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# Gateways of Ageing: Middle-class Senior Citizens in the National Capital Region of Delhi

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**Abstract** This chapter explores new ways of ageing in the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi. On the basis of different case studies I explore how urban developments influence ageing. The key focus is on the relation between urban change, class, and ageing. I argue that new elderscapes, which I understand as cultural spaces and sites that have emerged for and by older persons, are determined by the affiliation to class. The ethnographical material illustrates that new elderscapes are key sites for strengthening a middle-class identity at old age, reproducing social and economic differences in urban space. Environmental gerontological studies have often drawn attention to the marginalisation of elderly people in urban settings who cannot afford to take part in cultural or recreational activities. Societal exclusion of older persons is expected to rise under the influence of globalisation. However, my fieldwork shows that older people are not only subject to social demarcation processes but actively take part in them by distancing themselves from lower classes and by creating exclusive middle-class spaces. I argue that it is essential to keep in mind that the reproduction of class status is necessary at all ages and that segregation not only takes place between generations but also among them.

**Keywords** ageing, middle-class, India, urban, elderscapes

## Introduction

While global ageing has attracted public attention, the fact “that the ‘longevity revolution’ is taking place in the context of growing urbanization” (Gusmano 2009, 397) is only slowly moving onto the agenda of international stakeholders. Scientists and policy-makers often postulate an “urban age” because more than half of the world’s population now lives in urban areas.<sup>1</sup> But sociological and anthropological research on ageing in the city is still rare.

This chapter explores new ways of ageing in the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi. Since the 2000s, retirement communities and senior housing have arisen for the first time in India. They cater to those upper middle-class elderly in the city who no longer spend their later life within a joint family. The lives of many middle-class elderly in Delhi are marked by global displacement of kin, attachment to place, and security concerns. Urban change, like property development and notions of urban (un)safety, influences people’s choices of where and how to age. On the basis of different case studies,<sup>2</sup> I explore how urban developments impact ageing. The key focus is on the relation between urban change, class, and ageing. As social scientist Véronique Dupont reminds us, location is never neutral, but rather a space “signifying a political and societal vision of the city and access to it” (2007, 89). Studies on ageing and urban space often pinpoint the social exclusion of elderly people from urban participation (Buffel and Phillipson 2015). Whilst this is a crucial issue, scholars tend to ignore the fact that the elderly actively take part in urban segregation. In this chapter, the relationship between space and power is addressed by illustrating the historical and contemporary class-making and demarcation processes of stakeholders and (upper) middle-class seniors in different spaces. I argue that new elderscapes, which I define as cultural spaces and sites that have emerged for and by older persons, are determined by the affiliation to class. The ethnographical material illustrates that new elderscapes are key sites for strengthening a middle-class identity at old age, reproducing social and economic differences in urban space.

I also look at the role locality plays in the ageing process considering altered global–local connections. The local has gained new attention by scholars of globalization who acknowledge the challenge to redefine its importance in a globalized world (Donner and De Neve 2006). Global transformations have changed the political context in which individuals,

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1 Yet, urban scholars critique the concept and argue that the urban and urbanisation must be understood as theoretical categories that denote processes, not universal forms (Brenner and Schmid 2014).

2 Findings are based on a ten-month ethnographic fieldwork in the NCR of Delhi between September 2013 and March 2015. Tape-recorded conversations and interviews are marked with the date of data collection. The research was financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in the context of the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context” at Heidelberg University (research project “Ageing in a Transcultural Context”).

communities, and regions are embedded and the local has “acquired radically new meanings and contents, often counteracting the homogenising tendencies of cultural globalisation” (Donner and De Neve 2006, 2). A topography of ageing, which lends itself to this chapter, describes localized processes through which social and spatial transformations occur. Delhi’s neoliberal restructuring of space is not only taking place through large-scale projects of elite high-rise enclaves that have considerably changed the urban landscape, but also becomes evident in older neighbourhoods which are being remodelled through reconstructions of middle-class housing. Exploring existing and emerging middle-class spaces in the city will allow me to illustrate how senior citizens navigate social and urban changes. Real estate development in India is key for framing middle-class ideas of citizenship and belonging. Urban development by urban bodies and private developers as well as narratives of safety play a vital role in growing old in the mega city of Delhi. Various stakeholders have recently developed retirement communities, so-called “senior living” projects. They try to evoke a new “lifestyle” at old age, marked by leisure activities and the company of like-minded peers. In contrast to other middle-class spaces, these senior living projects not only indicate economic success, but are also markers of the absence of family care and therefore remain socially ambivalent.

## New ways of ageing

The boom in India’s economy after economic liberalization in the early 1990s has led to a preoccupation with the Indian middle classes in public discourses (Fernandes 2016, 232). Social science studies as well as market research companies have highlighted the emergence and growth of a new consumer group, even though their estimates vary considerably.<sup>3</sup> Scholars stress that there is no single definition of the Indian middle class and suggest speaking of *middle classes* instead in order to do justice to the heterogeneity of this strata of society. Heiman et al. (2012, 8) suggest researching *middle-classness* encompassing middle-class practices and subjectivities which are permeated by aspirations and anxieties. Studies on the middle classes often focus on younger generations who make up the majority of India’s population. Yet, the number of affluent middle-class elderly is increasing as well.<sup>4</sup> According to a study by an Indian consulting

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3 An often-quoted McKinsey study estimated the Indian middle classes at 50 million people in 2007, based on real annual household disposable income. They projected that in 2025, the middle classes will expand to about 583 million people, around 41 percent of the population (Beinhocker et al. 2007, 56). A more recent Credit Suisse research defining middle class according to wealth rather than income was much less optimistic and assumed the Indian middle class to amount to 23.7 million people in 2015 (Credit Suisse Research Institute 2015, 123).

4 The demographer R. B. Bhagat estimates that out of the 103 million Indian people over the age of sixty counted in the 2011 census, “38 million belonged to the

company, there were nine million “arrived veterans” (fifty-one to sixty years of age) in 2005 (Brosius 2011, 461) who are now past retirement age. Private companies, especially real estate developers, have begun to target this new market. Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL), a financial and professional services firm specializing in real estate, published a report in 2015 highlighting the “untapped opportunities” for investment in this field.

The senior living sector in India is at a crossroad. With the relaxation of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) restrictions on investments in the sector and increasing population of seniors (over 100 million seniors in India at present) to cater to, there clearly exists an untapped opportunity for investment and development in this sector. Unlike western countries where the senior living industry has gained maturity, India provides an opportunity to developers, service providers, healthcare players and operators to create solutions specific to India while leveraging learning from across the world (M. Kumar and Gattani 2015).

This passage evokes the image of India as the land of untapped opportunities for development in the senior market. Considering the changing dynamics of Indian society and demographics, investment seems to be a promising business opportunity. Due to extensive migration and emigration<sup>5</sup> of adult children seeking new job opportunities, and new notions of the nuclear family, there is a small but growing number of elderly in India who live alone or with their spouse. The increase in incomes of middle-class families has enabled people—both adult children and elderly parents—to live independently and to afford the “outsourcing” of eldercare (Lamb 2009, 51). Over the past few years, large private property developers have built “senior living” projects with special facilities for the aged all over India, for instance, Ashiana Housing, Paranjape Schemes, Max India Group, and Tata Housing.<sup>6</sup> The companies provide gated residences, typically located in the peripheral areas of India’s metropolises, and promise a secure and “hassle-free” life after retirement catering to new notions of middle-class lifestyle.<sup>7</sup> However, according to the JLL report, the biggest

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lower class, about 40 million to the middle class and the remaining 24 million belonged to the upper class” (Bhagat 2015, 258).

5 With 13.9 million people emigrating out of India in 2013, India is the leading emigration country worldwide (World Bank 2016).

6 See <https://www.ashianahousing.com/senior-living-india/>; <http://www.pscil.in/athashri-homes/>; <http://antaraseniorliving.com/>; [http://www.tatahousing.in/senior\\_living.php](http://www.tatahousing.in/senior_living.php), accessed March 26, 2016.

7 Gated high-rise housing often comes with the promise of secured water and electricity supply and other amenities like security, common grounds, a community centre, and leisure spaces like tennis courts or swimming pools. In personal conversations, my informants stated that to them “hassle” connoted both unwanted people on the premises and inconveniences with maintenance. Nevertheless, gated residences do often face problems, especially with water supply.

