

Exploration of Older People's Attitudes Towards Downsizing

Niamh Connery

CARL Research Project

in collaboration with

Age Action



Name of student(s):	Niamh Connery
Name of civil society organisation/community group:	Age Action
Name of community group liaison person:	Justin Moran and John O' Mahony
Academic supervisor(s):	Becci Jeffers
Name and year of course:	BScoSc Year 3
Date completed:	27 th April 2018

What is Community-Academic Research Links?

Community Academic Research Links (CARL) is a community engagement initiative provided by University College Cork to support the research needs of community and voluntary groups/ Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). These groups can be grass roots groups, single issue temporary groups, but also structured community organisations. Research for the CSO is carried out free of financial cost by student researchers.

CARL seeks to:

- provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education;
- provide their services on an affordable basis;
- promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;
- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;
- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and
- enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers (www.livingknowledge.org).

What is a CSO?

We define CSOs as groups who are non-governmental, non-profit, not representing commercial interests, and/or pursuing a common purpose in the public interest. These groups include: trade unions, NGOs, professional associations, charities, grass-roots organisations, organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life, churches and religious committees, and so on.

Why is this report on the UCC website?

The research agreement between the CSO, student and CARL/University states that the results of the study must be made public through the publication of the final research report on the CARL (UCC) website. CARL is committed to open access, and the free and public dissemination of research results.

How do I reference this report?

Author (year) *Dissertation/Project Title*, [online], Community-Academic Research Links/University College Cork, Ireland, Available from: <http://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/completed/> [Accessed on: date].

How can I find out more about the Community-Academic Research Links and the Living Knowledge Network?

The UCC CARL website has further information on the background and operation of Community-Academic Research Links at University College Cork, Ireland. <http://carl.ucc.ie>. You can follow CARL on Twitter at @UCC_CARL. All of our research reports are accessible free online here: <http://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/rr/>.

CARL is part of an international network of Science Shops called the Living Knowledge Network. You can read more about this vibrant community and its activities on this website: <http://www.scienceshops.org> and on Twitter @ScienceShops. CARL is also a contributor to Campus Engage, which is the Irish Universities Association engagement initiative to promote community-based research, community-based learning and volunteering amongst Higher Education students and staff.

Are you a member of a community project and have an idea for a research project?

We would love to hear from you! Read the background information here <http://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/ap/c&vo/> and contact us by email at carl@ucc.ie.

Disclaimer

Notwithstanding the contributions by the University and its staff, the University gives no warranty as to the accuracy of the project report or the suitability of any material contained in it for either general or specific purposes. It will be for the Client Group, or users, to ensure that any outcome from the project meets safety and other requirements. The Client Group agrees not to hold the University responsible in respect of any use of the project results. Notwithstanding this disclaimer, it is a matter of record that many student projects have been completed to a very high standard and to the satisfaction of the Client Group.

Abstract

The research began at the request of Age Action. The context of this study is to explore the views of older people towards downsizing within the contemporary housing crisis. It is envisaged that by conducting this research for Age Action, the data gathered will highlight areas in which the organisation can advocate on behalf of older people on any proposed changes to policy that influence and shape their lives. Given the participatory quality of the study, the research methodology developed for this study to gather data was qualitative in nature. Upon examination of the findings, the primary data from the focus group was supportive in demonstrating the notion that older people have a preference to remain within their home and communities for as long as possible as opposed to downsizing. There correlation between the primary and secondary research which showed similar findings on many themes that arose throughout the research study. Additionally, the research highlighted gaining an insight into the attitudes of older people, Age Action would have access to valuable primary data to build upon. It will benefit older people within current policies that influence and shape their lives.

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to offer my deepest gratitude to the seven participants from Age Action who most generously agreed to take part in this research project. The degree of openness and warmth that was shown to me was overwhelming and it was a great privilege to be allowed a brief glimpse into their lives. I am very grateful.

A special thank you to Age Action, who agreed to let me conduct this research on their behalf. Your participation and guidance within this study was of great comfort and I thank you for your time and efforts in helping me.

I would especially like to thank my supervisor Becci Jeffers, who provided guidance and support throughout these last few months. Your patience and understanding helped me surpass any difficulties encountered along the way. Your everlasting encouragement was invaluable and I really appreciated the opportunity to learn from your feedback.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends and fellow class mates, who were a constant pillar of support throughout these last few months

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	5
Table of Contents	6
Glossary of Abbreviations	8
Chapter One	9
1.1. Brief Context.....	9
1.2. Aims.....	10
1.3. Research Questions	10
1.4. Research Rationale.....	10
Chapter Two	12
2.1. Methodology	13
2.2. Theoretical Approach	13
2.3. Participatory Action Research.....	14
2.4. Research Design: Qualitative Approaches and Data Collection.....	16
2.4.1. Focus Groups	16
2.4.3. Research Design and Data Collection	17
2.4.3.1. Sampling and Recruitment	17
2.4.3.2. The Focus Group process	17
2.5. Ethical Considerations.....	18
2.6. Limitations to Study.....	18
2.7. Secondary Research	19
2.8. Conclusion.....	19
Chapter Three	20
3.1. Introduction.....	20
3.2. National Positive Ageing Strategy 2013	21
3.3. Age Action Response to Ageing Policies.....	24
3.4. Age Friendly Ireland.....	25
3.5. Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan	26
3.6. ‘Healthy and Positive Ageing for All’ Research Strategy 2015-2019	27
3.7. Conclusion.....	28
Chapter Four	29
4.2. Ageing and Old Age	30
4.3. Attitudes to Ageing.....	31
4.4. Ageing in Place	32
4.5. Aging and Housing Needs.....	33
4.6. Conclusion.....	35
Chapter Five	36
5.1. Introduction	36

5.2. The Importance of Community	37
5.3. Participation and Engagement.....	39
5.4. Pressure.....	41
5.5. Sense of Ownership.....	43
5.6. Barriers to Downsizing	44
5.7. Changed Housing Needs.....	46
5.8. Conclusion.....	47
Chapter 6	47
6.1. Introduction.....	47
6.2. Discussion.....	48
6.3. Recommendations	49
6.4. Research Limitations	50
6.5. Conclusion.....	51
Bibliography	52
Easterlow, D and Smith S (2004) ‘Housing for Health: Can the Market Care?’, <i>Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space</i> [online], 36(6), 999-1017, available:	55
ESRI (The Economic and Social Research Institute) (2017) <i>Demand for healthcare projected to increase substantially with rapid growth and ageing of population</i> [online], available:	56
Newall, E.G and Menac, V.H. (2017) ‘Loneliness and social isolation of older adults.....	58
Appendix One.....	61
Appendix Two.....	63
Appendix Three.....	64

Glossary of Abbreviations

CARL – Community Academic Research Links

CBR - Community Based Research

CSO – Central Statistics Office

DECLG – Department of Environmental, Community and Local Government

ESRI – The Economic and Social Research Institute

GOI – Government of Ireland

HaPAI - The Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative

UN – United Nations

WHO – World Health Organisation

Chapter One

Introduction

This study is a qualitative exploration of older people's attitudes towards downsizing within the context of the contemporary housing crisis. This chapter introduces the topic of research and provides the background to the study, the rationale and the research aims and objectives which underpin the research project.

1.1. Brief Context

The purpose of this study is to examine the possibility of a scheme whereby older owner-occupiers could sell their homes, thus freeing up housing stock, and use the proceeds from the sale to 'buy in' to a housing association project. The association would be able to use the funds received through the sale of the older persons property

to invest in building new homes that cater for the needs of older people. The main aim of this research is to conduct primary research with older people to explore their views on any proposed changes to policy and their thoughts on downsizing.

There is an extensive amount of research on the contemporary housing crisis. It is envisaged that by conducting this research for Age Action, the data and information collected will pinpoint areas in which the organisation can advocate on behalf of older people. The little research on the attitudes of older people that is currently available and what other studies often overlook is the fact the government hasn't developed any detailed plans for creating alternative housing for older people.

1.2. Aims

This study aims to explore older people's attitudes toward downsizing within the context of the contemporary housing crisis. Through this research, the researcher identifies interesting findings about the attitudes of older towards downsizing and generates recommendations for government policies ensuring older people's voices are heard.

1.3. Research Questions

The study is structured around a series of research questions aimed at focusing on older people's attitudes toward downsizing within the context of the contemporary housing crisis. By addressing these questions, the study undertakes to give older people a voice in the contemporary housing policy debates and to gain essential insight into the diverse needs of older people. The main research questions this study endeavours to respond to are: What are older people's attitudes towards downsizing? Emerging from this question are the following sub-research questions:

- 1) How do older people articulate the meanings of 'house' and 'home'? What meaning do older people attach to *their* homes?
- 2) What are the consequences of downsizing according to older people?
- 3) What are older people's perspectives on the current housing crisis? How do they think it should be overcome?

1.4. Research Rationale

The research began at the request of Age Action. The context of this study is based upon exploring older people's attitudes towards downsizing. A requirement of the

Bachelor of Social Science degree in University College Cork is to conduct a research study. Out of this I decided to undertake a research study in collaboration with Age Action and the Community Action Research Links project (CARL). Age Action works to mobilise and empower older people to advocate on behalf of themselves and their communities whilst offering services and programmes to older people to live full and independent lives. Age Action recognised that by conducting research on older people's attitudes to downsizing, the organisation would be better enabled to support and advocate for older people in relation to downsizing. By gaining an insight into the attitudes of older people, the organisation would have access to valuable primary data to build upon. It will benefit older people within current policies that influence and shape their lives.

1.5. Chapter Overview

Chapter Two - Methodology

Chapter Two presents the methodology and theoretical approach of the research. Participatory action research is examined in detail and the approaches used to collect the data are portrayed. The chapter will also include ethical considerations as well as limitations to the research.

Chapter Three - Policy Review

This chapter will review existing government policies which have an impact on older adults in terms ageing, participation and housing needs.

Chapter Four - Literature Review

Chapter three introduces secondary literature in the form of a literature review and will critically engage with literature relating to ageing and housing. Attitudes to ageing, ageing in place and housing needs are explored in greater detail.

Chapter Five - Findings

This chapter will analyse the data collected through primary research conducted with focus group participants. Recurring themes in relation to the findings are identified and discussed in the context of the policy and literature review.

Chapter Six - Conclusion and Recommendations

Chapter six draws conclusions from the data collected through primary research and explores the themes identified. Recommendations are constructed based on findings of this research.

Chapter Two

Methodology

This study is informed by community-based research and participatory action perspectives. The aim of this chapter is to outline the research methodology and design that were employed in conducting this research project. The methodological framework and theoretical perspective will be reflected upon throughout the chapter as this will assist with the framing of the research question and my interpretation of the data collected. Original data for the study was collected through the use of a focus group, which was run in collaboration with Age Action Ireland. The parameters of this approach are also outlined below.

2.1. Methodology

Given the collaborative and participatory quality of this research, the research methodology selected to gather data for this project was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research allows meaningful, in-depth investigation into the thoughts, views and attitudes of participants (Dawson, 2009). The research was carried out predominantly using qualitative methods as the aim of this research is to explore the views of older people towards downsizing. The research produced rich, in-depth, and experiential data from the participants, which reflects the aim of the project to enable older people to voice their opinions on downsizing and the current housing crisis. In doing so, the research project became an important medium to explore older people's attitudes and experiences of community, exclusion, and 'home'. The interpretive phenomenological methodology was chosen to account for the experiential and interpretive nature of the data (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). Underpinning the research practice with interpretive phenomenology complemented the qualitative data collection and analysis as it allows for an interpretive understanding of people and their social experiences. I chose to use qualitative research methods to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of ageing and how older people are affected by government policy and services available to them.