“stumbling block for senior living in India is the social stigma attached with the concept” (M. Kumar and Gattani 2015, 7). Ageing within the joint family and caring for one’s elderly parents are still seen as Indian core values (Lamb 2009, 50). In public discourses and everyday conversations there is a prevailing anxiety that economic prosperity entails the deterioration of Indian values, including the decline of the joint family. Even though the discourse of the decline of the joint family is often referred to as a recent phenomenon, coming along with a growing influence of the West, the discourse itself has had a long history in India, and the decline of cohabitation is far less dramatic than often depicted (see Uberoi 2005; Cohen 1998; Shah 1999). The majority of India’s elderly still live with their children,<sup>8</sup> and cohabitation is even more prevalent among middle and upper classes than among lower classes (UNFPA 2012, 73). Not surprisingly, start-up companies also began to target the home care sector. Kabir Chadha,<sup>9</sup> founder and CEO of Epoch Elder Care, estimated the home care market in India at over one billion US-\$. The former McKinsey analyst founded a company providing home care services (Bhatia 2014). Such private service providers have been mushrooming in and around Delhi lately.<sup>10</sup> They offer medical, legal or financial support, as well as “intellectual companionship” where caretakers spend time with the elderly. Other trends include e-commerce websites like *Senior Shelf*<sup>11</sup> which provide online shopping for seniors.

These new senior services are part of global flows of ageing (see Lamb, this volume).<sup>12</sup> While the analysis of global flows on a large scale used to predominate debates on globalization, social scientists have more recently stressed the importance of studying the entanglements of local and global

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8 According to Sathyanarayana et al. (2014, 87), who use data of two rounds of the National Family Health Surveys, the countrywide percentage of older persons living with children (and grandchildren) accounted for 78.4 percent in 2005–2006.

9 Names of persons in public or professional contexts are not anonymous. All names of private persons used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

10 See <http://www.pramaticare.com>; <http://www.whenat60.com>; <http://www.homital.in>; <http://www.maxhealthcare.in/home-care>; <http://www.medcareathome.com>, accessed on March 26, 2016.

11 See <http://www.seniorshelf.com/>, accessed March 26, 2016.

12 People are growing older worldwide and this demographic change—often termed “global ageing”—is gaining international attention. In 2002, delegates of over 160 states, intergovernmental institutions, and NGOs gathered at the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid and came up with a revised long-term strategy for ageing populations. Since 2013, the NGO HelpAge has been publishing a Global Age Watch Index, ranking countries by the well-being of their population over the age of sixty (<http://www.helpage.org/globalagewatch/>, accessed March 26, 2016). The UN and WHO continuously publish reports on this topic and there are various research initiatives concerning global ageing. However, Lawrence Cohen cautioned against these international initiatives producing a unilateral discourse, postulating a “universal gerontological order.” “As constituted by the World Assembly on Ageing, international gerontology is a flow of information from countries who produce discourse to countries who may resist discourse but must ultimately answer to it” (Cohen 1992, 127).

transformations and their regional particularities (Donner and De Neve 2006, 2). Metropolises are the “terrain where a multiplicity of globalization processes assume concrete, localized forms” (Sassen 2000, 147). Delhi and its surrounding satellite cities comprise over 16.7 million people<sup>13</sup> and have undergone vast transformations in the past decades. This case study illustrates the multiple ways and apparent contradictions by which older people ascribe meaning to urban change and globalization.

### “Ageing in place”

The meaning of place in the ageing process (“place in ageing”) and, more particularly, the meaning of staying in a familiar environment while growing old (“ageing in place”) are key foci of environmental gerontological studies (Rowles and Bernard 2013; Wahl et al. 2012; Smith 2009; Chaudhury and Rowles 2005; Oswald and Wahl 2005; Rowles 1993). Over the years, people develop an attachment to their surroundings, their homes, neighbourhoods, places of worship, shopping areas, parks, etc. This ambient space influences the behaviour and identity of residents, but also impacts place-making dynamics. “Personal identity is constantly spatialized because people narrate the things and places around them as part of their biographical development” (Katz 2009, 465). “Ageing in place”-studies often stress the positive effects for elderly people when they stay in their community. Policy makers and intergovernmental organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) equally favour this option as home-care services are less costly than institutionalized care (Wiles et al. 2012, 357). However, Graham Rowles (1993), a trailblazer in spatial gerontology, points out that “ageing in place” reasoning must neither overstate or romanticize familiarity with and emotional attachment to place, nor exaggerate negative effects of a change of residence for the elderly. Instead, it is necessary to “take into account all the pragmatic, intergenerational, income-related, situational and technical realities that go into residential decision-making” (Katz 2009, 465).

“Ageing in place”-debates in Western environmental gerontology often highlight the importance of home<sup>14</sup> for older people. I argue that a crucial component of “ageing in place” is the cultural aspect of ageing. The place where one feels “at home” does not only depend on the locality or one’s own house, but also on notions of the “right” way to age. Even though a growing number of seniors live alone in Indian cities—either in neighbourhoods or

13 According to census data, Delhi metropolitan area had a population of 16,787,941 people in 2011. <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/delhi.html>, accessed March 14, 2016.

14 The concept of “home” is controversial as the term is used both for an object (the house) and for an object-subject relationship (the relationship of house and resident) (Rapoport 1995, 29). Nevertheless, “home” is a useful tool to scrutinize the way older persons emotionally connect to space. Therefore I do not equate “home” with house, but rather ask how space can become home, meaning an emotionally significant place.

in senior living facilities—many still do not consider this an appropriate way of ageing. “Ageing in place”-debates are based on a Western value system, focussing on independence and autonomy in late adulthood and neglecting local ideas concerning ageing. Sarah Lamb shows in her research that in India it is regarded as appropriate to be dependent on family members in old age. This is an integral part of a familial intergenerational relationship which is based on notions of long-term reciprocity. As parents care for their children when they are little, children pay back part of the debt they owe their parents by caring for them when they grow old (Lamb 2013, 174). In a broader definition of the term, which I use here, “ageing in place” denotes living in a meaningful environment for older persons which must not necessarily mean one’s own house. There are multiple reasons for residential decision-making amongst upper middle-class older persons in Delhi. Intergenerational realities are important as well as the quest for securing one’s family’s class position. While for many, staying with their family is essential, others find new ways to *age in place* in the city, following a new middle-class lifestyle of greater independence. However, almost all informants of my study would agree that ageing within the family is the “ideal” form of ageing, and the majority of Delhi’s sixty and above population still live with or near their children.<sup>15</sup> The case studies I will draw on later in this chapter show that experiences of ageing are very heterogeneous and depend on the life history and the subjectivity of the person. “Ageing in place” is not only bound to locality, but rather to various factors like family support, mobility, perceived (in)securities, and notions of (in)dependence and lifestyle.

## Delhi—ageing in a “world-class” city

Sociologist Chris Phillipson calls for a “turn” towards an urban focus of gerontological research (Phillipson 2004, 2010). I follow his research agenda (1) by making the urban dimension explicit in my research, (2) by looking at the “impact of globalisation on definitions and perceptions of place,” and (3) by providing urban case studies that “can capture the experience of ageing within cities now subject to intense global change” (Phillipson 2004, 969f.).

Delhi’s population growth has been induced by a concentration of resources in the capital and has been determined by a massive flow of refugees (Ahuja 2006, 10). The city witnessed a dramatic increase in population

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15 According to a government survey, Delhi’s population above the age of sixty amounted to 5.5 percent in 2004, or just under 830,000 people. Of these, 79.5 percent lived with their children (either with or without their spouse), while 17.5 percent lived without their children, either with their spouse (14.4 percent) or alone (3.1 percent). The remainder lived with other relatives or acquaintances. Out of those living alone or with spouse, almost 40 percent lived in the same building as their children, and 28.5 percent lived within the same city (Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi 2006).

owing to the partition of British India into the sovereign states of Pakistan and India in 1947.<sup>16</sup> Thereafter the government developed various housing colonies to come to terms with the large numbers of migrants. Plots were allotted to refugees according to their class and caste status (Kaur 2007), and thus often people of the same region or ethnic community shared a neighbourhood (Nakatani 2015). Being the colonial and then post-Independence capital of India, Delhi became a city of bureaucrats and administrators. Delhi's conservatism added to the image of an "unloved city" whose inhabitants would not rave about its reputation but rather be indifferent to the city or would actively dislike it (Vidal et al. 2000, 16). Yet, recent civic initiatives evoke a new favourable image of Delhi mingling urban nostalgia with urban activism,<sup>17</sup> and since the early millennium the city itself has actively pursued a new branding as a "world-class city" (Brosius 2010; Ghertner 2011). With ongoing liberalisation, "Delhi is coming to occupy an increasingly large role in the economy of India [...]" (Vidal et al. 2000, 24). The older generation has witnessed these changes during their lifetime. The city has transformed into an urban fabric with a high level of air pollution and high traffic volume representing a challenging living environment for its citizens. Yet, many are proud to be part of an aspiring metropolis that is able to compete on a global level. When I asked Mr. Goswami, a man in his mid-seventies, in what way the city has "improved" or "gotten worse" over the last twenty years, he stressed that a growing city implicated deterioration but that urban development predominated:

Nothing has gone worse. It's an individual [perspective] ... like people say: 'Look, my health has deteriorated.' [The] question is: your health what you were at twenty-five, you cannot have the same health at the age of seventy. There is a natural decay. So when the city grows, some things do happen. Law and order situation, cleanliness, there's hardly any space, mushroom localities are coming up, illegal localities are coming up, because people cannot afford. People sleep on the roads, there's more begging. These are things, they have [come] ... but then development you see all around. Now at least we are at par with any world-class city. Of course we're the best in India, but it can be compared with any world class city. [...] Any facility you ask for, it is here. We feel ourselves in a fairy land, you see (December 20, 2013).