2.2. Theoretical Approach

The research was conducted in collaboration with Age Action and the CARL project. I concluded that a participatory approach would be compatible with the interpretivist phenomenological approach and were the most fitting and suitable theoretical frameworks to apply. Bryman (2012) depicts interpretivism as an approach that allows the researcher to understand phenomenon through the perspective of the participants in order to shape the research results. The interpretivist approach was seen as an instrument used to analyse and interpret participants' personal experiences and views of downsizing.

The phenomenology of ageing theory emphasises subjective experience of ageing and draws attention to the relationship between individuals and social life (Longino and Powell, 2009). This theory is particularly useful for explicating the attitude and point of view of older people, whilst also recognising that older people are actors involved in constructing the social world. Phenomenology is employed to gather subjective

human feelings and attitudes. The approach conveys exactly how individuals understand experiences and phenomena as features of the social world (Longino and Powell, 2009). Phenomenology caters for open-ended and flexible questions which allows participants to talk about an issue in their own words, free from the constraints forced by fixed response questions that can usually be observed in quantitative studies. Focus groups are well aligned to these philosophical ideas as they typically involve a semi-structured approach that focuses on discursive and conversational questions and themes. It is often seen as a collaborative approach, as a means of evoking insightful descriptions of experiences as well as empathetic understanding of ways an individual experience and views an issue (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2014). Carey (2009) depicts interpretivism as an attempt to understand the views, emotional responses and attitudes voiced by participants and combines this with a person's behaviour and actions with the intention of contextualising the views of participants in the research study. These understandings informed the development of the study's research design.

2.3. Participatory Action Research

This research was carried out in collaboration with Community Active Research Links (CARL) in University College Cork and with Age Action Ireland. Community-based participatory research (CBR) is the very cornerstone of the methodological approach of this research. The objective of the CARL project is to provide an opportunity for community based organisations to seek out student researchers to conduct a research on a specific issue or topic that is significant to an organisation within the community. Community-based research challenges traditional research approaches in social sciences as the research questions are created and shaped by the community organisation with the explicit purpose of contributing to some level of social change (Liston, 2014).

Age Action Ireland is an organisation which is committed to achieving “fundamental change in the lives of all older people by empowering them to live full lives as actively engaged citizens and to secure their right to comprehensive high-quality services according to their changing needs” (Age Action, 2018, p.1). By working alongside those whom the research is intended to benefit, older people will be in a better position to articulate their values, beliefs and needs in an empowered way. It is hoped that this will assist the organisation in supporting older people advocate on behalf of themselves and their communities.

Community-based participatory research stems partly from the fact that it is an approach that can be utilised to engage with groups that are often hard to gain access to by researchers (Durham Community Research Team, 2011). Although you are involved in the research process, unlike other research projects, the level of involvement with your community partner is considerably higher (Shaw and Holland, 2014). To specify, ‘community-based’ means to tackle or address issues relevant to people belonging to, or with interests in, a community. ‘Participatory’ denotes some degree of active involvement between a range of community stakeholders¹. Participatory research is based on a collaborative approach with participants and is aimed at enacting positive change for those involved (Ritchie et al, 2014). In this instance to explore the attitudes and views of older people towards downsizing who are often spoken about, but not necessarily represented in policy debates.

It is recommended that meaningful involvement in the research process should be sought from the start of the research. As researcher, I invited Age Action Ireland to contribute in shaping and creating the research topic and questions. Age Action were deeply involved in contributing to the research topic and influenced the research questions. Participants (Age Action and its members) were provided with the opportunity to offer their views and contribute to the study in a meaningful manner. Central to the success of community-based participatory research is the willingness and capability of participants to share their views, attitudes and experiences on the issue of downsizing which was being researched. It is important to establish a comfortable and secure environment to allow for rounded exchange to occur between the researcher and participants (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). Age Action actively participated in the process and facilitated the research project. The collaboration between the Age Action representatives and the researcher was extremely positive throughout the research process. Communication was a key feature and all parties involved were helpful and responsive to the needs of others. Mutual understanding and motivation to guarantee the best viable outcome from the research informed the positive research experience.

¹ There are some discrete differences to understand, for instance participatory research is more focused on increasing citizen voice and power while Action Research is concerned with social action, policy reform and other types of social change (Taylor et al. 2004).

2.4. Research Design: Qualitative Approaches and Data Collection

Qualitative research embodies a unique approach that assists researchers answer questions about human experiences (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). Holloway (1997) understands qualitative research methods as a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the social world in which they live. Qualitative research sets out to explore the behaviour, perspectives and experiences of people it studies and strives to progress to the core of an issue and is descriptive in its representation. In essence, qualitative research sets out to sketch a picture of the situation (Repko and Szostak, 2016). It relies on open ended questions, which enables participants to reflect on, voice, and interrogate their experiences. It also allows for context and meanings to be given to certain issues and affords participants who are often underrepresented in research the opportunity to share their views and attitudes (Skovdal and Cornish, 2015).

2.4.1. Focus Groups

Focus groups can help a researcher gather information about participants' perceptions related to a specific research area of interest. Focus groups provide a researcher with information about how a group thinks about a topic and enables them to document a range of ideas and attitudes in a particular community (Hughes and Dumont, 1993). Focus groups are useful for exploring an issue where attitudes or opinions have not been confirmed and where the researcher wants to understand group consensus (Creswell, 1998). As a researcher, I hoped to explore the attitudes of older people towards downsizing and through the focus groups participants are encouraged to present their own views and experiences. Through this process, they can reflect on what is said, and in light of this consider their own standpoint further (Finch et al, 2014). Participants continue to ask one another questions as they seek further clarification in an effort to sharpen and redefine their responses. Focus groups are explicitly used to generate data and insights (Stewart et al, 2007). Another feature of focus groups is the spontaneity that arises from the social context. The language used, emphasis placed on particular issues and participants' general understanding of issues are all more visibly on display (Krueger and Casey, 2009).

Despite all the advantages, I will also acknowledge some of the drawbacks to conducting focus groups for collecting data. A common criticism of focus groups is

that the group exerts a pressure on its participants to conform to a socially acceptable viewpoint and not to talk about differing and contrary views or attitudes. Nonetheless, based on the qualities of focus groups, they were considered as the most appropriate method to engage members of Age Action.

2.4.3. Research Design and Data Collection

Taking the literature relating to focus groups onboard, I proceeded to design the focus group. This involved designing a set of questions, themes, and visual prompts. Once these were drafted I circulated a copy to Age Action for their input. The themes and questions² were agreed by both the researcher and Age Action. It was important to review existing policies and literature to ensure that the research does not replicate what gone before. The focus group was scheduled at a convenient time for all participants and was arranged to take place at Age Action's premises.

2.4.3.1. Sampling and Recruitment

The collaborative nature of this research entailed that Age Action were profoundly involved in the sampling and recruitment process. Age Action recruited participants for the focus group by inviting members of the organisation to actively take part in the research. The selection of participants was monitored carefully to ensure that the sample met the requirements of the research (Ritchie et al., 2014).

2.4.3.2. The Focus Group process

As the focus group unfolded, participants often focussed on similar views and the researcher was often exposed to and presented with one side of the issue. As researcher it was important to be aware of how group dynamics work and how the 'norming phase' observes how groups are keen to work cooperatively together and may seek to find common ground, to agree with each other and reinforce what others say (Ritchie et al., 2014). This stage of the focus group can be problematic as social norms tend to be most influential, revealing what are seen as 'socially acceptable' beliefs (Ritchie et al, 2014). It is important to create an environment in which people feel comfortable and safe and know they can speaking openly. By collaborating with Age Action Ireland, the group of participants were already acquainted with one another as they are members of the organisation. This was beneficial as participants have 'normed' and are comfortable

² Please see Appendix Three

with expressing unusual or non-conformist views which allowed for rich and exhaustive data.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

In conducting this research, I engaged in regular reflection. One concern was to ensure that my community partner had an opportunity to engage in a meaningful way. A second feature was to secure informed consent from the participants, build rapport with them, ensure their comfort throughout the process, and, finally, to represent their ideas in a considered way. Due to the nature of this research involving a focus group with participants who were over the age of sixty-five, consideration was given to ensuring that good ethical practice was expected. Prior to the research, a detailed ethical form was completed and ethical approval was acquired from my supervisor. I worked within the guidelines specified in the UCC Code of Research Conduct 2017. Information sheets and consent forms were then drafted and approved by my supervisor ahead of the focus group. The information sheets³ informed participants the reasons focus group was being conducted, the aims of the research study and fully assured participants that anonymity would be upheld and that participation was based entirely on a voluntary basis. Participants also have the option of withdrawing from the research up to two weeks after the data has been gathered, this ensures full transparency. A core principle of social research is that informed consent is obtained from participants (Ritchie et al., 2014). The consent form⁴ guaranteed that all personal information gathered during the research process would remain confidential. I confirmed that all information and data collected would be stored securely. Upholding these protocols was instrumental throughout the research process. Ethical codes and guidelines should not be solely relied on to shape ethical practice. Ryen (2011) emphasises that answers to ethical dilemmas come from an awareness of ethical guidance coupled with constant reflection and discussion with a research supervisor. This understanding informed my practice.

2.6. Limitations to Study

Certain limitations arose throughout the process of this research. Firstly, as this project was conducted as part of an undergraduate degree, there was a limit to the project's

³ Please see Appendix One

⁴ Please see Appendix Two

scope. The limited time available to the researcher is the primary reason a smaller scale of research project was conducted.

Secondly, the participants that contributed to the research were all owner occupiers, which consequently limits the data as a wider range of experiences, attitudes, and livelihoods could not be explored. A more comprehensive picture may be determined from research by exploring the attitudes of older people living in private rented housing and social housing. However, the data is valuable in its own right as it produces a rich account of the attitudes of older people concerning downsizing. Thus, while the data provides very interesting and deep insight into a group of older people, it is not representative of the broader generational cohort.

Finally, numerous challenges emerged over the process of the focus group. A technical problem at the agency affected the data collected, as a set of visual prompts had been prepared for the focus group to explore what meanings older people attach to a picture and evoke different reactions. This occurred as a result of a failure to consider the availability of resources. Were more time available, the researcher could have responded with a follow-up survey or a set of smaller focus groups, but due to the time-limit and the rich data emerging from the focus group decided to proceed with the existing data set.

2.7. Secondary Research

In order to gain insight into the issues being researched, a broad overview of literature and policies on ageing and housing was conducted utilising secondary sources. The literature and policy review were of prime importance as it shaped the interview questions and also informed the researcher of what research has gone before. Relevant policy documents, books and journal articles will all be used within the policy and literature review to inform the research.

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter sought to justify the use of a qualitative research approach. The rationale behind participatory action research and interpretivist phenomenology are described as well as illustrating the methods used to gather data and thus analyse it. The policy and literature reviews provide the academic basis for investigation of the issues explored in existing literature and policies. Ethical considerations guided all aspects of the research project. Finally, the researcher acknowledged the limitations of the study and a setback

which limited one element of the study. The objective of this chapter was to show due consideration was given to the ways in which data was collected and analysed in keeping with the research aims sets out by all parties involved. The focus of the next chapter will illustrate the secondary research conducted in the form of a policy review.