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16 Just after Partition, 470,000 Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab and Sindh sought refuge in Delhi, whereas 320,000 Muslims fled to Pakistan. While the census counted a city population of almost 700,000 inhabitants in 1941, the number of citizens had doubled to more than 1.4 million ten years later (Dupont 2000, 229).

17 See, for example, the initiative "Delhi—I love you" which, according to their website, is "an independent socio-cultural movement of love in the city. A heady mixture of history, environment, art, music, and social initiatives, the movement is aimed at celebrating the city through an extensive programming of collaborative projects." <http://www.delhiiloveyou.com/>, accessed March 14, 2016.



Mr. Goswami compared the city's growth to the ageing of a body, which, in his opinion, also included a "natural decay." In his narrative, the increase in population inevitably led to a decline in order and cleanliness, as well as to the development of illegal settlements. By assuming that this was the ordinary course of events, Mr. Goswami naturalized inequality. In his view, this condition needed to be accepted rather than complained about or changed. Instead, one should actually look at the developments that have placed Delhi "at par with any world-class city." Mr. Goswami's equation of Delhi with a "fairy land" is based on the notion that Delhi is rapidly moving forward and upward and can now keep up with other global metropolises. Many metaphors which express a vision of the country's successful rise to world status are created in the context of India's neoliberalization. In contrast to the years of a socialist economy, middle-class aspirations of a capitalist lifestyle are now regarded as something to be proud of (Brosius 2010, 11).

Property acquired by older persons has turned into a valuable asset. This can lead to conflicts within families, and there is a prevailing discourse that older people should not hand property down to their kin during their lifetime as their children would no longer feel inclined to care for them (Lamb 2009, 99). While media accounts of children taking away their parents' property are often highly dramatized, there is some truth in this narrative. According to a police inspector I interviewed, the main reasons for older people to call the senior citizen helpline are family related conflicts, including property (March 2, 2015). Property is therefore not only a means of accumulating affluence, but also a site where home and family are negotiated:

Property regimes and urban space lie at the heart of how various social groups construct new identities for themselves, while simultaneously creating and accumulating capital. In this lies the dual role of urban property: (a) as an engine of capital accumulation, and (b) as a site of housing, place-making and identity formation. Indeed, property regimes that promote private homeownership are today crucial to the development of group-based identities, a multiplicity of urban ways of living, and notions of what makes kin, neighbourhood and gender relations (De Neve and Donner 2015, 258).

Property is also a space where middle-class identities are created. New residential enclaves are mostly designed for a nuclear family setting, and even though the vast majority of people cannot afford to live in these high-rise condominiums, there is a growing aspiration to participate in this "world-class" lifestyle advertised through various media like billboards, magazines, and real estate booklets (Brosius 2013).

Apart from the lifestyle entailed, not only young people but also elderly couples shift to these new kinds of living facilities for reasons of convenience and security. In Delhi, there is an omnipresent discourse on safety. Urban fear does not solely stem from recent incidents of violence and

crime, like the brutal gang rape case in 2012, but also from certain historical turning points where socio-religious boundaries and mistrust were created.<sup>18</sup> Nowadays the fear of murder, crimes, and gendered violence often revolves around migrants<sup>19</sup> coming to the city, making it an unsafe place. Daily newspaper articles on rape and murder cases add to the perception that Delhi's public places are insecure, even though in global comparison, Delhi is by far not the most dangerous city.<sup>20</sup> When living alone, older people and their children are worried about safety. An article in *The Times of India* reported an approximately forty percent increase in murders of senior citizens. An included infographic, entitled "Elders in Danger," stated: "Delhi's elderly are unsafe even inside their own homes, often ending up as targets of gruesome crimes" (Mandal 2013). Thereafter a table informed the reader about the numbers of senior citizens having being killed in the last years, accounting for thirty-five murders in 2011 and forty-eight murders in 2012 (Mandal 2013). Compared to Delhi's elderly population of over 990,000 people at that time,<sup>21</sup> the actual probability of becoming a victim of crime was very low. Nevertheless, the evaluation of such statistical charts produces insecurities rather than reassurance (Woodward 1999, 198). The report also dramatised the risk by comparing absolute numbers and stating a forty percent rise in murder rate. Personalised cases of murders and crimes picture a frightening reality intensified by the assumption that the police do not have sufficient resources to guarantee safety. Such media reports fuel fears. In 2004, the Delhi Police established a Senior Citizen Cell with the objective of monitoring "all matters related to Safety & Security of [the] vulnerable category of Senior Citizens of Delhi."<sup>22</sup> According to police inspector Gaur from the Delhi Police Senior Citizen Cell, this insecurity is more a sentiment than a real threat. In his view, it is the physical weakness

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18 Two ruptures in the city's history are Partition and the anti-Sikh riots that took place in 1984. A series of pogroms against Sikhs in Delhi started after Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984. Similar to the Partition, this communal violence stirred up distrust amongst the city's citizens, creating socio-religious boundaries (Das 1998).

19 Even though Delhi has always been a migrant city, poorer newcomers are often stigmatised. "Despite Delhi's history as a city of migrants, where the overwhelming majority of the population consists of first or second-generation migrants, the fact of migration is selectively used to stigmatise certain social groups. While attempts by the bourgeoisie to construct a genealogy explaining its presence in Delhi are granted legitimacy, similar strategies are denied to the property-less. Perceiving the poor as migrants and as newly arrived interlopers on the urban scene is a strategy to disenfranchise them from civic citizenship" (Baviskar 2003, 96).

20 Delhi's murder rate (homicides per 100,000 people) in 2014 was half that of New York City, for example (Burdett et al. 2014).

21 According to the Census of 2011, 5.9 percent of Delhi's population was over the age of sixty, giving an approximate elderly population of 990,000 people, [http://censusindia.gov.in/vital\\_statistics/SRS\\_Report/9Chap%202%20-%20202011.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/vital_statistics/SRS_Report/9Chap%202%20-%20202011.pdf), accessed March 15, 2016.

22 Apart from monitoring registered senior citizens in neighbourhoods, the Senior Citizen Cell of Delhi Police provides a senior citizen helpline and gives advice and safety instructions on their website as well as at informative events: <http://www.delhipolice.nic.in/seniorcitizen/history.htm>, accessed March 15, 2016.

and especially loneliness rather than experiences of threat which make elderly people feel insecure (March 2, 2015).

By means of two case studies, I will now reflect on how “ageing in place,” property development, and perceptions of insecurity influence ageing of middle-class seniors in and around Delhi. I will start with the analysis of a neighbourhood, as this is still the predominant form of living for middle-class elderly in the city, before turning to a discussion of new forms of “senior living” which have started to sprawl in the suburbs of the metropolis.