Chapter Three

Positive Aging and Social Policy: A Review of Relevant Strategies

3.1. Introduction

This chapter examines existing Irish research that focuses particularly on policy around housing, ageing, and older people. The research will critically analyse contemporary Irish policy and will highlight areas in which adjustments can be made to create a society that accommodates for the housing needs of older people. The material accessed

and reviewed is predominantly comprised of government publications and NGO documents. It is imperative to examine Irish policies regarding ageing and the failure of housing policy as it paves the way for a better future for older people. It also examines effective ways of freeing up housing stock particularly now during the housing shortage crisis in Ireland. By analysing policies from the past, one gains insight into which policies and publications have been successful and those that have not. Throughout Ireland's past, there have been significant policies designed to tackle homelessness and housing shortages with aims to reduce these causes. However, policies around ageing highlight the government's failure to implement detailed plans to develop policies and services for older people. The fundamental part of this research to conduct primary research with older people to explore their views on any proposed changes to policy as their voices are often unheard. Age Action advocates for changes in policy to benefit older people. This policy review will explore publications and reports such as "*The National Positive Ageing Strategy 2013*", "Housing for Older People", "Rebuilding Ireland", "Age Action Strategic Plan 2016-2018" and "Healthy and Positive Ageing for All" Research Strategy 2015-2019. Publications and reports concerning older people are vital as they deal specifically with ensuring older people's physical and social needs are met in secure environments. Ireland has many optimistic ideas surrounding the implementation of a successful housing strategy in Ireland and creating a country that caters for the needs of older people through alternative housing provision. What is more demographic change impacts significantly on housing demands. The government ought to recognise this and act immediately as an increase in the population results in an increase in the demand for housing.

3.2. National Positive Ageing Strategy 2013

Ireland's population is rapidly ageing and those in the group aged sixty-five and over are projected to increase very significantly to over 1.4 million by 2046 (CSO, 2013). The proportion of people aged over sixty is expected to double from 11% to 22% between 2000 and 2050 globally (WHO, 2012). Such significant changes and shifts in age demographics have led to the creation of policies and strategies aimed at promoting positive ageing in Ireland. There has been a significant growth in the interest of issues around ageing and old age (Higgs and Gillear, 2015; Timonen, 2008; Walker, 2002). Positive responses to an ageing population globally encompass both positive and negative strands. Traditional social constructions of older people and the ageing

process tended to view older people as dependent and frail, which neglected the contributions of older people and their right to participate completely in society (Dukelow and Considine, 2017). Negative perceptions of older people tend to dominate within the community, however older people are often perceived in a positive light as active members of the community (Lyons, 2009). Shifts in policy discourses have challenged how traditional theories and negative perceptions of ageing and older adults and has guided the creation of government policies and strategies aimed at promoting positive ageing in Ireland (O’Shea, 2006). In 2013, the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* was introduced to promote a more positive perception of ageing and to act as a catalyst for action and innovation across policy development and service provision (GOI, 2014). The policy is designed to encourage and push policy makers to recognise and address a variety of factors and determinants that affect the ageing process. As illustrated in its vision statement, the strategy was published to support the creation of a society,

for all ages that celebrates and prepares properly for individual and population ageing. It will enable and support all ages and older people to enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential. It will promote and respect older people’s engagement in economic, social, cultural, community and family life, and foster better solidarity between generations. It will be a society in which the equality, independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older people are pursued at all times (GOI, 2014, p.3).

The strategy is focused on employing a collective approach in changing attitudes towards ageing in Ireland by creating a more positive vision of growing old. The objectives of the strategy include the promotion of activities to combat and reduce ageism through awareness raising campaigns and by ensuring that older people’s needs are considered and listened to, relating to government policies affecting them. In essence, the strategy is an overarching cross departmental policy that operates as an outline for policies pertaining to ageing. Four national goals⁵ have been identified to

⁵ These national goals include, National Goal 1 which aims to remove barriers to participation and provide more opportunities for the continued involvement of people as they age in all aspects of cultural, economic and social life in their communities according to their needs, preferences and capacities. National Goal 2 strives to support people as they age to maintain, improve or manage their physical and mental health and wellbeing. National Goal 3 endeavours

direct the vision being implemented and achieved. The background of the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* is in line with international guidelines, in particular the World Health Organisation's *Active Ageing – A Policy Framework* (2002). The *National Strategy of Positive Ageing* (2013) is not prescriptive in relation to the implementation of explicit actions that should be implemented to promote positive ageing and creating a society that caters for older people. Rather, it fails to develop any plans through policy or service delivery to strengthen the strategy (GOI, 2014). It would appear that progress seems to have stalled as there is no visible evidence of developed plans to undertake the objectives outlined in the report. The vision statement is yet to produce a timeline for the implementation of the policy objectives it outlines. The strategy views ageing as a lifelong process, but leaves much to be desired in terms of making any concrete plans.

Each national goal is related to a specific policy, this chapter will explore national goal one, three and four in finer detail. According to the World Health Organisation, participation is evident when the market, employment, education and social policies and programmes support older people through full participation in socioeconomic, cultural and spiritual activities, according to their basic human rights, capacities, needs and preferences (GOI, 2014). The first goal in this strategy is to remove barriers to participation and provide more opportunities for the continued involvement of people as they age in all aspects of cultural, economic and social life in their communities (GOI, 2014). The Department of Environmental, Community and Local Government (DECLG) is responsible for achieving goal one. One of the main findings identified during the data collection process portrayed how older people often feel if they are not consulted by the government on policies relating to them. They do not feel listened to. Subsequently, further action is required to achieve this goal.

The strategy is led by the *United Nations Principles for Older Persons* which recognises participation as a key ingredient. Participation is such a significant pillar within the strategy, that aims to support older people by ensuring they remain integrated in society and have accessibility to participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies that have an impact on their wellbeing and lives. The

to enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. National Goal 4 seeks to support and use research about people as they age to better inform policy responses to population ageing in Ireland (GOI, 2014, p.19). They will be discussed in greater detail shortly.

strategy supports older people in their pursuit to partake on a political level to influence the development of policies relating to older people and ageing. In 2002, the United Nations encouraged all governments to “provide opportunities, programmes and support to encourage older persons to participate or to continue to participate in cultural, economic, political and social life and lifelong learning” (GOI, 2014, p.24). While the first goal aims to remove barriers to participation, no definitive plan exists to convey how to support older people to participate and engage in developing policies that affect them. National goal four strives to “support and use research about older people as they age to better inform policy responses to population ageing in Ireland” (GOI, 2014, p.40). The Irish government and research in the field has a responsibility to consult with older people who can provide unique insights as a result of their lived experience. Consultation is critical to adequately address the needs of older people.

As people age, they spend relatively more time in their homes. Older people want to remain within their homes for as long as possible (Amaráich et al., 2016), however their needs change with age. Despite the efforts of national goal three which endeavours to facilitate older people to live in well-maintained, affordable, safe and secure homes, suitable to their physical and social needs (GOI, 2014), little seems to have been done to address this objective. The government has failed to implement measures to ensure this goal is achieved.

These national goals present a useful framework containing action plans to allow for positive ageing. In order to foster positive attitudes towards ageing and growing old, discourses that characterise ageing as a problem that are seen to place a strain services must be curtailed. People are living longer, this is to be welcomed and celebrated. Certainly, this poses many challenges for the government in developing, adapting and improving services that are suitable for the changing population demographics. However, to achieve this the strategy must be enacted and the goals must be translated from theory into practice.

3.3. Age Action Response to Ageing Policies

Age Action welcomed the publication of the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* in 2013 as it sets out a blueprint for what’s required of the government in ensuring Ireland is the “best country in which to grow older” (Age Action Strategic Plan 2016-2018, 2016, p.4). The most pressing objective highlighted in the publication is the need to develop

alternative housing options. The near universal preference amongst older people is to remain within the home for as long as possible, however when this is no longer an option, there are few alternatives other than nursing homes. Although the launch of the *National Positive Ageing Strategy 2013* is received as a step towards recognising the needs of older people in Ireland, it is imperative to emphasise there has been no publication detailing how the government plans to develop policies and services to achieve the objectives outlined in the document (Age Action Strategic Plan 2016-2018, 2016).

3.4. Age Friendly Ireland

The *Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme* (2016) has unearthed through discussions with older people a strong preference to stay in their homes and communities for as long as possible (Age Friendly Ireland, 2016, p.10). However, this may no longer be an option for older people requiring extra supports and care. The current housing options available to older people in Ireland are limited resulting in little choice outside of nursing homes (Age Friendly Ireland, 2016).

Developments such as Great Northern Haven launched in 2010 have demonstrated how the caring needs of older people can be met through the design of sustainable housing projects within the community. The Great Northern Haven was constructed to encourage an independent living environment for residents who, for a variety of reasons, are no longer in a position to live in their homes. As stressed by older people that there is a preference to live independently in their homes, housing projects similar to the Great Northern Haven project could be an alternative that embraces living independently in an environment designed to accommodate their needs (Age Friendly Ireland, 2016).

The findings of the Age Friendly Ireland's research in 2016 indicate that Ireland needs to think differently on how it develop specific housing for older people and seek to hear their opinions and attitudes. The Great Northern Haven project may help shape policy development and support Goal 3 of the *National Positive Ageing Strategy 2013* – “to enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible” (GO1, 2016). This strategy outlines and recognises the role of lifetime adaptable, sustainable and alternative housing options for older people. From conducting this research, Age Friendly Ireland (2016, p.39)

formulates the following recommendations for future housing projects that will consider the following aspects in developing alternative housing for older people:

- Locating new developments close to (within walking distance of) services and
- Incorporating a universal design approach to allow for flexibility and adaptability of the dwelling in the future.
- Integrating technology into developments which enhance safety and security, support health monitoring, increase comfort and improve social connectedness.
- Integrating social supports into developments which support access to information, find non- health service based solutions and reduce demand on formal services.

The report carried out by Age Friendly Ireland is aimed at influencing those responsible for developing policy and housing providers such as Local Authorities, approved housing bodies and other private developers (Age Friendly Ireland, 2016).

3.5. Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan

There has been a long history of state intervention in housing provision, however over the past twenty to thirty years, housing provision is delivered predominantly on a private basis. This policy shift has resulted in the presence of problems such as social segregation, lack of access and affordability, which is typically associated with a policy regime which regards housing as a private property for purchase (Dukelow and Considine, 2017). The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan (2016) was developed by the government to address the unacceptable level of homelessness and to tackle the failing of housing policy that has resulted in many homeless people relying on emergency accommodation on a long-term basis. The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan aims to deliver housing in a way that meets the needs of people while maintaining housing at affordable prices and broadening the type of rental options available. Each action proposed in this plan falls under five pillars⁶.

The most relevant pillar in the context of this study is pillar five, which proposes Utilising Existing Housing. The government outlines that the most effective way to

⁶ These pillars include Pillar One: Address Homelessness, Pillar Two: Accelerate Housing, Pillar Three: Build More Homes, Pillar Four: Improve the Rental Sector, Pillar Five: Utilise Existing Housing.

achieve “optimum occupancy” is to utilise vacant housing and accommodation as potential housing supply to challenge the failing of housing policy (GOI, 2016, p.77). By bringing 20,000 houses back into use, this would be the equivalent to one year’s housing supply (GOI, 2016). The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan outlined that work will be undertaken to develop the national vacant housing reuse strategy by mid-2017 (GOI, 2016). This pillar is particularly pertinent as it raises questions about the security of older people’s tenure. Age Action was inspired by these developments, to examine the possibility of a scheme whereby older people could sell on their homes they no longer inhabit due to care needs and this would free up housing stock. The funds gained from the sale of the property could be invested in a housing project that is designed to meet the needs of older people (CARL Database of Available Projects, 2017).