## Ageing in a neighbourhood

### MIDDLE-CLASS ENCLAVES

Middle-class neighbourhoods like Safdarjung Enclave in the south of Delhi are precursors of newer urban developments marked by a uniformity of (upper) middle-class residents, a “modern” housing style, and the anxiety for compartmentalization.<sup>23</sup> Yet, there are also differences to these recently built residential enclaves, as Delhi’s neighbourhoods are often characterized by a sense of community that stems from the similar social background of their residents. Safdarjung Enclave was developed in the early 1970s by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA).<sup>24</sup> Even though it is not one of the rehabilitation colonies generated for refugees after Partition,<sup>25</sup> a substantial number of Punjabis live there. Mr. Goswami, for example, had come to Delhi with his parents during Partition, leaving behind their home in West Punjab like many other elderly in the city. His narration sounded like a rags-to-riches story. Although his parents came to the city with “nothing,” Mr. Goswami was allowed to study. His graduation enabled him to get a job in the medical sector where he progressed fast “by virtue of working very hard, honestly, sincerely,” as he told me. Mr. Goswami’s narration is part of what Ravinder Kaur calls the “master narrative” of Partition among Punjabis in Delhi, a collective memory of loss, and a successful self-rehabilitation created and perpetuated by public authorities, intellectuals, and affluent Punjabis (Kaur 2008, 286). It is important to note that even though the mass displacement was a collective experience, it did not overcome social distinctions as state support and compensation depended on class and caste status. Besides, segregating allotment strategies for different castes maintained strong class and caste boundaries within the city quarters and sent lower-caste and lower-class migrants off to housing colonies on the margins of the city (Kaur 2007, 2008). Thus, the success of upper-caste Punjabis in regaining affluence in Delhi and the opportunity

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23 For similar urban development in Kolkata see Donner (2015, 331).

24 The DDA was founded in 1957 as the “apex planning authority for the city” (Kacker 2005, 71).

25 [www.rgplan.org/delhi/Basic\\_Statistics\\_of\\_Delhi.pdf](http://www.rgplan.org/delhi/Basic_Statistics_of_Delhi.pdf), accessed March 15, 2016.

to buy property in this well-off neighbourhood owed not only to their hard work, but also decisively to privileges they enjoyed.

As the post-Partition government allotted plots according to ethnicity, caste, and class, Delhi's city quarters are often inhabited by people of similar social background. In Safdarjung Enclave, Punjabis numbered half of my informants (ten households) while the others came from surrounding north Indian states, namely Uttar Pradesh (five households), Haryana (two households), and Delhi (two households). Only one family was originally from south India. The neighbourhood is predominantly populated by Hindus and a minority of Sikhs.<sup>26</sup> Out of the twenty households I visited, three couples and eight single elderly shared their flat with their adult children, three couples lived with children or other relatives in the same house, and three couples and three singles had no family close by. The composition of residents in Safdarjung and other colonies of Delhi has been changing slowly as real estate has become very expensive and people sell their property to buy new residences elsewhere (see also Nakatani 2015, 173). Older people felt that bonds within their neighbourhood had weakened over the last decades, and that new generations were less family- but more self-centred, which had altered the solidarity in the neighbourhood. Some residents thought about moving elsewhere, feeling that the neighbourhood had become too crowded with people who shifted from less developed neighbourhoods to Safdarjung Enclave. Numerous single-storeyed houses had been redeveloped into multi-storeyed buildings, so more cars and people frequented the colony and fewer parking spaces were available. Upper middle-class people moved to more posh residences and the mix of residents has therefore changed. In a conversation two older women stated:

DESHNA KAUSHIK: *Nowadays, some people have moved away from here to places like Gurgaon, where there are private houses. And from other places like Chandni Chowk and East Delhi, which were crowded areas, these people have shifted to settle here in Safdarjung. [...] Those who had a house here, those people from here all shift to Gurgaon, Noida, and also Faridabad. But Gurgaon is a little better, college-wise, and the area is developed a little better.*

SUNDHYA PAHUJA: *So many malls.*

DESHNA KAUSHIK: *There are also malls.*

ANNIKA MAYER: *Which place do you like better, Safdarjung or Gurgaon?*

DESHNA KAUSHIK: *I used to like this place, but now we're also thinking we should move from here. [...]*

ANNIKA MAYER: *But if you move to Gurgaon or Faridabad, then you won't know your neighbours, no? Now, here, you know most of the ...*

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26 Communal violence in the history of Delhi has led to a clustering of people along religious lines (Dupont 2016, 230).

DESHNA KAUSHIK: *No, no. There has been a lot of change in this aspect as well. In former times, there was space around. This lane, when I was in A2 block, that time, there were only few DDA staff, since my husband was in DDA. So in our back lane, the housewives who lived there, they came, sat down, all asked 'How are you?', there was a lot of social gathering. Today, if a house is constructed, nobody knows who has made it. [...] Everybody is shifting. In this lane how many old neighbours are left? All is rented out (November 15, 2013).*

The neighbourhood can be conceptualized as “a specific type of urban locality where politics and power struggles are located and take place on a day-to-day basis [...]” (Donner and De Neve 2006, 9). However, as Ms. Kaushik’s comment shows, it cannot be seen as an isolated unit, but it is always related to other city spaces. My informants evaluated and reproduced middle-classness in the locality—for instance, by reconstructing their houses into fashionable multi-storeyed buildings, by forming middle-class peer groups in the nearby park, or by distancing themselves from other lower-class living. Hence, the reproduction of a middle-class lifestyle in older neighbourhoods is always competing with newer forms of housing like gated condominiums which promote a middle-class lifestyle from the outset.

For senior citizens, social upward mobility is connected to the neighbourhood. The vast majority of my informants in the neighbourhood had purchased their plots in the 1970s, when this area was still on the outskirts of the city. Due to the incredible expansion of the city, housing in this area is now in great demand and property prices have risen enormously, explained Mr. Goswami:

You see, when we came [to Delhi] the population was seven lakhs [700,000]. Now it’s one point five crores [15 million]. It’s twenty times. You see, this place, it was dead cheap. Rather people used to be scared to take this place. When I purchased this plot, I purchased this plot for 57,000 [INR]. You can say now 1,000 dollars. And now it costs 500,000 dollars. And that time there [were] no buyers. Now, you just ask and there are twenty buyers (December 20, 2013).

Real estate has indeed become a major factor in the accumulation of wealth in Indian metropolises. Housing in urban India has been commodified and “property has enhanced both monetary gains and social status for those individuals and communities benefiting from post-liberalization ownership regimes” (De Neve and Donner 2015, 255). As Mr. Goswami owned two other houses in much sought-after localities, his rental income was higher than his work income. Many other informants sublet one or more floors of their property and thus gained additional income.



Figure 1: Newly constructed building in Safdarjung Enclave, 2013, South Delhi.

As indicated, neighbourhoods have undergone visible changes during the last decades. Delhi's urban planning was heavily influenced by the garden city movement which envisaged a garden environment in the city (Khosla 2005, 13). The Master Plan of 1962 restricted the height of buildings,<sup>27</sup> making the city grow horizontally instead of vertically. Plots in middle-class neighbourhoods typically included a garden and a single- or two-storeyed house. Since the late 1990s, private builders have succeeded in convincing property owners in (upper) middle-class areas of Delhi to turn their low-rise residential houses into fancy multi-storeyed buildings (see Fig. 1).

Middle-class status demands a level of consumption that includes housing. To maintain a status among peers, people feel the need to "improve" their houses and make them look modern. As part of the many policies which aim at transforming Delhi into a world-class city, "private developers

27 The maximum height of a building is calculated from the floor area ratio (FAR) and the ground coverage. However, in some areas there is a restriction of maximum building height. (Interview with Arunava Dasgupta, head of the Department of Urban Design at the School of Planning and Architecture Delhi, February 12, 2015).

increasingly fight height restrictions in the city and promote upper-class residential enclaves [...]” (Bhan 2009, 140). During construction, the builder bears all the costs, including temporary housing for the owners. In return, he receives one or two floors to sell. Disregarding the compulsory height limit of three-and-a-half storeys, builders often illegally generate additional levels (A. Kumar 2000, 159). Elderly people I talked to had frequently faced problems with builders. In one case, a couple had a lot of trouble maintaining their new house as the building materials used were of poor quality. In another case, the builder cheated the couple by starting to tear down the house without having the necessary permission to build the new one. As the plot was next to a protected monument in Deer Park, the elderly house owner had to fight with municipal and legal bodies for more than two years until he was allowed to construct a new house on the same plot. His status as a retired army officer and the authority that comes along with it helped him solve his problem in the end.

As it became apparent during my research, people decided to rebuild their houses for different reasons. For some families, it was an opportunity to gain more space. Grown-up children would move into the flat above their parents’ apartment so that they were still close to them while securing more privacy for themselves. Sometimes the additional flats were sublet and therefore accounted for an important rental income for the elderly. In other cases, property issues were involved. Mr. Lal, a man in his early seventies, was thinking about having his single-storeyed house reconstructed for family reasons. Even though he had bought the property in the 1970s, it was registered in his parents’ name. When his parents died, the property was inherited by all eight siblings. Mr. Lal feared that if he died before his wife, his siblings would not let her stay in this house. For Mrs. Lal, like for many women in India, “the fact that her husband had been coparcener in a joint family home did not in any way guarantee access to legal share in the property” (Donner 2015, 326). Yet, Mr. Lal did not want to reconstruct his house as he was a passionate gardener and spent a lot of time in his yard. In older houses, the elderly normally lived on the ground floor and frequently maintained a garden. At present, new bylaws make it mandatory to provide parking space on the ground level and to construct the building on posts. Thereafter gardening, a frequent pastime of predominantly male elderly, is no longer possible. It also implies that the mobility of elderly facing health problems gets more restricted. Even though new buildings often have elevators, these are frequently out of order, so that the ability to walk the staircases determines the mobility of older inhabitants. This is of course also true for older houses without elevators. An eighty-seven-year-old man who lived in the neighbourhood had developed pain in his leg and therefore stopped going to the market or the temple on his own. He was restricted to the flat and the terrace of the house. Only occasionally would he ask his daughter-in-law, who took care of him, to take him along when she went shopping and help him climb the stairs.

## EMERGING PEER GROUPS

Almost all my informants thought that their children were very busy and tended to have less time than previous generations. Consequently, many of the elderly felt the need to search for additional activities outside their household. Going to nearby parks for a morning or evening walk was a very common activity. Most of my informants went to Deer Park, a spacious park south of the neighbourhood, which was easily accessible on foot. The gated neighbourhood around the park was to their advantage as the slower traffic enabled them to walk with more ease in the area. In Deer Park, numerous elderly got together in various groups. I conducted fieldwork among a senior citizens' yoga group which met daily at 7:30 am for yoga exercises, chatting, singing, and reciting poems, or telling jokes (see Fig. 2).

On Sundays, they would extend these social gatherings by organizing tea and snacks, and many more elderly who did not take part in the yoga exercises also joined in. The team members, whom they referred to as "family" (*parivār*), were highly enthusiastic about their social circle, like Mrs. Gupta:

Now they say that otherwise what happens once you become old that you say: 'Oh, now we have become old, life is over' and all, but once you go to this yoga class you see: now my life has started, now it's the beginning of my life. Because till now I was doing for my job, I was doing for my children, now I have got the breathing space I can live myself. Whatever the rest of my life is left, I can do those things which I never did today, I can do for the society, so we feel very happy (December 16, 2013).

The group was strongly middle-class-based, and people stressed that it was pleasant to be in the company of "like-minded" people who formed a useful network apart from their families. Mr. Ahuja explained:

The people are from different strata. Professionals are there, doctors are there, engineers are there, lawyers are there. So if you got any problem you can talk to them and they will give you advice (December 12, 2013).

Indeed the "yoga family" was a source of relationships that secured social cohesion amongst middle-class residents. For elderly women this was a favourable opportunity to leave the private sphere of their house. Anthropologist Henrike Donner observes that to protect their image of dutiful housewives, many middle-class elderly women in a central neighbourhood in Calcutta "withdraw from the public sphere" and "devote more time to food preparation and religious activities than the cultivation of relationships within the neighbourhood" (2008, 149f.). Elderly women in Safdarjung Enclave also spent most of their time on household duties, but





Figure 2: Senior citizens' yoga group in Deer Park, 2014, South Delhi.

they would nevertheless meet with their friends in the colony, go for outings or wedding celebrations, take part in religious recitations and song, or in other activities in the park. An elderly lady who had to look after her grandchild in the mornings eagerly looked forward to Sundays when she was able to join the yoga group and leave the house. Mrs. Agrawal recalled:

It feels fresh when one walks in the morning. It also feels good when you talk to someone. [...] We don't have any neighbour here even to talk to. It feels good to meet people. There [in the yoga group], we get to meet many people. Someone tells jokes, someone tells poems, someone dances. It's quite fun there (December 9, 2013).

Andrews et al. remind us that too often “there is a tendency to treat place simply as a context (clinical or living), rather than seeing it as productive of particular outcomes for older adults, as well as being shaped by them” (2007, 162). The yoga group was an elderscape<sup>28</sup> that allowed seniors to form a peer group. Yet, this social interaction depended largely on the mobility and the personality of the individual. While one man actively engaged with the neighbourhood, invited neighbours, attended the local club, and went for morning walks in a nearby park, another man mostly stayed at home, feeling that there was a lack of sociality in the neighbourhood. One lady,

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<sup>28</sup> Using a term coined by Stephen Katz (2009), I define elderscapes as the *cultural spaces and sites that have emerged for and by older persons*, including residential spaces, leisure spaces, and market spaces.

whose son had moved out of her house, wished she could move in with her son's family but felt that her daughter-in-law would not be pleased. For her the family environment rather than the neighbourhood was the decisive factor for where she wanted to age.

The heterogeneity of ageing experiences in this neighbourhood shows that "ageing in place" depends not only on the possibility to stay in one's own home, but on various factors like property developments, family, mobility, (perceived) security, personal contacts, and personal engagement.

## SURVEILLANCE AND SECURITY

With the increasing number of affluent colonies in Delhi, residents formed various neighbourhood or civil society organizations, most prominent being Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs). These local associations were founded to pursue the interests of private property owners in civic matters such as security and infrastructure to create social and recreational spaces, often in the form of exclusive clubs, and to lobby local bodies like the Municipal Corporation or government departments for their aims and objectives. Resident Welfare Associations are institutionalized bodies that regulate public life in middle-class neighbourhoods, providing a sense of security, shared values, and common interests, like clean streets and parks. Although these local associations represent highly different localities and pursue diverging, often contradictory, aims by various sections of the middle classes (Kamath and Vijayabaskar 2009), they nevertheless share a claim to middle-classness by articulating "a common set of issues that are seen to affect all 'middle-class' people" (Srivastava 2015, 86). Leading posts in the RWAs are generally occupied by elderly male residents. Mr. Kapoor, the then president of an RWA of his neighbourhood, stressed in an interview that apart from having more leisure time than younger people, it was the good relations seniors usually had with representatives of the government that made them perfectly suited for the job:

Senior citizens manage to have good relation repo[sitory] with the elected representatives of the government: municipal corporation, member of the legislative assembly—they have lot of funds to develop your colony. So [the residents] want a senior citizen who can keep liaison, good relations with [the representatives to] get something for the colony. That's why you have a senior citizen generally who is the president of a colony (November 28, 2013).

Mr. Kapoor, like many other presidents of RWAs, was a retired officer of the Indian army. Sanjay Srivastava thinks that RWAs may tend to fill their posts with members of the armed forces in order to "attach the aura of military discipline to that of the modern housing locality" (2015, 89). In my view, the appointment of military retirees is rather owed to the due respect paid to

elderly army officers, both by peers and by younger generations.<sup>29</sup> Their status is regarded as beneficial for their capacity to lobby for the colony's interests. The voluntary engagement of Mr. Kapoor as well as of other male senior citizens working for RWAs not only shows the desire of older men to keep a position of power, but also shows their active involvement in securing and expanding middle-class interests. Although middle-class activism is not a contemporary phenomenon,<sup>30</sup> it changed from a leftist commitment to uplift the poorer sections of society to a protection of self-interests making claims against the state which is in general seen as favouring the poor (Srivastava 2015, 88–89). Resident Welfare Associations actively secure demarcated middle-class spaces and lobby with government officials to develop their residential areas, for instance by tarring roads or reconstructing local markets. Since the mid-to-late 1980s, RWAs have installed and maintained gates at points of entry to their colonies, not only reducing traffic but also monitoring the access of people to the residential area. According to Sanjay Srivastava, RWAs “became the key vehicles for articulating an exclusionary urban politics of space” (2015, 113). These new modes of urban activism are a defining feature of the new middle classes in India,<sup>31</sup> and senior citizens often actively commit to civil society organizations, which aim at gentrifying and “cleaning up” cities, enhancing a greater political inequality in India's cities (Harriss 2006, 2007).