3.6. ‘Healthy and Positive Ageing for All’ Research Strategy 2015-2019

The rationale for this research strategy is to assist with policy development and service planning for an ageing population in Ireland. The strategy concentrates on areas where knowledge gaps exist and promotes the use of existing data and funding of innovative research to resolve knowledge gaps and answer significant research questions. The strategy aims to improve the lives of people as they age. The strategy stemmed from the question of whether or not Ireland was equipped and prepared to adequately assert and meet the needs of an ageing population. The strategy consists of four pillars, three of which are consistent with the ambitions of the *National Positive Ageing Strategy 2013*. With the intention of reviewing policies centred around ageing and housing, the policy review will pay particular attention to the pillar concerning security. The strategy merely provides the government and planners with rich data and funding opportunities to address the disparities that currently exists in knowledge surrounding an ageing population. Pillar 3 relating to security seeks to fund needed research that will enhance knowledge on the attitudes of alternative housing options from observing international best practice alternatives to residential care settings (Department of Health, 2015). Objectives that fall under pillar 3 including financial security, housing, age-friendly public spaces, personal safety and elder abuse. The physical comfort, security and appropriateness of the home environment can impact on the quality of life as a person ages. One in seven (14%) of people aged 50 years and over experience some degree of difficulty accessing essential services (Department of Health, 2016, p.11). Another indicator conveyed that one third of people aged 50 years and over encounter obstacles

accessing social facilities due to a lack of availability in an area. Two-thirds of people over the age of 50 reported high neighbourhood social capital which is understood to contribute to increased self-esteem, provides social support and helps a person to access better resources (Department of Health, 2015).

3.7. Conclusion

With an ever-expanding ageing population, an increased level of urgency is needed to address the objectives of these pillars. Census 2016 confirmed that Ireland's population has been steadily growing older over time. The 65 years and over age group conveyed the largest increase in population since 2011, rising by 102,174 to 637,657, a rise by 19.1% (CSO, 2017). The census recorded 456 centenarians, an increase of 17.2% on the 2011 census (CSO, 2017). The 'Healthy and Positive Ageing for All' offers a benchmark for the future which will allow Ireland to measure the progress made in terms of addressing older people's participation, health and security and ways of combating ageism. To fulfil the objectives outlined in the strategy, the Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative (HaPAI) has been established.

Ireland is currently facing a housing shortage as evidenced by rising rents and low levels of new completions relative to estimates of demand (Lyons, 2016). It has been identified that there is little housing mobility amongst older people. Barrett and Kelly (2016) suggest there is scope to incentivise downsizing among older people. The media conveys older people as empty nesters⁷ and writes about how the elderly could alleviate the housing crisis by downsizing (Baker, 2016; Ryan, 2016). The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) published the report "Housing and Ireland's Older Population" to provide a sense of whether there are many older people living in houses that are largely comparative to their needs and to also explore whether downsizing or trading down is viable. The report conveyed that one-third of people aged over fifty years of age live alone and the figure rises to almost two-thirds over the age of eighty. Precisely 40.6% of older people living alone live in a home with four rooms or less, emphasising that older people live in smaller homes and thus challenges any arguments of under-utilisation (Barrett and Kelly, 2016, p.7). However, when the number of older couples is examined, the evidence of under-utilisation strengthens as just over 30% of

⁷ Empty nesters refer to elderly people who no longer live with their children, a stage which occurs after children grow up and leave home (Wang et al., 2013).

older couples live in houses with seven rooms plus (Barrett and Kelly, 2016, p.7). Suggestions around the potential to generate greater housing mobility amongst older people might have less of an impact as the number of those living alone is significant. However, the findings relating to older couples implies there is scope to generate greater movement in the housing market. One recommendation for government policy suggests if any scheme on mobility of older people meant leaving a community, this could be damaging and any policies in this area should be mindful of this factor. It is imperative that the government any policies in this area remain sensitive to any impacts this will have on older people (Barrett and Kelly, 2016). The following chapter will explore the secondary research conducted in the form of a literature review.

Chapter Four

Literature Review

4.1. Introduction

This chapter explores literature pertaining to ageing, old age, and downsizing. It examines the perceptions of ageing and how social policy discourse is shaped as a result. Firstly, this chapter will provide other definitions of the concept of age and will proceed to distinguish the difference between ageing and old age. In order to gain a broad view of older people and housing, the chapter will firstly, analyse the housing crisis. The focus of the research is to explore attitudes of older people towards downsizing so the definition of downsizing is outlined. The literature will draw on the

works of others to explore what this means for an older person. Concepts such as political participation and engagement are considered and how this has an impact on older people and policies that impact on their lives

4.2. Ageing and Old Age

The population of Ireland is rapidly ageing and an ESRI report conveys the percentage share of the population aged 65 and over is projected to increase from one in eight to one in six in 2046 (ERSI, 2017). In an effort to understand the implications of this increase, this section provides an overview of existing academic literature on old age and ageing. A necessary precondition for understanding social policy as it relates to older people is to understand ageing. Theories of ageing can shed light both on the experience of ageing and the surrounding social contexts. There are three theoretical approaches that affect the way in which ageing is conceptualised. The biological, social and psychological approaches to ageing cast a fascinating light on the concept of ageing.

Ageing occurs throughout the life course and despite there being many commonly used definitions of old age, there is no universal agreement as to what age a person becomes old. Higgs and Gilleard (2015) define ageing as the processes that emerge from a person living a long life, which is a life that extends beyond the period of reproductive fitness (Higgs and Gilleard, 2015). Ageing refers to a social sequence of life processes and creates the category of old age (Vincent, 2003). Ideas on ageing form part of societies' cultural knowledge of life, its origins, development and decline. In contrast to how ageing is conceptualised, old age has been represented as status or societal category conferred on individuals at a particular point in their lives (Vincent, 2003). Ascriptions such as physical signs, characterological features, social markers and chronological age, are all utilised to designate a person as old. The discourse around ageing and old age in the literature (Timonen, 2008; Walker, 2002) emphasises concepts such as 'positive', 'active' and 'successful' ageing. Language like this gives us insight into the shifts in public and academic discourse.

In recent decades, literature has seen a dramatic change and shift in the attitudes and perceptions of what ageing signifies. For instance, in one study (Hepworth in Bunton et al, 1995), the concept of positive ageing is adopted with the importance of encouraging a 'positive attitude' towards ageing into old age. There has been much

policy emphasis on the promotion of active ageing⁸, however there is no accepted and putative definition in the literature. As we saw in the previous chapter, these ideas are reflected in policy too. The *National Positive Ageing Strategy* (2014), for instance, indicates a strong government tendency in the promotion of positive attitudes to growing old in Ireland. It would appear that perceptions of ageing seem to be progressively extending in the right direction as the government commits to ensuring that “older people re recognised, supported and enabled to live independent full lives” (Department of Health, 2013, p. 56). On the surface, concepts such as positive, active and successful ageing take little account of the influence of structural factors on individual outcomes. Consequently, policies developed from these concepts are not likely to address the pervasive structural basis of diversity and difference of the ageing experience. Social Inequalities are often an aspect of old age not adequately addressed. Restrictions encountered by individuals as a result of structural power are ignored.

4.3. Attitudes to Ageing

Attitudes to older people in society have significant implications for positive ageing. All societies have preconceptions of ageing, and a set of behavioural norms that older people are expected to adhere to (Timonen, 2008). The presence of negative attitudes towards older people in society can have an impact on services, facilities, and can leave older people feeling socially isolated and excluded. In an ageist worldview, older people are often not afforded the prospect to attaining needs and wants and can be treated differently based on their age (Capowski and Peak, 1994). The media and social policy discourse contribute to ageism as older people are often portrayed as a significant economic problem and burden (O’ Shea, 2006). Walker (2009) claims that a necessary precondition for understanding social policy as it relates to older people is to understand ageing. Older people are perceived in both positive and negative light, which we can see in Estes’ (2003, p. 18) portrayal:

[T]he experience of old age is dependent in large part upon how others react to the aged; that is social context and cultural meanings are important.

Meanings are crucial in influencing how growing old is experienced by the

⁸ Active Ageing refers to the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. The essence of the concept of active ageing places a strong emphasis on quality of life and mental and physical wellbeing (Walker, 2002; GOI, 2014, p.64).

ageing in any given society; these meanings are shaped through interaction of the aged with the individuals, organizations, and institutions that comprise the social context.

Growing older is socially constructed and Dukelow and Considine (2017) voice that traditional social constructions of ageing tended to see older people as dependent and frail, which on the whole neglects the contributions of older people and their right to participate fully in society. The *National Positive Ageing Strategy* was put together to eradicate ageism in society and to counter negative discourse by promoting positive ageing.

4.4. Ageing in Place

Consequently, by examining literature which explores ‘ageing in place’ and how it is the preferred option for older people, this will enable one to understand hesitancy towards downsizing and to identify ways in which it could promote downsizing to alternative housing options.

Within the literature, research suggests that older people have expressed a preference to ageing in place. Ageing in place is analysed within the *Housing for Older People – Thinking Ahead* report and illustrates that 88% of older people are content within their current home (Amárach Research et al., 2016). There is also strong correlation between ageing in place and remaining within the community. Ageing in place has been described as “the desire and tendency of older persons to stay their current dwelling units for as long as possible” (Pynoos et al., 2007). Moreover, ageing in place has been broadly defined within the literature as the ability of a person to stay in their home as he or she ages (Cutchin in Bailey Fausset et al., 2011). Leonora Blaakilde (2015) agreed that ageing in place is an idea of creating living arrangements for older people that supports them to remain in their home environment whilst adapting to varying needs with age.

Based on the idea of ageing in place, it is vital that any government policy or initiative formulated to tackle the housing crisis is sensitive to older people’s preference to remain within their own home. From a policy perspective, facilitating ageing in place means helping people to remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible. However, with the current housing shortage older people are encouraged to free up housing by downsizing. Ireland's older population appear both settled and content with

regard to their housing arrangements. However, there is an openness to different living arrangements, driven by healthcare requirements and changing needs as one ages such as accessible housing facilities (Amárach Research et al., 2016). Long-term planning and government policy can pave way for more appropriate housing options if the government remains sensitive to older people's relationship with the community.

There is a difference between ageing in the home and the community as ageing in place may not exactly equate to one's home. Many older people wish to remain within their house and others are open to relocating to alternative housing within their community. This provides the government with the opportunity to develop alternative housing that meets the needs of older people who wish to remain within their community but are open to the concept of downsizing. This is verified in the *Housing for Older People – Thinking Ahead* report which surveyed 554 people aged fifty-five and over and revealed that most older people were content in their homes based on the location and community, not the actual dwelling (Amárach Research et al., 2016). When asked further what would deter older people from relocating or downsizing, the response confirmed that a loss of community and contact with friends and neighbours would dissuade them. There is scope to downsize however it must be in the same neighbourhood or community.