Urban segregation processes are usually embedded in a discourse of unsafety or threat from lower classes. For those of my informants living alone or staying alone during the day, security was of concern, even though most people felt that the neighbourhood was relatively safe. In May 2015, there was a burglary in the flat of Mr. and Mrs. Lal. When the couple came home, they found their closet broken open and valuables like cash and jewellery stolen. It was the first time this had happened to the elderly couple, but according to Mr. Lal, burglaries were not uncommon in the area. He was upset that the police were neither able to safeguard the area nor to restore his financial loss. Nevertheless, he stressed that the robbers could not “snatch away his happiness” and in fact, the incident did not seem to make him feel insecure. However, the writer of an article in a neighbourhood online forum used the incident to promote the intensification of safety measures in the neighbourhood like police patrolling and CCTV surveillance.

The entire area is under shock, especially the senior citizens who live by themselves. Their security is greatly at risk. [...]

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29 In my presence, military retirees were often praised for their disciplined way of life as well as their service to the nation.

30 During colonial and post-colonial times, movements fighting for freedom or various social reforms were “important sites of public activity by the ‘educated classes’” (Srivastava 2015, 88).

31 Nevertheless, this new kind of urban governance is not restricted to India but promoted globally, often supported by funding from international institutions like the World Bank (Upadhyaya 2009, 265).

This particular block is a safe target of robbers as the location is highly vulnerable with many open points of escape. Street lights and day and night police patrolling is the need of the hour. Police needs to draw exhaustive plan to secure the area as our seniors are soft targets. Their confidence into police needs to be restored at the earliest. The RWAS also need to be more vigilant and more CCTV Cameras need to be installed at strategic locations.

We all need to be very vigilant and each of us should take care of the seniors living in our area. Any suspicious activity should be immediately reported to the police. Such incidents shake our faith in the system. Now the police and senior citizen forum needs to come into action to instill a sense of security among seniors of the colony.

Encroachment on Govt land is also on the increase and there is no check by police. Police cooperation is absent even when they are intimidated by residents about the encroachment in their area. Many phone calls made for encroachment near B-[block] have gone on deaf ears (Tiwari 2014).

The article reproduces middle-class anxieties around the loss of state control over infrastructure, crime, and unruly people (Baviskar 2003, 96). According to the author, the failure of the state to provide security makes it necessary for RWAs and citizens to take action and to self-monitor the neighbourhood. Like many other middle- and upper-class colonies of Delhi, Safdarjung Enclave was semi-gated. Barriers were deployed at the entrances of the colony (see Fig. 3). Some of them were guarded by watchmen and closed during the night, but others were permanently open because the RWA of this sector did not raise enough money to employ security guards. These are the "open points of escape" the article refers to. Besides the heightened vigilance of residents, the author promotes a strengthening of day and night police patrol to restore a "sense of security among seniors of the colony." In the writer's view, lower-class people, who encroach upon the area, are to be blamed for the increase in insecurity. These people are seen to make the area unsafe. Indian publisher and writer Urvashi Butalia reports that in the locality where she lived, tea stalls and street stalls which addressed a poor working class clientele had been removed from public space,

in order to make, as the welfare association claims, 'the colony safer for our residents, particularly our elders, our women and children.' The assumption is that the mere presence of working class people, no matter that these same people work in the houses of the wealthy, somehow renders a public space 'unsafe,' perhaps because here is where they may loiter, and therefore get up to no good (Butalia 2012, 3).

Middle-class life depends significantly on domestic workers who manage different tasks like cooking, cleaning, gardening, and driving. In former



Figure 3: Entrance gate to B4 block, Safdarjung Enclave, 2013, South Delhi.

times, “servants”<sup>32</sup> used to be employed for a longer period of time and often patron-client relationships evolved. Now elderly people in the neighbourhood complain that servants have become very unreliable and are making too many demands. There is a lot of anxiety concerning lower-class workers in middle-class residential spaces who are hired to provide security (Webb 2013, 4). One elderly woman, who lived with her husband in a recently rebuilt house, worried about hiring a “trust-worthy” security guard. She wanted to get “professional guards,” one at night and one during the day, who, in her opinion, were more reliable albeit more expensive than the guard they employed at the time. This is one of the reasons why the private security industry has boomed in recent years. It did not only benefit from state policies outsourcing security measures to private-public partnerships, but also from the middle-class perception of urban fear which led to a “deployment of private security guards at all manner of public and private sites [...]” (Gooptu 2013, 16). As Sanjay Srivastava rightly observes, the gating of Delhi’s colonies indicates several middle-class anxieties, namely “the lack of confidence in the police to provide security, the strong sense of a ‘middle class’ under threat from urban under-classes, and the overwhelming perception that such threats can only be countered through localized and locality specific means that convert public thoroughfares into private and highly regulated spaces” (2015, 114).

32 The word servant is commonly used in India. I only use the term when referring to my informants’ opinion.

Serving the middle-class longing for security, the Delhi Police Senior Citizen Cell started an initiative to address people over the age of sixty living alone or remaining alone during daytime. These persons are now able to register with the police. Police officers will then periodically conduct visits or call registered elderly to check on their status. When I asked police inspector Gaur what advice they would give senior citizens on how to secure their private space in middle-class neighbourhoods, he suggested a mix of security measures:

First [...] we advise them to get their domestic help[er]s—whether it is washerman, gardener, whatever service he is providing—we ask them to get him or her verified. Main thing is, get your servants and helps advised... no, verified and if you have some tenants also get them verified. Second thing, we check their premises. And advise them to get it secured. If they don't have grills on walls or windows and so you should put grills on your walls, on the windows, you keep a magic eye on your door, safety chain. And if you can afford then install a CCTV camera. So these are the things (March 2, 2015).

The middle-class perception that lower classes are potentially threatening and therefore need to be monitored is fortified by police advice to verify domestic workers. The verification and the installation of grills or CCTV cameras are ways to draw clear boundaries between assumed upright middle-class residents and untrustworthy lower-class people. Distinction is at the core of class formation and the shielding is a way to normalize dominance and inequality. The proclaimed menace deriving from the urban poor reproduces class lines in which lower classes “intrinsically” threaten middle classes. One elderly couple I visited had indeed followed this suggestion and installed a grill in front of their door to keep back potential intruders. Yet, aside from this couple, elderly people living alone were in general less anxious about their security, but more concerned about the lack of support in case of medical emergency.

## Gateways of ageing

Like other Indian metropolises, Delhi has undergone vast transformations in the last decades. Since the early 2000s, public funds have shifted from “education, public housing, health care, and food subsidies towards large, highly visible, and ‘modern’ infrastructure developments” and prestige projects like the Delhi Metro Rail or the Commonwealth Game Village (Ghertner 2011, 280). Part of this modern urbanism are gated residential enclaves that have been developed extensively in the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi<sup>33</sup> in the last two decades (see, for example,

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33 The National Capital Region (NCR) encompasses New Delhi but also adjacent areas in the neighbouring states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan:

Searle 2013). Real estate developers have transformed vast agricultural areas into residential enclaves. Even though these “fortification” or “gating” practices can be observed worldwide, they take specific local, social, and spatial forms (Nelson 2011, 214). In Delhi, the gating of housing is not a new phenomenon, but rather an expansion of the “logic of separation” that has motivated gating practices of neighbourhoods in the city since the 1980s (Srivastava 2015, 114).

Condominium living is mainly associated with younger generations. Nevertheless, a growing number of older people reside in these kinds of facilities, either with their families or alone. Older persons living in The Nile, a condominium in Gurgaon, a booming satellite city thirty kilometres south-west of Delhi, stressed that the two main differences between living in a neighbourhood in Delhi and living in a gated enclave in Gurgaon were safety and the composition of residents. Mr. Sharma reported:

We have seen change happening in the last thirty, forty years, whatever changes have taken place. We witnessed all those changes. So, urbanization has happened, this kind of living [has come up]. One thing that most of us have is that we are living independently; most of the children have gone away. So we are looking at security. And this is a place where one could find some kind of security; at least the physical security is there. That is one. The second is of course, you come across different kinds of people; you come across people with different experiences. [...] Probably in another place you could not have this kind of a great mix of people of all kinds (November 21, 2014).

As already noted, colonies in Delhi have often been community-based due to the government’s allotment policy, even if this is slowly changing. In contrast, condominium living is rarely attributed to ethnicity in the first place. It is class, not ethnic affiliation, that makes residents part of this “world-class” lifestyle.

Different stakeholders see great economic potential in senior living projects in India. Ashiana, an eminent real estate developer, was the first to develop housing exclusively for older persons in Delhi NCR. Up to 2016, they have pursued six housing projects for senior citizens in the vicinity of major metropolises of India (Delhi, Pune, Chennai, and Kolkata). Om Gupta, the founder of Ashiana, came up with the idea to build senior living residences as he had come across this residential form during his years of study in the US. In the 1990s, he developed the idea to invest in retirement communities in India as part of his real estate endeavour. Initially,

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<http://ncrpb.nic.in/ncrconstituent.php>, accessed on March 15, 2016. It is one of the world’s largest urban agglomerations with a population of over 46 million people: [http://ncrpb.nic.in/pdf\\_files/Annual%20Report%202014-15.pdf](http://ncrpb.nic.in/pdf_files/Annual%20Report%202014-15.pdf), accessed March 15, 2016.

the company did intensive research on retirement communities in the US, Canada, and Europe. In 2007, the first project was constructed in Bhiwadi, an industrial hub around seventy kilometres outside Delhi (see Fig. 4).

The management of The Golden Estate (Fig. 5), a senior living project in the NCR region, also studied senior living schemes in the US, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. These projects are thus highly informed by Western concepts of eldercare. Yet, Amit Vaidya, management leader of The Golden Estate, stressed that he had realized they had to come up with their “own” model, as there were significant cultural differences between India and the West. For him, it was important to add a “human angle” to the concept which, in Western countries, was “too process-driven” and “too professional.” He contrasted a Western model of a rigid personal space with a more inclusive Indian model of common space that allowed for social interactions. In his opinion the Indian intrusive “nature” was helpful because people enquire about other people’s worries. He claimed that Indian people were more willing to share their problems and therefore had less need of consulting a coach or psychiatrist than Westerners. Amit Vaidya compared the spatial design of the compound with the spatial design of large family houses. As the joint family is an icon of the ideal form of aged care in India, it is not surprising that stakeholders in senior living projects try to establish a link between familiar living concepts and these new spaces. He explained:

AMIT VAIDYA: *The way we have structured ourselves is borrowing from what we already had—that was a joint family system. So we used to have huge houses, shared by a very large family where your bedroom was your personal space and the rest is shared with everyone. So we have tried to structure ourselves like that.*

ANNIKA MAYER: *In what way, can you give an example?*

AMIT VAIDYA: *See, the way we have structured the whole facility is like that. So in terms of, like a simple thing like we made it compulsory to eat food in the dining area, so you can’t cook in your room. So by design we have ensured that all of them come and interact with each other, no one is left isolated, even if a person wants to—or is going into that path of being withdrawn and into himself which happens to a lot of single people who stay with us—the other person tends to detect it (December 5, 2014).*

According to Mr. Vaidya, the design of their premises prevents isolation, as no one can evade common interaction during meals. It is interesting that the institution objects to the withdrawal of residents although, according to the Hindu model of life stages,<sup>34</sup> it is part of the ageing process

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34 “According to the Hindu ethical-legal Dharmaśāstra texts, as a person enters old age, he will move to the forest as a hermit, either with or without his wife,





Figure 4: Ashiana Utsav senior living compound, 2014, Bhiwadi, Rajasthan.



Figure 5: The Golden Estate compound, 2014, Faridabad.

to renounce one's social ties at old age. The renunciation model has—in contrast to the old-age homes Sarah Lamb researched in Kolkata (Lamb 2009, 161–180)—not become part of the mission of these new senior living projects. The image they are promoting is highly influenced by global discourses on *active ageing*, as I will explore later in more detail.

While The Golden Estate offers furnished units and provides all other services like cooking, cleaning, washing, monitoring of medicines, etc. in-house, Ashiana sells fully-equipped apartment units so that people can decide whether they want to cook and spend time “at home” or rather engage with others in the activity centre or the parkway.<sup>35</sup> Ankur Gupta, joint managing director of Ashiana, emphasized that they especially catered to the “sense of security” of older persons in their senior living projects:

We followed the financial model which we thought would be best in India, the sales-model. We sold our senior living unlike the US and Australia where it's a deposit model. We thought there's this sense of ownership and safety [which] is still you know ... We are very insecure about ourselves, right? And there is no other financial security in the country which is available to us, so the security we grab on is real estate. So when you are a senior citizen and you don't have security, sense of security, you grab on real estate (November 19, 2014).

The sense of insecurity Ankur Gupta refers to is not only corporal, catered to by the gatedness of the estates, but also mental and financial. As ageing outside the family is still a new phenomenon in India, it is connected to insecurities about care arrangements. Residents stressed that they felt safe living in these senior living enclaves, referring not only to physical safety but also to security concerning health care. As children often work during the day or live abroad, they are no longer reliable care providers in case of emergency. Mr. Chadha, a resident in The Golden Estate, hoped that the considerable amount of money he paid would make the institution care for him, at best like a family member. In his view,

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in a process of relinquishing material desires. The life phase of a forest-dweller, or *vānaprastha*, is the third of four life stages—of studenthood (*brahmacharya*), householder (*gṛhastha*), forestdweller (*vānaprastha*), and finally renouncer (*sannyāsa*). In this third life phase, which works as a transition between material and spiritual life, the person is in a retreat from worldly life or *saṃsār*, living with as few material possessions and family ties as possible, as he prepares for the fourth and final life stage of *sannyāsa*—complete renunciation of the world, with a focus solely on God, spiritual realization, and release” (Lamb 2009, 161).

35 Ashiana Utsav Bhiwadi comprises 640 flats, one cafeteria, one activity centre, one (Hindu) temple, and one nursing home which was opened only two years ago. For a two- to three-BHK (Bedroom, Hall, Kitchen) apartment, buyers would have to spend ₹25–45 lakh (ca. €30–60,000). The Golden Estate consists of seventy-five bedroom units, an outside pavilion, a recreational area, and a medical unit. A one-bedroom unit would require a ₹27 lakh deposit (ca. €35,000) and a monthly rent of ₹35,000 (ca. €465).



Figure 6: CCTV at The Golden Estate, 2014, Faridabad.

in advanced age problems are going to come, health problems. Then as we see over here, there is an *organization* to look after [you]. Their job is to look after us. They have a vehicle. They take you to the hospital. They have a doctor, who may not be there to treat you, but he will monitor your treatment in the hospital. [...] Your child, your son or your daughter-in-law may not have that much of time to look after you. So we are hoping ... we are hoping that this organization will be responsible enough to treat us like their own family member. [...] Now for an example, people who have their children staying abroad, if the parents fall sick in a place like this, they will be first all reasonable sure that [their] parents have been looked after by an organization. There is no need for panic for them over there. And even if they come, they can't stay over here for long. They will speak to the director, they will speak to the medical officer and they will say that 'I see, now we have to go and look after business' and they will leave. So they go back reassured that their elders are not left to fate (December 5, 2014).

Mr. Chadha, like many other informants, stressed that security not only made them feel safe, but also eased their children's mind who, being abroad, were no longer physically able to provide support in case of emergency but who nevertheless cared for their parents' safety. To cater to the feeling of safety, The Golden Estate provides emergency alarms within the units. Furthermore, the common areas of the premises are monitored by CCTV (Fig. 6), and the single-entry gate is constantly monitored. The

supervision and the disciplinary measures to integrate residents remind us of Foucault's panopticism (1977) in which human populations are systematically and spatially controlled through invisible structures as much as they internalize the control.

Apart from safety issues, proximity to the city mattered to many residents. According to Ankur Gupta from Ashiana, most of the flats in their senior living projects in Bhiwadi were bought by elderly couples from Delhi. Apartments could be purchased by people of all ages, but residents had to be over the age of fifty-five. Some people kept their flat in the city and commuted between the two localities. In the last years, other senior living residences which are even closer to the city followed, catering to financially well-off elderly. Amit Vaidya of The Golden Estate stressed that they had consciously chosen the locality of Faridabad as their own research revealed that elderly people wanted to stay in the city. He elucidated:

Doing our research, we found that most of the people—unlike what was thought of—actually didn't want to be out of the urban fabric. Their entire lives they had lived in cities, so I found that it was a myth that people want to go and be in a resort kind of a situation. So then we decided, ok if people want to be within urban fabric then we need to build within the urban fabric. But the land prices in Delhi area is very high, in the entire NCR for that matter. So in any project the land becomes one of the major components of costs and as we were doing something which was very new as a concept, especially in Delhi, so we thought ok let's keep our costs down and try and find land which is within the urban fabric. Plus we had some other criteria, like we wanted to be located within thirty minutes driving distance of a hospital; we wanted the infrastructure to be easily accessible, like banks, parks, theatres. So this, where we are sitting today, is like the heart of Faridabad, everything is accessible within ten, fifteen minutes of driving distance, and plus it is very peaceful. So, in spite of being in the heart, it has got its peace and quiet also (December 5, 2014).