4.5. Aging and Housing Needs

Housing influences individual well-being through a variety of psychosocial mechanisms affected by building type, floor level and the 'sense of financial and personal security associated with some forms of housing tenure (such as ownership) as documented by Easterlow and Smith (2004). Demand for housing can be expected to change with age and specific housing characteristics can also shift with age. As people age, they tend to spend lengthier amounts of time in their homes, older people are inclined to spend 80% of their time in their homes (Baltes et al., 1999). Their home environment and how it accommodates an older person's needs has an impact on their health, wellbeing and quality of life (Department of Health, 2015). Poor housing quality and design can limit daily activities older people engage in, thereby impacting upon their physical and mental health. There is a gap within the literature which fails to assess the impact of downsizing on older people worldwide. Previous research endorses the view that older people who have lived in their dwelling for some time prefer not to move elsewhere. Hence mobility rates are low among the elderly.

Accordingly, one might expect older people to show significant unwillingness to move house, due to emotional attachment to their homes (Costa-Font, Elvira and Mascarilla-Miró, 2009). In order to analyse older people's attitudes to alternative housing options and to enhance our knowledge of alternative forms of housing, it is important to observe international residential care settings (Department of Health, 2015).

Housing is one of the most talked about topics in Irish society (Dukelow and Considine, 2017). The most recent housing boom to bust brought the financial dimension of housing into astute focus, indicating the ways in which housing can be a source of wealth for some and unsustainable debt and insecurity for other. Due to problems generated in housing, state intervention plays a significant role as they attempt to modify inequalities (Dukelow and Considine, 2017, p.271).

The most recent housing context has been dominated by the dramatic rise and fall of housing prices. Powell (2017) expressed the opinion that Europe was susceptible to an economic crisis as countries had become extremely dependent "on overheated housing market". Households were not able to repay bottomless debts complimented by weakly regulated and over extended financial sectors which subsequently contributed to the economic crisis. Ireland was particularly vulnerable to the economic crisis with its open market and over-reliance on the housing market.

Housing is currently undergoing considerable transformations. Official policy discourse identifies increased reliance on market solutions and private provision as a shift towards tenure neutrality and as practical response to borrowing and supply constraints. *Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, Social Housing Strategy 2020* and *Housing for Older People – Thinking Ahead* along with many more policy initiatives aimed at delivering more homes. The *Housing Policy Statement* (DECLG 2011: 2) made a strong commitment "to enable all households access good quality housing appropriate to household circumstances and in their particular community of choice". How well Irish housing policy commits to these normative standards regarding availability, affordability, security and quality is questionable as the language of official housing policy documents avoids commitments beyond the most generic aspirational objectives and makes no commitments in relation to affecting these in tangible terms (Murphy and Dukelow, 2016, p.239).

Downsizing has become part of the conversation in overcoming the contemporary housing crisis, emerging mainly through media commentary. Ireland has no history of downsizing as the government and policy has never sought to provide any alternative sheltered accommodation for older people in later life. According to the ERSI report, some 26,000 people are considered 'empty nesters' with the potential of downsizing from their homes, with considerable potential in freeing up housing stock during the current housing crisis. The government believes that by incentivising older people to sell their homes and move into alternative housing, this may alleviate the present housing shortage.

Downsizing can be defined as a move to a dwelling with fewer bedrooms or less floor area or as a move to a higher density dwelling type, i.e. a move from a detached house to a town house or apartment. Downsizing often includes a reduction in personal belongings (decluttering), lifestyle changes and occasionally reductions in housing value or equity (Judd et al. 2014). A Eurobarometer report indicated that only 31% of Irish people would consider moving to a smaller dwelling in their retirement in contrast to almost 60% of Danish people and 57% of Dutch people. 4.5% of Irish people would contemplate moving to sheltered housing. This is phenomenal as it draws a distinction between 40% of Slovenians and 24% of Austrians who would be approving of this move (Gallop Organisation, 2008). Likewise, Lehnert accepts that downsizing involves less housing consumption (2004).

4.6. Conclusion

It is clear from the literature review that ageing and older age can be presented in both positive and negative lights. There is little research on downsizing within the literature. Ageing in place is highlighted as the preferred option amongst older people but the literature expresses that ageing in the community is a preferable alternative. The chapter delivered a rich insight into the housing crisis which left housing policy unsettled and points to an over reliance on privatised and marketized solutions to correct an inadequate supply. Political participation and engagement is a central issue for older people to give them a voice to shape how policies will impact on them. The *National Positive Ageing Strategy 2014* emphasises participation as a significant pillar within the strategy aimed at supporting older people's participation in the formulation of policies that will openly impact on their lives. However the strategy is not prescriptive in relation to any clear plans to endorse this. It is imperative that the

government supports older people to engage and participate in policy making that will shape their lives. The succeeding chapter will examine the findings of the primary research.

Chapter Five

Findings

5.1. Introduction

As discussed in chapter one, the aim of this research is to explore older people's attitudes towards downsizing within the context of the contemporary housing crisis. The data was thematically analysed and is divided into six themes that best represent the primary data and the aims of the research questions. Reference will be made to the data obtained in both the policy and literature review, with new literature also being introduced to better analyse the findings. While there was a great deal of possibility, a

number of very pertinent themes emerged from the data. The themes identified were, The Importance of Community; Participation and Engagement; Public Pressure; Sense of Ownership; Barriers to Downsizing; and, finally, Aging and Changing Housing Needs.

In line with the interpretivist phenomenological approach to analysing data, the aim of this chapter is to portray and interpret the data as it was relayed to the researcher during the focus group. In an attempt to capture a sense of the lived experience and allow for meaningful investigation into the views of participants, the data is presented and analysed here. The data presented here was generated through a focus group conducted with seven participants actively involved in Age Action Ireland. All of the participants met the selection criteria for the research⁹, namely being over the age of sixty-five and each being in the owner occupier tenure. Recruitment for the study failed to access older people living in social housing and privately rented housing. While the study is not fully representative of a variety of tenures, it provides an interesting exploration of older people's experience.

5.2. The Importance of Community

When participants were asked what downsizing meant to them and whether the community would affect a person's decision to downsize, the answers received expressed that the community played a significant role in their lives. Participant 7, who is a retired garage owner and mechanic, highlighted how older people are part of the community and pointed out a negative impact of leaving the community. He stated:

that'd be very important now I think, in fact because if you're in a community for a long time you become part of it and you make good friends. To lose all of them in one shot and to be dumped ten or fifteen or twenty miles away would be very isolating as when you get older, chances of making friends and things are kind of less (Participant 7).

This particular quote illustrates the point that living within a community is very important to an older person as they've built up lifelong relationships with neighbours and friends. The issue of isolation also presents a particularly prevalent concern. Isolation is a concern for Participant 7 and presents prominently in the ageing literature

⁹This criterion was outlined in the methodology chapter and included being over the age of sixty-five.

on aging and older adulthood (Newall and Menec, 2017). To date the discussions relating to downsizing amongst older people have not been completely sensitive to these concerns. While moving into a residential or supported living space is presented as a way to overcome issues like social isolation, the reality is that people fear the loss of long-term relationships to people and places.

Likewise, Participant 4 expressed the opinion that,

downsizing means leaving an area that you're very familiar with where you have built up a friendship and relationship with the people around you (Participant 4).

Friendship, relationships, and community presented highly for many of the participants. Participant 4 articulated some similar concerns to Participant 7, the local community and personal connections are key reasons for staying at home. Maintaining contact with friends and neighbours is another key element, which is seen as more challenging should a person leave the community. Furthermore, the Housing for Older People - Thinking Ahead report identified that more than 50% of older people surveyed stated a preference to remain within their local community as opposed to downsizing and 28% expressed the view that keeping up contact with friends and neighbours strongly influenced older people to reside in their local community (Amárach Research et al., 2016).

In a similar way, the fear of social isolation and in ability to participate is critical. For instance, a lack of mobility and adequate transport has also had a significant impact on older people and has prevented a person from downsizing for that reason alone. Participant 3 articulated the importance of public transport to an older person:

a bus service affects a person's decision to downsize, it would be important to have public transport (Participant 3).

The analysed data from this theme highlights that isolation can be a result of moving away from one's community and that adequate public transport affects a person decision to downsize. Providing adequate transport maximises participation, capacity and inclusion of older adults in communities which is essential to combating social exclusion and isolation (Walsh et al., 2012). McKenna uncovered that the benefits of public transport went beyond aiding older adults accessing services but also increased

their quality of life through greater independence and the opportunity to meet with friends and neighbours and hear the local news (McKenna cited in Breen, 2014).

The importance of community emerged as a significant theme in the data, which reflects other work on older adulthood. A sense of community is an important consideration in assessing an older person's risk of social isolation (McCarthy and Thomas, 2004). Leaving the community and neighbours raises concerns over the sense of isolation participants may feel if they relocate to another area. A lack of nice neighbours and being in the position to socialise may in effect force older people into isolation and loneliness. Another component that arose in this theme was a person's access to resources and services such as health care services and public transport.

A review of the concept of a sense of community revealed that belonging, trust and reciprocity are key aspects that create a sense of community (García et al., 1999). A sense of belonging is a central element in a community (Means and Evans, 2012) and many of the older people participating in this study have over many generations engaged and witnessed changes in their communities. As stressed by participants in the focus group, by living in an area you become part of the community and establish friendships and relationships within it. Many of their reflections reflect, Hummon's (1992) suggestion that community identity provides people with a sense of belonging.

5.3. Participation and Engagement

Interestingly, there was unanimous agreement amongst the participants in the focus groups that current government policy does not address the needs of older people. The National Positive Ageing Strategy stresses that it will ensure that older people's needs will be considered during the development and creation of policies and initiatives that will have an impact on them. The focus group prompted a discussion about voice and participation in policies that affect the lives of older adults. This discussion explored the subject of political responsibility to support older people to remain integrated in society and to invite contributions in the formulation of policies that will shape their lives. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with being excluded from political decisions that have a direct influence on their lives across a range of policy areas. Participant 4 expressed the importance of listening to older people:

they should listen to the older people really because until you walk in our shoes, they don't know what it means (Participant 4).

This statement illustrates the importance of attitudes and perception, as it conveys that older people want to be heard and to have their voices listened to so they can advocate for and address their needs. The lack of consultation with older people who have relevant lived experience in relation to aging, hinders meaningful policy change as it is approached in a top-down and, often value-for-money manner. The aim of this research is to explore the attitudes and view of older people on initiatives that will affect them. Likewise, the National Positive Ageing Strategy has included collaborative approaches to tackle ageism and exclusion and promote positive ageing. It is questionable how far these proposals fully involve older people in decision-making concerning issues that directly impact their lives. Older people feel alienated from political processes aimed at shaping their lives.

It is important to remember that the attitudes and actions of individuals are just as important as the attitudes and actions of Government and other agencies in enabling people as they age to do so in a positive way (Department of Health, 2013, p.13).

The Strategy expresses that the attitudes of individuals are just as influential and notable as the attitudes of the government, however participants in the group expressed that their voices are not heard. For instance, Participant 5 echoes his view the government has failed to plan and implement strategies aimed at meeting the needs of older people.

the needs of the elderly aren't being considered in successive governments (Participant 5).

Participant 1 emphasises that Ireland's population are steadily growing older and the government should ensure adequate housing for older people is guaranteed. The proportion of Ireland's population over the age of sixty-five is set to increase extensively in the future (Amarách et al., 2016). Considering the growth of an ageing population, evidence suggests that government needs to ensure that services and supports for the elderly can sufficiently sustain the growing population. Participant 1 expressed the opinion that it is imperative that the government and property developers start to plan for the imminent demographic changes and articulated:

we're told in terms of numbers, we, the elderly, are going to explode in the next number of year. It should be government policy to ensure that

developers, if they're planning a big scheme, that it should have a portion of the scheme devoted to sheltered housing (Participant 1).

By 2050, the number of people aged 80 and over is expected to rise from the present number of 130,600 to 458,000. Thus, careful planning is essential to meet the needs of older people. When participants were asked if they felt the needs of older people were met within current government policy, the most unified and irrefutable response was that government failed to address their needs.

they haven't even begun (Participant 6).

if you plan for the old, you include the young and if you only plan for the young, you exclude the old (Participant 6).

This illustrates the importance of listening to older people as their voices often go unheard. Meaningful consultation between government and older adults is central to identifying and addressing the needs of older people and implementing improved policies that affect their lives.

5.4. Pressure

Participants were asked if they thought the commentary in the media or broadcast places pressure on an older person to downsize. There was a rather mixed reaction amongst participants ranging from positive and negative responses. By exploring older people's views on media pressure, a number of participants expressed the view that the media has a strong impact on views about older people. However, for others the effects of the media in influencing views had no bearing on them and didn't amount to any pressure felt. For instance, Participant 1 expressed:

not me personally, you don't have to take that on board (Participant 1).

Participant 6 response differs to that of Participant 1:

well that writer Ronan Lyons in Trinity talking about older people who should sell their houses and move out to give way for younger couples to come in placed some amount of pressure on me (Participant 6).

Participant 5 highlighted how pressure is subjective and expressed:

one person might read something in the media and might not feel any pressure and another person might read the same thing and they might feel

pressurised so it's okay for some people to say no it doesn't and for others to say yes it does (Participant 5).

Likewise, those who expressed the belief that the media pressurized them in some form, Participant 4 revealed:

Even though it mightn't affect you, you still might feel that bit of pressure on you as public opinion is building up on you a bit (Participant 4).

While participants had differing views on how media influenced them, it was clear that a number of the participants felt the media was a contributing factor in placing pressure on some older adults. In the above account, one of the participants described how this portrayal in the media can influence public opinion and how older people are perceived. Vallocheril and Thorn (2007) identified two theories, social learning theory and cultivation theory and demonstrated how each affect how older people are perceived. Social learning theory suggests that young people are influenced by what they see and hear in the media, parallel to the cultivation theory which states that the content of media has the ability to shape people's perception of the world (Vallocheril and Thorn cited in Vickers, 2007). Therefore, both theories highlight how the media has the power to influence how older people are viewed by younger generations. Negative coverage of the elderly in the media activates negative beliefs amongst young people. A number of participants expressed how negative exposure within the media deeply entrenches negative stereotypes and beliefs within public opinion. Negative media portrayals of ageing contribute to a culture where society is both consciously and unconsciously briefed to view ageing pessimistically (Milner et al., 2012). The one-sided media messaging has led to an unfair view of the elderly. The example of Ronan Lyons, an economist, who in a piece highlighted how older people are not downsizing into suitable accommodation, was an interesting one. His commentary was interpreted by the media in a negative light resulting in headlines labelling older people as "empty nesters" with headlines depicting that older people could alleviate the housing crisis by downsizing. In this instance the media ignored the complexities of downsizing, what older people want and the shortage of suitable accommodation available for older people.

5.5. Sense of Ownership

Participants were asked if they felt they were contributing to the housing crisis by occupying houses whilst there are families without homes during the contemporary housing crisis due to a shortage in supply. The participants responded as follows:

we had hassle to get the houses we have (Participant 5).

we had to scrimp and save when we bought our place (Participant 6).

no that's your house, it's your property (Participant 5).

we moved in with nothing, just packing cases and things whereas now they move into houses and it's all furnished, but in our time no, second hand curtains, packing cases (Participant 6).

if you moved into a house when you're young and we'll say you're married and you paid for the house overall the years, it's very much your house and no one has any business shushing you out, they just don't and that's all about it (Participant 7).

This question inspired an animated discussion. Participants clearly voiced their sense of ownership and the hardship they experienced when buying a house in the past. In many ways, they explained their sense of home ownership derived from the reality that they had their own struggle to buy their homes. They expressed that they bore no contribution to the housing crisis.

As people grow older, they often become more attached to their home and community and spend relatively more time in their homes. As identified by the participants, they each had to save to buy their homes and are strongly attached to their homes as a result. La Grange and Ngai Ming (2010) identify many benefits to home ownership including a valued asset over time, security of tenure and ability to exercise of greater personal choice in the type of house they occupy. Based on the findings of this research, it can be argued that the home functions as a secure base. Saunders (1990, p. 361) identifies the home as a secure base describing the home as a place, "[W]here people feel in

control of their environment, free from surveillance, free to be themselves and at ease, in a world that might at times be experienced as threatening and uncontrollable". In this definition, elements such as security, freedom and privacy are fundamental to home ownership. Home ownership¹⁰ is associated with a sense of freedom and independence and downsizing results in a loss of those most important of feelings. Owner occupiers feel more secure and protected as they are likely to live in trouble free areas and are less likely to find themselves in vulnerable circumstances (Hiscock et al., p.57). For older people who lived through the economic downturn from 2007 onwards, their homes have served to provide them with security. Furthermore, many of the participants articulated that these were more than houses, they were homes filled with cherished memories of loved ones, reflecting the deeply meaningful attachment the participants have to their homes.

5.6. Barriers to Downsizing

All participants clearly expressed a preference to remain living in their homes for as long as possible with the provision of suitable services available to them when needed. As identified within the literature review, ageing in place is one of the preferred options (Blaakilde, 2015; Pynoos et al., 2007; Amarách et al., 2016). All participants spoke about how their homes as perfect and appropriate to their needs at one stage of their lives, however their needs have changed and evolved. Participant 4 stated:

everything should be on the flat, particularly toilet facilities, walk-in shower and things like that, they're all important to the older person really (Participant 4).

Despite Ireland's over 65s population appearing to be content and settled in their homes, there is openness to different living situations, driven especially by healthcare requirements and accessibility aspects. Participant 3 identified:

from a health situation, such a situation where you couldn't manage on your own... none of us know what the future holds, we might have to even though we don't choose to downsize (Participant 3).

Participant 4 stated:

¹⁰ The difference between an owner occupier and a tenant is freedom and security, ownership allows for control over renovation and adjusting the house to the owner's taste, whereas tenants face restrictions from the landlord on what they can alter.

everything should be on the flat, particularly toilet facilities, walk-in shower and things like that, they're all important to the older person really (Participant 4).

In spite of some of the participants being open to the idea of downsizing, participants voiced a lack of suitable or alternative accommodation. This would correlate with the policy review. Many Participants echoed similar responses, Participant 4 voiced:

well the smaller houses aren't available in your area (Participant 4).

Participant 1 expressed:

the options aren't there (Participant 1).

Likewise, Participant 4 agreed with Participant 1 and stated:

a gross lack of options (Participant 6).

Participants openly expressed that it would be their preferred choice to age in place and remain within the home for as long as possible or, failing this an alternative would be sheltered housing or community living provided within their community. However, this is not always a viable option for older people as specific policy areas are underdeveloped and do not facilitate for the changing needs and demands for older people.

Resistance to downsizing also arose during the focus group when the discussion moved to the stress and trouble an older person might experience during the transition. Participants express their concern about the difficulty and energy involved in downsizing. Participant 1 said:

and if it's made easy in terms, you know, the actual transition from one, I mean okay imagine if you're downsizing a house you have to sell that and you have to buy something suitable, I mean that can be, there's going to be a lot of work in it (Participant 1).

Another participant said:

older people don't like hassle, there's a lot of hassle in changing house and the stress level would be very high (Participant 4).

This theme explores barriers which prevent older people from downsizing. As noted in the literature review, ageing in place is the most desired option for older people as they

would prefer to remain in their homes and community for as long as possible. Despite an openness to downsize into different living arrangements driven by healthcare requirements and accessibility aspects, participants expressed a gross lack of suitable accommodation available.

5.7. Changed Housing Needs

By understanding challenges that older people face in maintaining their homes, effective ways to support older adults can be designed to support their desire to age in place. The data gathered during the focus group confirmed that there are times during the ageing process when individuals can outgrow their homes. Older people often find themselves in the position that their houses become challenging to manage or are now too big. The analysed data conveyed that older people encounter difficulties in home maintenance. The relationship between a person's capabilities and their environment has been explored by Lawton and Nahemow (1973). Based on their research, it can be argued that as the environment exceeds the person's capabilities, complications arise and the environment is no longer suitable or appropriate a person's changed needs (Lawton and Nahemow cited in Bailey Fausset et al., 2011). One participant expressed:

there's a certain amount of stress there where you are kind of constantly aware of the lack of capability of the upkeep of your own place you know (Participant 6).

Another participant stated:

you've less work to do, you can manage one or two rooms alright whereas if you have seven or eight, they become junk holes, things get throw in you know (Participant 7).

Participant 4 articulated:

well you haven't the same energy you see when you grow older with keeping a bigger house clean, like the necessities are what you want now, a bathroom, a living room, kitchen and a toilet, they're particularly important if there's only one or two left in the house (Participant 4).

Participant 6 revealed:

everything takes you longer when you're older (Participant 6).

Likewise, the upkeep of the garden that was once a hive of activity is now proving to be more problematic.

if you've the garden thrown in and you have a high hedge, it's not as easy to manage (Participant 2).

The data above outlines older people's experience relating to home maintenance and the difficulties they face as they wish to age in place. Participants felt that their current living conditions would become progressively more unsuitable and incompatible as their housing needs were changing with age. Their houses no longer suited their needs and maintaining a larger house was becoming unmanageable. The data also conveys that maintenance issues begin to cause stress as opportunities to continuing living in the home were at risk.

5.8. Conclusion

This chapter explored six themes identified by the participants of the focus group as contributing to their attitudes on downsizing. The themes that emerged we see as impacting on older people's attitudes were: community, participation and engagement, pressure, sense of ownership, barriers to downsizing and changed housing needs. Interestingly, there is a strong correlation between the literature and what was voiced by the participants. To complete the research study, the following chapter will discuss a conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Introduction

Throughout the course of this research study, the researcher observed many themes which emerged through analysis of the data. As a researcher, I sought to explore the attitudes of older people towards downsizing within the contemporary housing crisis. Every effort was taken to ensure that the voices and attitudes of all participants were

heard, in keeping with the theoretical paradigm of interpretivist phenomenology. The study successfully elicited participants views and attitudes towards downsizing. Moreover, participants offered a rare insight into their personal views towards downsizing, paving way for the emergence of thought-provoking themes.

6.2. Discussion

The research brings to light interesting findings about the preferences of older people within the context of housing and ageing in place. By employing a qualitative, community based research approach, the research identified a number of interesting findings in relation to older people's attitudes towards downsizing and, thus, has the potential to generate recommendations for government policies. As identified within the literature review and the finding chapter, there is strong correlation between ageing in place and remaining within the community (Amarách et al., 2016). It is crucial that government policies and local authority planning is sensitive to older people's preference to age within the community. The government and local planning authorities have the opportunity to tackle the housing crisis by developing housing that facilitates for the changing needs of older people.

It was highlighted through the literature review and through the views of the participants that a lack of consultation, participation and engagement are significant barriers which prevents older people from having their voice heard on policies and initiatives that impact their lives. Dissatisfaction was explicitly expressed by participants during the focus group regarding exclusion from policy consultation processes on matters that affect them across a range of policies. It is essential that older people are afforded the opportunity to have their voices heard.

Findings from this research indicates that much more needs to be done within policy development to future-proof and alter homes to make them more suitable and appropriate to the needs of older people. The findings chapter examined many barriers faced by older people who are open to the proposal of downsizing as their housing needs change and they outgrow their homes. There is a vast amount of research that supports the notion that the majority of older people have a strong preference to reside in their own homes for as long as possible (Amarách et al., 2016; Hummon, 1992). There is a strong correlation observed in the data analysis from primary research which conveyed all participants expressed identical views.

The information gathered during the focus group illustrated that within a new housing scheme, a specific number or percentage of housing should be devised for older people within new housing stock frameworks. Themes such as barriers to downsizing suggested alternative housing options are not available to older people. Local authority development plans should adhere to developing plans that incorporate the future needs of all sections of society, including older people as it is of paramount importance. Developing innovative, high quality housing will require engagement and collaboration between many actors such as builders/developers, planners, architects, local authorities and agencies acting for older people so that developments happen in the right location with the right supports in place. It is hoped this research will help to inform this conversation and also encourage further planning and innovations (Amarách Research et al., 2016).

6.3. Recommendations

Based on the themes identified in the findings, the following are the main recommendations for this study:

- Even though this was a small scale research project, it does give an important insight into the attitudes of older people relating to downsizing and its possible influence on the housing crisis. One limitation of the research project was an inability to gain access to older people living in social housing and privately rented housing. Therefore, further research in the area should incorporate the views of older people living in diverse tenures and, perhaps, older people who do not engage in the Age Action service, as a means of considering different perspectives towards downsizing. Likewise, the research conveys that there is limited literature relating to downsizing in Ireland. Further research could be conducted into the experiences of older people who have downsized.
- A particularly thought-provoking reflection on social and public policy emerged during the focus group: *“if you plan for the old, you include the young and if you only plan for the young, you exclude the old”* (Participant 6). This excerpt rendered me to reflect on activities that include both old and young people. I propose that by implementing and facilitating group work where the young and old engage with one another, both the young and old gain insight into each other’s world dispelling myths and stereotypes of old age. I would

encourage Age Action to invite students from local schools and third level institutions to visit the organisation and encourage members of the community to interact. While Age Action already has a partnership with schools through the Getting Started Programme to bridge the digital divide¹¹ that exists between young and old people, a programme dedicated to social and policy developments would provide a space for building common ground across generations.

- The research conveys that older people feel that their needs are not being addressed under current government policy. The *National Positive Ageing Strategy* outlines that participation is a key element within the strategy aimed at supporting older people participate in the formulation of policies and issues that will shape their lives and wellbeing. For this reason, it is imperative that greater effort is made by the current and successive governments to extend the participatory possibilities for older people to engage with policy development. Participation is often referenced in policy in a tokenistic manner, it is crucial that we seek to establish a stronger and more meaningful approach to voice and participation.
- In order to meet the housing needs of Ireland's older population, housing policies need to acknowledge older people's requirements for alternative housing. This involves a conversation between developers, builders, planners, architects, local authorities and older people to identify those needs for the best possible outcome.

6.4. Research Limitations

The study was small in nature, however it does give a comprehensive insight into the attitudes of older people towards ageing and downsizing. Certain limitations arose throughout the research study. It needs to be acknowledged that all participants were owner occupiers which subsequently limits the data as a wider range of experiences, attitudes and livelihoods could not be explored. The research presents possibilities for future studies of the broader general cohort of older people living in social housing and private rented housing for a more comprehensive picture. However, the data is valuable in its own right as it produces a rich account of the view, thoughts and attitudes of older

¹¹ Computer classes were established to tutor older people by volunteering schools.

people concerning downsizing. Due to a technical problem at the agency, the data collected was affected as a set of visual prompts that had been prepared for the focus group to evoke different reactions and to explore what meanings older people attach to a picture could not be studied. Were more time available, the researcher could have responded with a follow-up survey or a set of smaller focus groups, but due to the time-limit and data emerging from the focus group decided to proceed with the existing data set.

6.5. Conclusion

The data generated in this research presents a deep and exploratory insight into older people's experiences and attitudes to downsizing within the contemporary housing crisis. The research is significant as it gave a voice to older people to express their views relating to policies pertaining to ageing and housing. By analysing contemporary policies and policies from the past, one gains insight into those which have been successful and those which have not. The research evidenced that policies concerning ageing and housing highlight the government's failure to implement detailed plans to develop policies and services that address the needs of older people. The research generated understandings of discourses and attitudes that characterise ageing as a problem that place a strain on services.

The study is relevant as it contributes to the government's vision underscored in the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* to support older people to actively engage and participate in the formulation of policies that shape their lives. However, to do this the strategy must be enacted and the goals must be translated from theory to practice. Three rather broad research questions were used to guide this study. The main findings of the primary research show that there are similarities in what existing literature says on ageing in place and the importance of community. This informs the researcher of what affects a participant's decision to downsize. Participants expressed that remaining within the community and a sense of ownership prevented them from downsizing for the reason they had formed a strong attachment and felt secure in their homes and communities.

It was highlighted through the findings that there is an openness to downsize into different living arrangements driven by changing housing needs, healthcare requirements and accessibility aspects. Despite this, participants expressed there is a

gross lack of options available compounded with the fact that government policies fall short of implementing strategic plans to counteract this problem. The review of relevant policies identified many weaknesses, such as the government's failure to adequately address older people's needs.

Findings from Age Friendly Ireland's research indicates that Ireland needs to approach how they develop specific housing for older people differently and to seek out to hear their views and attitudes. This research presents possibilities for future study in the area of ageing in sheltered accommodation and community living.

Bibliography

Age Action (2018) *Age Action for Older People – Our Vision and Mission* [online], available: <https://www.ageaction.ie/about-us/our-vision-and-mission> [accessed 3 April 2018].

Age Action Ireland Strategic Plan 2016-2018. (2016) [pdf] Dublin: Age Action. Available at: https://www.ageaction.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/age_action_strategic_plan_2016_-_2018.pdf [accessed 6 Nov 2017].

Age Friendly Ireland (2016). *Housing for Older People: Future Perspectives*. [online] Dublin: Age Friendly Ireland, pp9-39. Available at: <http://agefriendlyireland.ie/wp->

[content/uploads/2016/05/Housing-for-Older-People -Executive-Summary.pdf](#)
[accessed 8 Nov 2017].

Amárach Research., Lyons, R., SIRR, L. and Innovation Delivery. (2016) “Housing for Older People – Thinking Ahead”, Dublin: Housing Agency.
<https://www.housingagency.ie/getattachment/News/Current-News/Report-on-Housing-For-Older-People-Thinking-Ahead/Final-Report-Housing-for-Older-People-Dec-2016.pdf>.

Bailey Fausset, C. Kelly, A.J., Rogers, W.A. and Fisk, A.D. (2011) ‘Challenges to Aging in Place: Understanding Home Maintenance Difficulties’, *Journal of Housing For the Elderly*, 25:2, 125-141.

Baker, N. (2016) ‘Study suggest downsizing by older people ‘could free up housing’, *Irish Examiner* [online], 8 Mar 2016, available:
<https://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/study-suggests-downsizing-by-older-people-could-free-up-housing-386158.html>

Baltes, M. M., Maas, I., Wilms, H.-U., Borchelt, M., & Little, T. D. (1999). Everyday competence in old and very old age: Theoretical considerations and empirical findings. *In the Berlin Aging Study: Aging from 70 to 100*. (pp. 384-402).

Barrett, A., and Kelly, E. (2016) ‘Housing and Ireland’s Older Population’, *The Economic and Social Research Institute* [online], available:
<http://www.esri.ie/publications/housing-and-irelands-older-population/>

Bergold, J., & Thomas, S. (2012) Participatory Research Methods: A Methodological Approach in Motion. *Qualitative Social Research*, pp. 1438-5627.

Blaakilde, L. (2015) ‘Transnational issues for the Danish State and its retirement migrants abroad’, *Journal of Housing for the Elderly* [online], 29(1-2), 146-163, available: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02763893.2015.989773>

Breen, C. (2014) *Public and Community Transport for Older People in Rural Ireland – North and South*. Pdf. Dublin: CARDI (Centre for Ageing Research and

Development in Ireland) available:

<http://www.cardi.ie/sites/default/files/publications/cardi-ruraltransport-final.pdf>

Bryman, A. (2012) *Social Research Methods* (4th edition), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bunton, R. et al (1995) *The Sociology of Health Promotion. Critical Analysis of Consumption, Lifestyle and Risk*. London: Routledge

Capowski, G. and Peak, M. H. (1994) Ageism: the new diversity issue. *Management Review*, 83, 10, 10-16.

Carey, M (2009) *The Social Work Dissertation, Using Small-Scale Qualitative Methodology*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

CARL Database of Available Projects. (2017). [pdf]. Cork: CARL. Available at: <https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/research/carl/CARL-available-projects-November-2017.pdf> [accessed 6 Nov 2017].

Carswell, S. (2017) 'Ireland's empty nesters: 'A big home is okay when you have kids'', *The Irish Times* [online], 9 Dec 2017, available: <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/homes-and-property/ireland-s-empty-nesters-a-big-home-is-okay-when-you-have-kids-1.3317886>

Considine, M. and Dukelow, F. (2009) *Irish social policy: A critical introduction*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd.

Costa-Font, J., Elvira, D. and Mascarilla-Miró, O. (2009). 'Ageing in Place'? Exploring Elderly People's Housing Preferences in Spain. *Urban Studies*, pp.295-316.

CSO (Central Statistics Office) (2013) *Population and Labour Force Projections*, Dublin: Stationery Office, available: http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/population/2013/poplabfor2016_2046.pdf

CSO (Central Statistics Office) (2017) *Census 2016 Summary Results* [online], available:
<http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/presspages/2017/census2016summaryresults-part1/>

Dawson, C. (2009), *Introduction to Research Methods: A Practical Guide For Anyone Undertaking a Research Project*. 4th edn, How To Books Ltd; Begbroke Oxford. Fix

Denscombe, M. (2009) *Ground rules for social research guidelines for good practice*. 2nd edn. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill.

Department of Health (2016). *Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative Literature Review*. Dublin: Department of Health. Available from: <https://hapai.net/hapai-project-resources/>. Accessed 24 January 2018.

Department of Health (2015). *Healthy and Positive Ageing for All Research Strategy 2015-2019*. [online] Dublin: Department of Health. Available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/Who/healthwellbeing/Our-Priority-Programmes/Positive-Ageing/Healthy-and-Positive-Ageing-For-All.pdf> [accessed 24 Jan 2018].

Dukelow, F. and Considine, M. (2017). *Irish Social Policy A critical introduction*. 2nd ed. Bristol: Policy Press, pp.271-299.

Durham Community Research Team (2011) 'Community-based Research Participatory Research: Ethical Challenges' [online] available at: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/connected-communities/community-based-participatory-research-ethical-challenges/>

Easterlow, D and Smith S (2004) 'Housing for Health: Can the Market Care?', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* [online], 36(6), 999-1017, available:

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1068/a36178>

ESRI (The Economic and Social Research Institute) (2017) *Demand for healthcare projected to increase substantially with rapid growth and ageing of population* [online], available:

<https://www.esri.ie/news/demand-for-healthcare-projected-to-increase-substantially-with-rapid-growth-and-ageing-of-population/>

Estes, C.L., Biggs, S. and Phillipson, C. (2003) *Social Theory, Social Policy and Ageing*. Berkshire: Open University Press

Finch, H., Lewis, J. and Turley, C. (2014) 'Focus Groups' in Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nicholls, C. and Ormston, R., *Qualitative Research Practice – A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, Los Angeles: Sage, 211-242.

Gallop Organisation. (2008). Flash Eurobarometer Summary: Family life and the needs of an ageing population. Eurobarometer. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_247_sum_en.pdf

García, I., Guiliani, F. and Wiesenfeld, E. (1999) Community and sense of community: the case of an urban barrio in Caracas. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 27, 727-740.

GoI (Government of Ireland) (2014) *The National Positive Ageing Strategy*, Dublin, available at: http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/National_Positive_Ageing_Strategy_English.pdf

GoI (Government of Ireland) (2016) *Rebuilding Ireland: Action plan for housing and homelessness*, Dublin: DHPCLG, available at: http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland_Action%20Plan.pdf

Higgs, P. and Gillear, C (2015). *Rethinking Old Age Theorising the Fourth Age*. London: Palgrave

Hiscock, R., Kearns, A., MacIntyre, S. and Ellaway, A. (2001) 'Ontological Security and Psycho-Social Benefits from the Home: Qualitative Evidence on Issues of Tenure', *Housing, Theory and Society*, 18:1-2, 50-66.

Holloway, I. (1997) *Basic Concepts for Qualitative Research*, Oxford: Blackwell Science

Huges, D. and Dumont, K. (1993) Using Focus Groups to Facilitate Culturally-Anchored Research. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 21 (4), 775-806.

Hummon, D. (1992) Community Attachment: Local sentiment and sense of place. In I. Altman & S. Low (eds), *Place attachment* (pp.253-279). New York: Plenum.

Judd, B., E. Liu, H. Easthope, L. Davy, and C. Bridge. 2014. "Downsizing Amongst Older Australians." AHURI Final Report No.214. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

Keane, N (2018) 'Critical Perspectives on Age and Ageing Presentation', SS3045: *Critical Perspectives on Age and Ageing* [online], available: https://ucc-ie.blackboard.com/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?course_id= 38641_1 &content_id= 1319004_1&mode=reset

Kleinhans, R. and Elsinga, M. (2010) 'Buy Your Home and Feel in Control' Does Home Ownership Achieve the Empowerment of Former Tenants of Social Housing?, *International Journal of Housing Policy*,10:1, 41-61,

La Grange, A. and Ngai Ming, Y. (2001) 'Social Belonging, Social Capital and the Promotion of Home Ownership: A Case Study of Hong Kong', *Housing Studies*, 16:3, 291-310.

Lehnert A. 2004, Housing, consumption, and credit constraints. Washington D.C.: Divisions of Research and Statistics and Monetary Affairs Federal Reserve Board,

Finance and Economics Discussion Series, viewed 15 August 2011,
<http://www.federalreserve.gov/Pubs/feds/2004/200463/200463pap.pdf>.

Liston, V. (2014). The Problematic of Participation: Back to the Future. In: R. Munck, L. McIlrath, B. Hall and R. Tandon, ed., Higher Education and Community-based Research: Creating a Global Vision. New York: Palgrave MacMillan

Longino, and Powell, J. (2009) 'Towards a phenomenology of aging' in Bengston, V.L., Gans, D., Putney, N.M. and Silverstein, M. (eds) Handbook of Theories of Ageing, Second Edition, Springer Publishing Company, New York, pp. 375-88.

Lyons, I. (2009) *Public Perceptions of Older People and Ageing*. Dublin: National Centre for the Protection of Older People.

http://www.ncpop.ie/Year%201%20Reports/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20NCPOP%20Lit%20Rev%201%20IL%2001_12_09Cover%20inc22_01_10.pdf

Lyons, R. (2016). 'When properties trade too rarely', Sunday Independent, 7 February 2016.

McCarthy, H. and Thomas, G. (2004) Home Alone: Combating Isolation with Older housebound people. London; Demos 2004.

Means, R. and Evans, S. (2012) Communities of place and communities of interest? An exploration of their changing role in later life, *Ageing and Society*, 32 (8), 1300-1318.

Milner, J., Milner, C and Van Norman, K. (2012) *Global Population Ageing: Peril or Promise?*, pdf, Switzerland: World Economic Forum, available:
https://www.homeinstead.com/documents/wef_gac_globalpopulationageing_report_2012.pdf

Newall, E.G and Menac, V.H. (2017) 'Loneliness and social isolation of older adults

Why it is important to examine these social aspects together', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* [online], available:

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0265407517749045>

O'Shea, E (2006) *Towards a national strategy for older people in Ireland*, Older and Bolder Campaign, available at: http://web.archive.org/web/20071118175900/http://www.olderandbolder.ie/documents/1_Older&Bolder.pdf

Repko, A.F., & Szostak, R. (2016) *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory*. Los Angeles: SAGE

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nichollis, C. and Ormston, R. (2014) *Qualitative Research Practice*, 2nd ed, London, SAGE Publications Ltd.

Ryan, O. (2016) 'Older people moving to smaller houses might help housing crisis', *The Journal.ie* [online], 8 Mar 2016, available: <http://www.thejournal.ie/esri-housing-report-older-people-2647307-Mar2016/>

Ryen, A. (2011) 'Ethics and qualitative research' in D. Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research*, 3rd edition: London: Sage, pp. 416-438.

Saunders, P. (1990) *A Nation of Home Owners*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Savin-Baden, M. and Howell Major, C. (2013) *Qualitative Research The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice*, Canada: Routledge.

Shaw, I. and Holland, S. (2014). *Doing Qualitative Research in Social Work*. London: Sage Publications.

Skovdal, M., & Cornish, F. (2015) *Qualitative Research for Development: A Guide for Practitioners*, Rugby: Practical Action Publishing Ltd

Stewart, D.W., Shamdasani, P.N. and Roel, D.W. (2007) *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice*, 2nd edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Taylor, R., Jason, L., Keys, C., Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Davis, M., Durlak, J. and Holtz Isenburg, D. (2004) 'Introduction: capturing theory and methodology in participatory

research', in L. Jason, C. Keys, Y. Suarez-Balcazar, R. Taylor and M. Davis (eds), with J. Durlak and D. Holtz Isenburg, *Participatory Community Research: Theories and Methods in Action*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association: 3-14.

Timonen, V. (2008) *Ageing Societies A Comparative Introduction*. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.

The Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative (HaPAI). (2015). *National Indicators*. [online] Available at: <https://hapai.net/hapai-project-resources/> [accessed 24 Jan 2018].

UCC (2017) Code of Research Conduct

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/research/researchatucc/documents/UCC-CodeofResearchConductV2.111thApril2017.pdf>

Vickers, K (2007) 'Ageing and the Media: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow', *Californian Journal of Health Promotion*, 5(3), 100-105.

Vincent, J. (2003) *Old Age*. London: Routledge

Walker, A. (2002) A Strategy for Active Ageing. *International Social Security Review*, Vol. 55(1):121-139

Walsh, K., O'Shea, E. & Scharf, T. (2012) *Social Exclusion and Ageing in Diverse Rural Communities*. Galway: Irish Centre for Social Gerontology

Wang, Z., Shu, D. and Dong, B. (2013) 'Anxiety disorders and its risk factors among the Sichuan empty-nest older adults: A cross-sectional study', *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 56, 298-302.

World Health Organization (2012) Interesting facts about ageing. Available at: www.who.int/ag

World Health Organisation (2002) *Active Ageing: A Policy Framework*. Geneva:
WHO <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/WHO-Active-Ageing-Framework.pdf>

Appendix One Information Sheet



Purpose of the Study. As part of the requirements for the Bachelor of Social Science at UCC, I have to carry out a research study. This study aims to explore older people's attitudes toward downsizing within the context of the contemporary housing crisis.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve conducting a focus group where I will meet with members from the Age Action Group for one hour. I will ask questions regarding downsizings.

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been asked because the study involves exploring the attitudes of older people and you are suitable to provide data for this study. The study undertakes to give older people a voice in the contemporary housing policy debates and by listening to your views and attitudes, I will gain much insight. By conducting this research for Age Action, the data and information collected will pinpoint areas in which the Age Action organisation can advocate on your behalf.

Do you have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part. Prior to taking part, participants will sign a consent form but are free to withdraw at any time before the study has commenced even if the consent form has been signed, or after the data collection has commenced. There will be a two week period after the data has been collected by which you are free to contact the researcher to have the data provided destroyed.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. I will ensure all data collected will remain anonymous and that any direct quotes or extracts used in the thesis will remain entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information which you give?

The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study, available only to me and my research supervisor. On completion of the project, data will be retained for minimum of a further ten years and then destroyed. Any physical data pertaining to the project will be kept in a secure place and consent forms and all other identifying information will be kept separate. This data can be destroyed after analysis. All electronic versions will be stored for the minimum of ten years as per the university policy and will be stored in a laptop which is password protected.

What will happen to the results?

The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may be read by future students on the course. The study will be published on the Community Academic Research Link (CARL) website as part of the initiative it is part of and studied in relation to recommendations which may arise from it.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.

What if there is a problem?

At the end of the procedure, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you subsequently feel distressed, John O' Mahony and I will refer you for further assistance.

Who has reviewed this study?

Approval must be given by the Social Research Ethics Committee of UCC before studies like this can take place.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, you can contact me:

Niamh Connery

(086) 054 0103

115473982@umail.ucc.ie

Supervisor

Rebecca Jeffers

rebecca.jeffers@ucc.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

Appendix Two

Consent Form



I.....agree to participate in Niamh Connery's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Niamh Connery to be audio-recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed:

Date:

PRINT NAME:

Appendix Three

Focus Group Questions

Theme One: Barriers to Downsizing

1. What do you think, are the barriers to downsizing? Why?
2. Do you think money play's a significant role in older people's decisions to downsize? Why?
3. Do you think needs affect people's decision to downsize to a smaller house? If so, why do you think a smaller house is better suited to a person with health needs?
4. Do you think the lack of alternative housing options acts as a barrier?
5. Do you think community effects people's decision to downsize? Are people fearful of moving away from their communities?
6. What do you think ultimately stops a person from downsizing if they wish to do so? Why?

Theme Two: Pressure

1. Do you think the media or broadcast places pressure on you to downsize? Why/Why not?
2. Do you experience any sense of pressure to downsize as a solution to tackle the housing crisis?
3. Do you feel older people are unfairly blamed that you are contributing to the housing crisis?
4. Where does the sense of pressure derive from?

Theme Three: What could sway one to downsize?

1. Those of you not in favour of downsizing, is there anything that would change your mind?
2. Would aspects such as heating a large house and paying the property tax make you consider downsizing?
3. Is financing a large house making it difficult to retain the house? In your opinion is it difficult to finance a house? What are the biggest challenges to maintaining a house (finance, labour etc)?
4. Would you be willing to downsize into sheltered housing/community living? Sheltered housing is designed to help people to live independently and know help is to hand
5. Do you feel there is a lack of alternative housing choices in Ireland? Why?