The "vision of safety and peaceful seclusion" Amit Vaidya refers to is a prevalent narrative of urban Indian lifestyle advertisements for residential enclaves (Brosius 2010, 94). Senior living developers not only rely on these imaginaries of "world-class" living, but also on successful or active ageing discourses that have "taken hold in global public policy and popular cultural worlds as well" (Lamb 2014, 44). Ashiana brochures advertise a new "freedom" to enjoy life on one's own terms, following an "enviable lifestyle" in a "hassle-free" environment, pursuing new hobbies or discovering "a new passion." (Ashiana, n.d., 7, 14, 16) A banner along the highway from Delhi to Bhiwadi advertises an "active life after retirement," depicting two senior men playing football (Fig. 7).

Successful ageing discourses in the US have a strong focus on being able to keep control, on being independent, and on being productive while



Figure 7: Ashiana advertising billboard on the highway between Delhi and Bhiwadi, 2014.

ageing. Furthermore, they create a vision of not ageing at all (see Lamb 2014). Senior living advertisements in India make use of these images, but they do not negate ageing per se. An Ashiana brochure states:

Since time immemorial, people have been searching for the elusive “Fountain of Youth.” This desire has motivated millions to search for solutions that can reverse the effects of aging. But the pursuit for such “magic potion” has not been very fruitful.

At Ashiana Senior Living, we might not prevent aging, but we have definitely helped in transforming the way you age. By offering a lifestyle that is active, healthy, carefree, dignified and independent, we have mitigated the impact of aging. We constantly facilitate our residents in finding ways to be more productive and more creative, by adding more opportunities to their lives (Ashiana 2014, 3).

Even though these real estate companies have tried to advertise their facilities with a desirable middle-class lifestyle, both Ankur Gupta and Amit Vaidya admitted that it was a major struggle to “break the mind-set” of people in India as there were still many reservations about or resentment against moving into such a facility. Mr. Gupta explained:

We tried doing PR-work with videos and online activities and advertising and all of that. [...] So if you look at these brochures, the idea is that, you know, you think of destitutes—[but] we look at them as the people who’ll have fun, who’ll add a lot of value. So you know

we are converting it [the notion of living in a facility for the elderly] completely. The actual product will be closer to the active but it'll not be that bright, right? But by giving a lot of visual impact we are trying to just break the mind-set that there is life after a time and which is a high value. Why waste it? (November 19, 2014).

Ankur Gupta suggested that people needed to visualize the difference between old-age homes for the destitute and their retirement homes where people could experience an active lifestyle at old age. At the same time, he admitted that "the actual product," and I assume he was thinking of their senior living projects, would not be as bright as the advertisement projected. But by using positive images, the company intended to break the mind-set, so that people could see the potential of these new elderscapes.

The JLL report on the senior living sector in India lists four key challenges for investors in this sector. Apart from affordability, manpower, and the legal framework, stigma is the major challenge. They recommend advertising the provision of services rather than of real estate to "change the perception of such projects and shift the positioning from social stigma to an 'aspirational project' to be in" (M. Kumar and Gattani 2015, 7). One resident told me that although he felt comfortable living in the posh institution equipped with a spa, a cinema hall, a fitness centre, and other amenities, visitors pitied him and could not understand his decision to live there. Despite the negative image that senior living facilities were confronted with, residents often stressed that they felt comfortable in this new living environment. They especially valued the "companionship" of peers whose different backgrounds added new perspectives to their lives. Women in The Golden Estate appreciated the fact that they were freed from doing household work since cooking, cleaning, etc. were taken over by the institution. Women in Ashiana would regularly organize kitty parties, a common activity of middle-class women in Delhi (see Waldrop 2011), and enjoy each other's company. But when standing apart from other residents, one woman told me that in truth this was not a home for her. She said: "To tell you the truth, this is not home, I mean what is there? It is peaceful, there's a lot of greenery and the people are nice but otherwise there's nothing. No market, no shopping, nothing is there." To her, the place was like an isolated island that lacked urban life. She therefore often commuted to the city where she and her husband still owned a house.

## Conclusion

Like any other city, Delhi is unique in its history and marked by particularities. Being the capital of India, Delhi is a city of bureaucrats with a particular history of migrant flows and spatial expansion. It is also a "world city" in the sense that it is "affected by the structural realignments of capitalist economies across the world" (Huysen 2008, 11). In its urban imaginary,

the city is marked both by fear and by striving to rank as a “world-class city,” as an “eventful, safe, clean and ordered” place (Brosius 2010, 42). To explore the entanglements of urban space and ageing, this chapter was designed around the ways spatial practices, urban imaginaries, and current developments in the National Capital Region of Delhi inform ageing in the metropolis.

Building my analysis on theories of environmental gerontology, which emphasize the role of place for older persons, my study ventured into new directions, looking not only at spatial practices of my informants, but also at larger urban transformations and urban imaginaries that inform ageing in the city. Most of my informants were attached to place and wanted to stay in Delhi, despite the city’s drawbacks for older persons (like its perceived insecurity or the difficulties in commuting within the city). “Ageing in place” debates in Western environmental gerontology often highlight the importance of “home” for older people. My fieldwork underlines that this assumption has to be reconsidered carefully. Urban middle-class Indians take into account a number of factors that determine their choice of residence. Residential decision-making not only depends on the locality, but also on family support, mobility, and perceived (in)securities, and is connected to cultural notions of the “right” way to age. The case studies illustrate that urban spaces of “world-class” living are embedded in local and cultural contexts and marked by uncertainties and ambivalences. The new elderscapes of retirement communities are advertised through notions of “active ageing” and “global living,” which are informed by Western concepts of market-based eldercare. They aim at appealing to middle-class aspirations for a cosmopolitan lifestyle, status, and safety. However—in contrast to other new middle-class spaces like gated communities—they struggle to attract customers because they are not able to overcome strong negative connotations that accompany ageing outside the family. In daily discourses, these projects are not associated with a cosmopolitan idea of an “active ageing” community, but rather with the neglect of children to care for their parents. Marketers see great potential in the senior living sector in India because the number of affluent elderly living without children is on the rise, but it still remains to be studied how the imaginaries of an active lifestyle at old age, but also the discourse on urban insecurity, translate into aspirations and spatial practices of middle-class elderly. To date, these projects do not have the same appeal as other neoliberal living complexes, which are an alternative option for senior citizens who seek retreat from the buzzing city.

Furthermore, the case studies reveal that negotiations about space not only take place in these insular neoliberal spaces. Established middle-class spaces like neighbourhoods have a longer history of spatial and social segregation, but they are likewise affected by an urban restructuring which changes not only the texture of housing, but also the social composition of residents. Place-making strategies of elderly in these localities are equally marked by aspirations to belong to “world class,” an altered understanding

of leisure activities in common spaces (for instance in parks), and a longing for “cleanliness” and orderly spaces.

My analysis shows that changing urban spaces not only shape the lives of my informants in manifold ways, but also that the elders themselves very much influence the changing processes. This engagement has its limits when people are not or are no longer able or willing to play a part in their social and spatial environment. Still, as Sarah Lamb suggests, it is necessary to consider older persons as “potential agents in the workings of social-cultural transformation” (Lamb 2010, 85). Middle-class elderly actively create elderscapes, for instance in forming groups in neighbouring parks, thereby claiming their “right to the city.” Elderscapes, like new senior living compounds, old-age homes, or meeting points of older persons, are spaces where negotiations around class and belonging crystallize.

Environmental gerontological studies have often drawn attention to the marginalisation of elderly people in urban settings who cannot afford to take part in cultural or recreational activities. Societal exclusion of older persons is expected to rise under the influence of globalisation (Wahl and Oswald 2010, 119). However, my fieldwork has shown that older people are not only subject to social demarcation processes but actively take part in them by distancing themselves from lower classes and by creating exclusive middle-class spaces. Hence, it is essential to keep in mind that the reproduction of class status is necessary at all ages and that segregation not only takes place between generations but also among them.

On these grounds, I suggest a more comprehensive reading of the entanglements of ageing and the city, taking into account the multiple interrelationships between class, space, events, institutions, and community which characterize much of modern life.

## Figures

Fig. 1–7: © Annika Mayer.



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## Abbreviations

BHK	Bedroom, Hall, Kitchen
DDA	Delhi Development Authority
JLL	Jones Lang LaSalle (International Real Estate Consultant Company)
NCR	National Capital Region of Delhi
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RWA	Resident Welfare Association
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization