

# ***Towards an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for the study of residential mobility at older ages***

Celia Fernández-Carro<sup>1</sup>  
[cfernandez@ced.uab.es](mailto:cfernandez@ced.uab.es)

## **Abstract**

*The large increase of ageing population has directed demography and population research towards the understanding of different aspects of old age dynamics. Within this context, residential mobility has been one of the emerging topics due to the impact that living strategies and housing needs at older ages may have on later-life well-being. The main objective of this work is to bring together the most important theoretical contributions that explain residential mobility using a longitudinal view; especially those focused on older life transitions. On one hand, at micro level, those focused on explaining the changes in different life course's domains (family, work and health), also in how they may induce a housing transition for an elderly person, determining the last stage of their housing career. On the other hand, the macro level explains the effect of the structural restrictions to the older mobility; housing market dynamics, public policies or social and cultural factors. Due to the importance that elderly collectives will represent in the near future, this is an essential issue not only for demographers and other social scientists, but also for policy makers interested in understanding the longitudinal dimension of elderly mobility patterns. In addition, possible future lines of research in this field will be highlighted.*

**Key words:** Life course, old age, theory, residential career, households.

---

<sup>1</sup> Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona / Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics (Spain)

## **Introduction**

The onset of “baby-boom” cohorts to older ages in coming decades has encouraged research related to diverse aspects of ageing process, including that which focuses on life course transitions (Arber, 1993, Setterstend, 2003). The ageing process implies numerous transitions in an individual’s life. Despite the fact that it sometimes can be perceived as a stable stage, old age entails changes in essential life domains like family, work or health (Grundy, 1991). Residential mobility is one dynamic that is triggered by changes in these domains. In the particular case of older people, retirement, widowhood, children’s emancipation or changes in health status, are some of the events that push them to adapt their housing careers to later-life circumstances. Various social sciences, including demography, have contributed to develop theories and methodologies to research human behaviour through the time, one of which is the Life Course Approach.

Even though the static general trend, many older Europeans change their residential location after 65. Hence, some questions arise; what are the differences between those who move and those who do not? What is the difference between voluntary (private homes) and involuntary (collectives’ homes) mobility? In addition, the increase of longevity and the economic and health status improvement imply that these residential patters might be modified. Therefore, can we expect new mobility patterns of elderly Europeans? Will a longer and more resources old age mean a more mobile stage than in the past?

The Life Course Approach can be an excellent theoretical framework as a basis for answer to such questions, although others could appear. Taking into account that elderly are in the last stage of their life, most of their biographies can be reconstructed and events which trigger changes in their residential careers identified. Therefore, before analysing these suggested questions in detail, it will be necessary to review all theoretical approaches that have been developed until now. Thus, this study aims to serve as a helpful summary for all those that desire to research the life trajectories at older ages from a life course perspective.

### **1. Why study the residential mobility at older ages?**

#### **The meaning of housing at older ages**

The meaning of housing is not the same throughout the life course. Each life stage involves a specific housing demand and implies differences on living condition’s needs. In the particular case of old age, the relevance of residential context is higher than in other life stages such as during early adulthood. The reason for that is, firstly, because the elderly stay at home more time

compared with the rest of the population (Butler, 1986). Due to the decline of physical functions or the change in their daily routines after retirement, at old age the individuals tend to reduce their social networks to the domestic sphere. Secondly, the importance of housing at older ages lies in the emotional attachment that older people feel about their homes. This emotional attachment arises from the fact that in the domestic sphere takes place the most relevant life events, above all in the familiar dimension as birth of the children and childbearing (Clapham, 2005). An example of the strong feelings that attach the elderly with their private homes is their wish to pass away in their own dwelling instead of a medical centre or institution (Gurney and Means, 1997). Also in a psychological sense, the home in old age symbolises the independence and the autonomy that determine the well-being of older people. In this sense, the preference of the vast majority of elderly is to remain in their own private dwelling until some disability or chronic disease forces them to move in a non-private or supported accommodation (Costa-Font, 2009). Furthermore, the “ageing in place” is the widely extended residential way of ageing in western societies. At this point, the role of welfare systems that promote this kind of residential ageing should be highlighted as most western governments have developed public measures to support elders in their own homes. The progressive increase in old and older-old populations has been also accompanied by an increase of the likelihood of living in a nursing home during the last stages of old age. Despite of this, the majority of older people live in an ordinary dwelling.

### **Changing behaviour and trends associated with old age**

The changes of elderly characteristics have not only taken place in a structural sense, but also in a qualitative way (Harper, 2006). According to Arber and Evandrou (1997), one of the most important features of the current older population is the time that elderly live independently. According with them, it have been the improvements in four life spheres which have contributed to transform the living context at older ages; economical, residential, physical and mental health, and social or emotional. Thus, the life span extension and the resources availability during old age have triggered transformations on the behaviors that have traditionally been associated with the elderly. These transformations have renewed the way that the old age is conceived and lived.

### **Residential careers as neglected topic in ageing research**

The use of longitudinal and biographical approaches to research elderly dynamics have arisen from changes that have occurred in older population dynamics and the emergence of proficient database management systems and accompanying statistical techniques. However, the different

life trajectories have received different degrees of attention from social scientists. The work and, above all, the family domain have captured more attention than residential biographies in the study of old age dynamics (Rindfuss et al., 1987). The main reasons have been the lack of available data referring to elderly housing contexts and, above all, the apparent low mobility of elderly. In consequence, studies on the residential paths in later life configuration have been rather scant. Nevertheless, the recent evidence of an increase in residential mobility at older ages as mentioned earlier have provoked new ways to interpret the old age living context, highlighting the importance that older population residential dynamics have for themselves and the rest of the population. Thus, the biographical and longitudinal approach has appeared as an excellent framework to study how the residential paths at older ages are configured.

Furthermore, demographic research carried out from the Life Course perspective and which analysed residential mobility focused on a specific life stage, namely the youth. The timing of fertility or marriage influence choices in relocation, the process of leaving the parental home or the access to first homeownership have been the most common researched issues (Hooijmeier, 1991, Clark & Dieleman, 1996, Liefbroer, 1999; Feijten, 2004; Mulder, 2006). However, the rise in the 65+ population that is foreseen over the next decades as a result of increasing life expectancy has increased the number of studies that focus on elderly mobility in a European context (Bloem et al., 2008; Bonvalet & Ogg, 2008; González Puga, 2004; Grundy, 2007). Under the question “what life domain transformations trigger residential mobility at older ages?” new studies are wondering about relocation choices, establishing the theoretical guidelines for the study of the parallel careers of older people.

## **2. Emerging research questions**

It is a fact that elderly prefer to live independently in their own home as long as possible. Traditionally, both emotional attachment that elderly feel about their homes and the economic and health burden that suppose a residential move for older people has provided disincentives to mobility (Font et al, 2009). Besides, public policies in Europe have been aimed to benefit “ageing in place”; socio-economic measures that have encouraged older people to stay at home until it is absolutely necessary for them to move. Then, both individual and structural restrictions have conditioned mobility pathways at older ages. This situation usually undergoes a mismatch between the needs and the housing reality of the elderly. Furthermore, this scenario lead to deepen on shows the relevance that elderly has and will have in the close future not only regarding to the intra-generational dynamics of older cohorts, but also in the inter-generational relationships.

Based on this re-interpretation of old age some authors have suggested new hypotheses about the residential behaviours of elderly. On the one hand, there are those who consider elderly mobility to be increasing. Bonvalet & Ogg (2008) carried out research on residential mobility patterns of the elderly wondering if these will continue be the same in the future or if an increase in mobility can be expected. The authors concluded that when over the coming decades the current baby-boom cohorts will reach older ages it will lead to higher rates of mobility for this life stage. Higher divorce rates among over 60-year olds or wide-spreading secondary residence ownership are some of the factors identified that might promote mobility during old age if we compare them with the mobility patters of previous older cohorts.

A different hypothesis considers the effect of this mobility increase on the residential dynamics of the whole population. As Kendig (1984) or Malmberg (2010) have shown, the study of mobility and old age linkage is very useful to understand the effect that the duration of elderly households can unleash on the housing consumption of other age groups, especially its influence on the housing stock and prices. Thus, the importance of the study of residential careers of elderly households lies both in new mobility patterns and the consequences that these patterns can have on the entire residential system, i.e. to the rest of the population.

These questions have implied a search of new approaches to clarify in what way individuals develop the last phase residential biography, or another related with it, that frequently have ended with the adoption of the life course perspective as a theoretical tool.

### **3. New sources, new opportunities**

Studies focusing on the exploration of the biographical trajectories and changes during old age are relatively recent. One of the most important reasons for this delay has been the lack of data sources that allow longitudinal approaches to later life stages. Some authors have pointed out the essential role that the emergence of this new data source has meant for the development, both theoretical and methodological, of Life Course Approach applicability to old age studies (Elder, 1985, 2003; Heinz & Krüger, 2001; González Puga, 2004b; Mayer, 2009), reasons for which are diverse. Firstly, these new surveys have adapted the sample design to the complex reality of the composition of the elderly population. It has meant that some of the new samples are exclusively composed of aged persons, allowing a more accurate analysis of different profiles that are found among the elderly population. Mature, older and older-old populations are not the same and one of the most important benefits of these new surveys is that they facilitate such distinctions by recognizing old age as a life stage formed by sub-stages. In consequence, elderly cannot be

considered as a homogenous group with same characteristics and realities. The design of these longitudinal surveys responds to the awareness of the diversity of sub-stages that individuals have to pass during the life period that is commonly defined as “old age” (Arber & Evandrou, 1997). Secondly, as Börsch-Supan et al. (2009) showed, the new data sources present three main features that allow analysing old age dynamics under a biographical perspective.

#### *Cooperation among disciplines*

The new data sources are planned to facilitate the cooperation among the diverse disciplines involved in research on ageing. This multidisciplinary has the objective to avoid the biases, theoretical or methodological, as a result of the specialization within the social sciences. Thus, these surveys are composed by thematic modules addressed to record information about diverse aspects of elderly life as demographic characteristics, financial situation, family composition, residential context, etc. The diversification of the questionnaire favours linkages between biographic spheres that encourage close collaboration between different social sciences areas.

#### *Longitudinal design*

Secondly, the longitudinal design of the surveys has been essential to the monitoring of changes that have occurred. The inclusion of the time dimension has facilitated to know how the biographies evolve and also to identify how the socio-historical time have shaped the relocation choices of the population. Consequently, the new statistical projects are conceived from their beginning as panel surveys (in most cases) or retrospective surveys, or both at the same time, allowing information during a broad period of an individual’s life to be recorded. In the case of the elderly, these are highly relevant data sources because they suppose a revolution of the available data of ageing processes. Previously, panel surveys were dedicated more to childhood and youth. Being aware of the difficulties that monitoring ageing population entails, these new data sources contain the required information to use methodology that until now was applied to the study of younger cohorts.

#### *International comparisons*

In the third place, these new surveys permits cross-national comparisons of the way residential mobility processes take place among the elderly in different territories and the subsequent search for more structural types of explanations.

To illustrate this, one of the best examples of this kind of statistical projects is the SHARE (Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe). Its design makes it comparable with other surveys as ELSA<sup>2</sup> (United Kingdom) and HRS<sup>3</sup> (United States)

#### **4. The study of residential mobility using Life Course Approach**

The emergence of the “long way of thinking” in social sciences was the previous step to the development of frameworks that consider the temporal dimension of social phenomena (Elder, 1994). In that sense, the life course approach has been one of the main frameworks to give theoretical support to the longitudinal study of human lives. One of the best qualities of this approach has been its multidisciplinary applicability. The constant collaboration among disciplines has encouraged the re-interpretation and the improvement of the principles that form it. Thanks to that, the life course approach has reached to a high degree of maturity, both theoretical and methodological, that has led to denominate it even “paradigm” (Mayer & Tuma, 1990: 5).

The Life Course Approach is based on understanding how the individuals’ life structure can be affected by the timing of the events they have undergone. This framework aims to explain the biographical development process regarding to the life events experienced by individuals in several life domains (Elder et al., 2003). Thus, an individual’s life consists of several parallel trajectories which belong to a concrete life domain. These parallel trajectories are linked; as a result, to changes in one life sphere that can trigger transitions in any of the other ones. Moreover, these individual trajectories and transitions not only affect at an individual level, but also determine the collective dynamics when these pathways are followed by numerous part of the society. In turn, changes are motivated at the same time by historical or social restrictions (Elder, 1985). Due to the interest to explain the demographic trends through the changes occurred in their individuals careers, demography has also contributed to the development of Life Course Approach concept by introducing the “cohort” concept. It has improved the understanding of the macro processes from a micro level view (Willekens, 1999).

Many authors have highlighted that the study of life course and the interdependence of life domains an excellent theoretical framework to approach the study of residential mobility of individuals and households (Kendig, 1984; Clark & Dieleman, 1996; Willekens, 1999; van Wissen & Dysktra, 1999, Clark et al., 2003; Kulu & Milewski, 2007). In the first place, the applicability of the approach for the study of the relocation paths is given by the idea of “advance” that involves the “life course” concept. This concept refers to the “a sequence of socially defined events and roles

---

<sup>2</sup> English Longitudinal Survey on Ageing

<sup>3</sup> Health and Retirement Study

that the individual enacts over time” (Giele & Elder, 1998: 22). In the specific case of residential careers, these also can be conceived as an “advance” expressed by the sequence of dwellings where the individuals live across their life span. Thus, the progression of any residential trajectory would be initiated with the first entrance as an independent household in the housing system, taking into account the successive movements and adjustments on housing according with the household needs until their disappearance as independent household from the housing market (Clark et al, 2003: 144).

In second place, the use of life course approach allows to consider the interdependence among life trajectories; family, work, health, and residential (Willekens, 1991). This connexion among parallel trajectories and their development trigger that any change occurred in one of them can unleash modifications on the others (Kending, 1990). This is one of the most important principles of life course approach, and it acquires an especial relevance in the case of residential careers studies due to that a great extent of residential relocations are triggered by events embedded on other life spheres, i.e. retirement on work dimension or widowhood on family dimension.

Currently, an agreement exists about the theoretical principles that integrate the life course approach. Each one of them refers to a particular element that acts in the biographical configuration process. It has been considered that they are not independent theoretical elements, but their sense arises from the interplay they maintain. Although the number of principles varies depending on the reference author (Elder, 1994, 2003; Mayer, 2009) essentially they are the same principles and every new classification complement each others. To illustrate in which sense this principles can be used to study the elderly residential mobility it have been chosen one of the Elder’s classification (2003).

#### *Principle of Development*

The main idea is that human development and ageing are active processes that act during all the life span. In consequence, the biographical evolution does not end with the pass from childhood to adulthood, but it continues until the old age. The development principle takes the idea of advance previously mentioned; it is essential to think that the adults and the elderly also experience fundamental changes in their life course that push them to adapt their needs. Besides, this principle also assumes that the life course has “memory” and the events lived during the first years or decades have their reflection at old age. In the case of relocation, González Puga (2004b) have recognised in her work about elderly residential strategies on Spanish context that a childhood and youth more mobile increase the probability to make a relocation movement during old age.



### *Principle of Agency*

The principle of agency refers to the choices that individuals make to construct their own life course. These choices depend on the opportunities and constraints posed by their living environment. It means that the decisions are taken based on the alternatives that people perceive for themselves, being this choice's planning an essential point to the development of future trajectories. Mulder & Hooimeijer (1999) proposed a terminology to describe the elements that shapes the decisions making process; those that favour the behaviour are denominated as resources at micro level and opportunities at macro level. In the case of these circumstances that limit the behaviour they proposed restrictions at micro level and constrictions at macro level. Through the combination of these elements arise the decisions that make evolve the life course.

Regarding the residential choices this two dimensions, macro and micro, also interplay. A housing movement, as every decision making process, is conditioned by the favouring or limiting circumstances that determine the individual's action; income or health status, in a micro level, or housing availability and prices or public policies, at the macro level.

### *Principle of time and place*

Other of the fundamental principles proposed by life course approach, intimately linked with previous principle, is the influence that the socio-historical context has in the decision making process. The life course of individuals is determined by the historical context and places where they have been living. Each one of these places are formed by three essential features: a geographical location, a culture, and an investment with meaning and worth. These three features shape the kind of influence that the context of each individual will have throughout his life, reflecting in each cohort the effects of the historic environment where they live (Elder, 1994). Thus, both the historical period as the social structure within which the individual has grown are the ones who organize and regulate its progression macro-level in each of the vital areas (Kohli and Myers, 1986).

As it was expressed by Gurney and Means (1997), for a study of the residential careers of the population is essential to consider the historical circumstances and the political context where this careers are developing. This is because housing is an asset that depends heavily on economic fluctuations. Then, it is important to check the effects of the historical moment has on the residential system in each territory, understanding the interplay of all factors that act to determine dynamics of the housing market (Boelhower and Heijden 1992). Therefore, the tenure status or housing type choices not only depend on individual needs or individual resources, but

also are determined by the price and composition of housing market (Clark et al ., 2003: 147). The life course perspective allows us to introduce in our analysis the influences of socio-historical residential decision-making.

#### *Principle of calendar*

The causes and consequences of biographical transitions vary depending on the social calendar of each individual. It means that these life events can trigger a different outcome depending on the stage when they occur during life course. The basic element around which is built the social calendar is the age, an attribute with a clear social meaning established by the incidence, duration and sequence of roles at each stage of life. Age is the criterion on which it is established whether or not an event happening within the social expectations attributed to the stage in life where the individual is. Both promptly and delay in act according to the expectations of the biographical period is the person can result in different effects on the direction of biography. In addition, the social calendar has a strong cultural component that varies over time.

#### *Principle of linked lives*

It is one of the central concepts of life course approach. It is based on the assumption that individual's lives are linked, which means that the opportunities and restrictions are shaped not only by the individual needs, but also they are fixed by the household or family needs (van Wissen y Dysktra, 1999). The biography of individuals is linked with those beings with which it interacts, with particular intensity when it comes to family or friends. Often, people's lives are affected by changes in their environment that simultaneously trigger transformations in the lives of those around them (Kulu and Milewski, 2007). Because of that, to consider the family and the ties established between members is a determinant factor in the mobility paths, both to provide or to limit the movement. In this sense, the Rossi's seminal work titled "Why families move?" (1955) was pioneer relating residential mobility with the changes occurred in households. In the residential careers, if a couple decide to move for work reasons of one of the members, the other can lead some problem does not foresee. Then, the principle of linked lives shows the involuntary transitions triggered by the bond with other people. As noted by Mulder (2007), the fact that family is the largest care provider at older ages amplifies the dependence that elderly present of their relatives to make decisions about mobility. Moreover, this connection between household members can not only generate mobility but can also limit it. It is the case of the "empty nest" consequences. On the one hand, children's leaving the parental home can mean an incentive for elderly household mobility, stimulated by the search of shorter size dwelling, with better access

or a zone with amenities dedicated to older populations, etcetera. However, the same situation can entail disincentives if the new children's residence is established near to the parental dwelling, due to the children proximity used to means a residential remaining desire of elderly (Bloem et al., 2008). Thus, it is highly necessary to consider the importance of intergenerational relationships and the closeness in spatial terms of family members as variables motivating or limiting mobility the residential biography of households and individuals at old age.

## **5. Essential concepts for the study of residential mobility**

Residential mobility can be defined as a dwelling's change carried out by an individual or a household that, unlike migration, it does not imply necessarily transformations in one of the other biographical spheres (Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999: 162). This is because, when we allude to residential mobility, normally it refers to a short-distance displacement. Hence, that daily routines and living environment rupture is less drastic than in the case of migration process.

Using the theoretical proposes of Life Course Approach, the common term to refer each one of the relocation movement are "transitions". This concept has been defined as the transformation from a state to another determined by a change socially significant in an individual's live (Elder, 1985). In the case of elderly, some significant transitions are the pass from married to widowhood or from an independent household to a dependent. Every transition has consequences both in an individual way and social way, depending on which the life course is developed. Hence, to analyse the residential careers during later life it is necessary to use this concept to understand how the entire trajectory is constructed. Deeping on the definition of this concept, residential transitions only is undertaken when the benefits obtained by the change are higher than those of stay. This is due to residential movements imply higher not-monetary cost, as the break of social ties or daily routines (Sjaastad, 1962). In that way, Willekens (1991) noted that residential transitions should be considered as a response mechanisms or adjustments to the changes occurred in other life trajectories. This characteristic distinguishes residential trajectories to the other parallel trajectories; it is a necessary condition, but not essential, the existence of a trigger event that causes a change of residence. This means that each change of dwelling at older ages is probably caused by other event happened in another area biographical and through that interconnection of vital areas from where we explain the mechanisms generator of mobility. The life course approach provides the framework to establish this interplay between life domains.

Summarising, the search of a new dwelling do not suppose a purpose by itself. This is an instrumental behaviour to cover new needs aroused from other life domains as family or work

spheres (González Puga, 2004a). The emergence of a chronic disease, with the consequent transformation in the health sphere, can entail a residential movement that is motivated by the searching of care or the housing facilities that allow living independently. Also, it should be notice that to identify the trigger events of residential mobility that the temporal sequence of the events not always reflects the causal order of them (Willekens, 1991). Thus, residential mobility may occur before the materialization of the event that triggers it. An example would be the search of a new dwelling before retirement in advance of the income decline or before the onset of a degenerative disease previously diagnosed.

The study of residential transitions cannot be understood without other concept, appeared in previous sections, closely linked: the trajectories. However, the empirical contributions focused on residential biographies have replaced it by other similar concepts. Thus, the studies focused on describing the residential trajectories have been more common to use the term "career" and to refer to the events that provoke the transitions it has used the idea of "trigger".

#### *Career*

The use of "residential career" describes the sequence of dwellings that each person or household occupies over life (Keding, 1990: 133). Some authors have defended the more accurate mean of this term because it implies the idea of a "sequence of states" with a direction. Moreover, this concept alludes to every move that a household or an individual make with the intention to improve their living conditions. Therefore, the use of the concept "career" not only describes progress for which will be enough to use "trajectory", but in turn it reflects an intention towards improvement (Clark et al., 2003).

#### *Trigger*

As discussed previously, changes in the life trajectories of individuals are produced by transitions. These transitions need an event to generate and motivate the change process, the Anglo-Saxon academic literature has defined this concept as a trigger. In the case of residential mobility, triggers, or triggers, household change often occur due to a mismatch between the actual housing conditions and desired by individuals (Mulder, 1996.) Thus, residential mobility in micro dimension, reflects the intention of fit between what individuals want as housing and what actually available. It depends on the importance that individuals give to both the housing and the environment where it is located (Mulder and Hooimeijer, 1999). In 1981, De Jong and Fawcett identified and classified into seven categories of possible targets that encourage individuals to change their domicile: 1) increase well-being or wealth 2) improving the status 3) improved

comfort 4) 5 environmental stimuli ) increased autonomy 6) proximity to family networks 7) environment consistent with their moral beliefs.

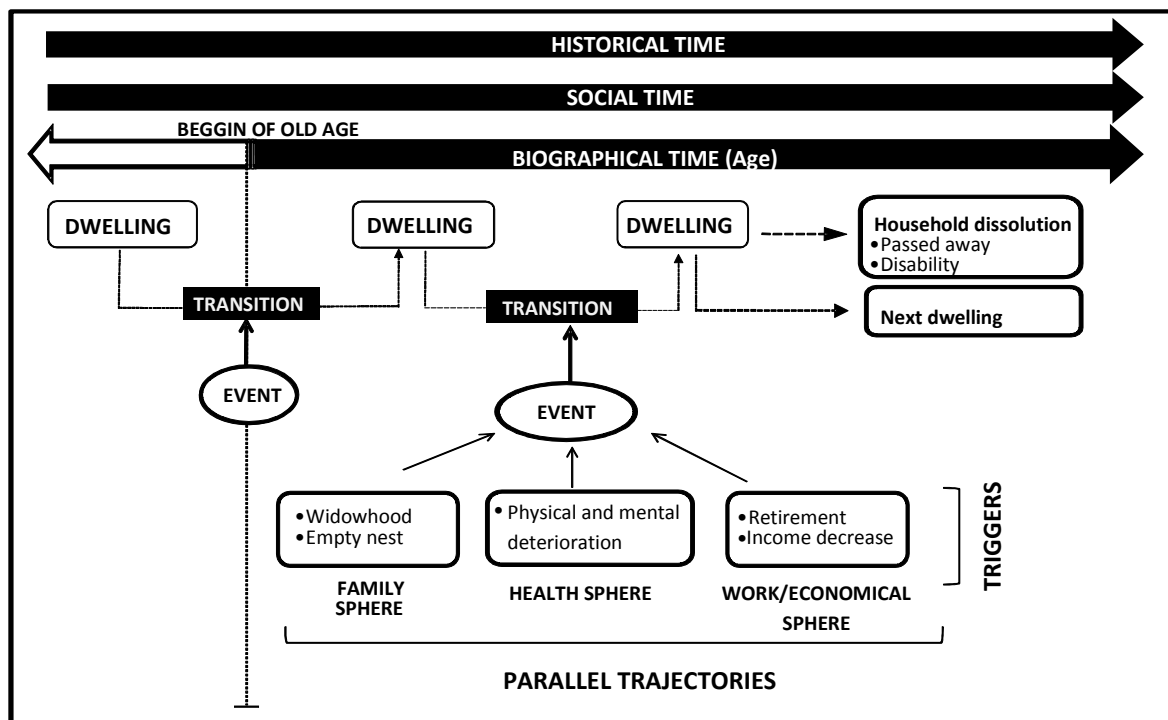
### Household

Surely, the most relevant key concept in the study of mobility triggers, not only at older age, is the household. The reason is because the events of formation and dissolution of households are those that more frequently imply housing changes derived from a modification on the household needs. Hence, it is the family trajectory which is closer linked with residential transitions.

## 6. Theoretical scheme

The scheme I propose below summarises the most important elements related to elderly residential mobility from a life course perspective, as mentioned in the previous sections. It should be noticed that although this summarising-scheme was developed from an elderly perspective, it can easily be applied to explain changes in residence at younger or middle ages.

Figure 1. Scheme of residential career elements from life course approach



The central element to be taken into account when residential mobility is approached from a biographical view is the sequence of dwellings that a person or an individual has occupied during its life. Thus, the underlying mechanism that explains the mobility from a biographical perspective

would be formed primarily by those changes between homes. The succession of them forms the "residential trajectory" which ends with the dissolution of independent household, either by death of its members or by moving to a nursing or collective institution. Each of the residential changes would be caused by a "transition" occurring in turn by a triggering event. As shown in the bottom of the figure, the main events triggering mobility among the elderly come from three parallel trajectories that belong to relevant life spheres: family, health and economic/work.

Paying attention to the top of the scheme, we see that any career is influenced by the three "times" that shape the development of the life course: historical, social and biographical time show the different levels that must be taken into account in applying the life course perspective to the study of mobility. Historical time and social time determine the conditions, both facilitative and limiting, at the macro level. This means that these two dimensions of time influence the contextual conditions under which the individual makes the decision-making move. Thus, economic conditions, ageing-related policies, socio-cultural attitudes towards older people, act structuring the life course. In the case of biographical time, it sets the conditions at the micro level. In any biography, also in the residential careers, events experienced in youth is reflected in old age, so any lifetime analysis must take into account the entire period when biographical events seek causal mechanisms.

## **Conclusions**

The transformation of the socio-demographic profile experienced by the elderly population in the last decades has encouraged researches that pursue a more accurate understanding of the aging process. At the same time, the increasing number of available longitudinal datasets has allowed to introduce the temporal dimension in old age studies. Those studies has pointed out the importance that biographical transitions has in the configuration of individuals' later life course. In this sense, the Life Course Approach provides a solvent theoretical framework to formulate new hypotheses to assess the processes involved in ageing and, above all, to establish the links between all the life spheres and contexts involved in it. As it was emphasised in previous sections, this frame allows connecting the different parallel trajectories that compose the biography of the individuals searching for explanations. The concept of "parallel careers" proposed for the Life Course Approach is highly useful to establish the theoretical guidelines of elderly residential mobility analysis from a longitudinal view. At the same time, this frame is very effective to identify the events that shape residential careers of the elderly; being family, work and health are the three main trajectories where these events are "embedded". Moreover, the multidisciplinary

character of this framework is one of its most noteworthy characteristics due to the constant revision and renewal of its principles and concepts.

Despite of the fact that relocation choices of the elderly has been a neglected topic within life course research, the beliefs about the residential behaviour during old age have been recently reviewed. This revision has been preceded by an observed increase of older population mobility rates, at least in some European countries, as well as by a change their socio-demographic features they present. Based on these findings, the assumption that elderly barely move seems to be questioned and some researchers point out that the moves between dwellings will be more frequent among elderly. At this point, it seems suitable to reflect on the consequences that these changing mobility patterns will unleash on micro and macro level. Some of the most remarkable future lines of research are; to establish the profiles of those that change their residence and those who do not, in order to deepen our knowledge about the factors that cause elderly mobility and, especially, to determine how these shape the timing of independent household's dissolution.

Finally, to carry out further research on this topic we cannot forget the essential role of the longitudinal statistical methods. The benefits of using the theoretical principles of Life Course Approach are not completed without a subsequent statistical analysis enabled by these methodological tools. Hence, this will be the next step to advance on exploring the longitudinal dimension of old age transitions.

## **Bibliography**

- ARBER, S. & EVANDROU, M. (1997). Mapping the territory. Ageing, independence and life course. IN ARBER, S. & EVANDROU, M. (Eds.) Ageing, independence and life course. London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers / British Society of Gerontology.
- BLOEM, B., TILBURG, T. & THOMÉSE, F. (2008). Residential Mobility in Older Dutch Adults. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life*, 1, 21-44.
- BOELHOUWER, P.J. & van der HEIJDEN, H.M.H. (1992). Housing Systems in Europe: Part I. A Comparative Study of Housing Policy. Delft: Delft University Press.
- BONNET, C., GOBILLON, L & LAFERRÈRE, A. (2008). The effect of widowhood on housing and location choices. *Document du Travail*, 154, INED.
- BONVALET, C. & OGG, J. (2008). The Housing Situation and Residential Strategies of Older People in France. *Ageing & Society*, 28, 753-777.
- BÖRSCH-SUPAN, A. (1990). A dynamic analysis of household dissolution and living arrangement transition by elderly Americans. IN WISE, D. A. (Ed.) *Issues in the economics of ageing*. University of Chicago Press.
- BÖRSCH-SUPAN, A., HANK, K., JÜRGES, H. & SCHRÖDER, M. (2009). Introduction: empirical research on health, ageing and retirement in Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 40, 293-300.
- BUTLER, A. (1986) "Housing and the elderly in Europe", *Social Policy & Administration*, 20 (2), pp. 136-152, London, Blackwell.
- CLAPHAM, D. (2005). *The meaning of housing. A pathways approach*, The Policy Press / University of Bristol.
- CLARK, W. (1983). Life Cycle and Housing Adjustment as Explanation of Residential Mobility. *Urban Studies*, 20, 47-57.
- CLARK, W. & DAVIES, S. (1990). Elderly mobility and mobility outcomes; household in the later stages of the life course. *Research on Ageing*, 12, 430-461.
- CLARK, W. A. V. & DIELEMAN, F. (1996). *Households and housing. Choices and outcomes in the housing market*, Centre for Urban Policy Research.
- CLARK, W., DEURLOO, M. & DIELEMAN, F. (2003). *Housing Careers in the United States, 1968-93. Modelling the Sequencing of Housing States*. *Urban Studies*, 40.
- COSTA-FONT, J., ELVIRA, D. & MIRÓ, O. M. (2009) Ageing in place? Exploring elderly people's housing preferences in Spain. *Urban Studies*, 46, 295-316.
- DEJONG, G. & FAWCETT, J. T. (1981). Motivations for migration: An assessment and a Value-Expectancy research model. IN JONG, G. F. D. & GARDNER, R. W. (Eds.) *Migration decision*



- making. Multidisciplinary approaches to micro level studies on developed and developing countries. New York, Pergamon Press.
- ELDER, G. H. (1985). Life course dynamics, trajectories, and transitions, 1968-1980, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.
- ELDER, G. H. (1994). Time, human agency, and social change: Perspectives on the life course. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 57, 4-15.
- ELDER, G. H., JOHNSON, M. K. & CORSNOE, R. (2003). The emergence and development of life course theory. IN MORTIMER, J. T. & SHANAHAN, M. J. (Eds.) *Handbook of the life course*. Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers.
- FEIJTEN, P. (2005) *Life events and the housing career: A retrospective analysis of timed effects*, Eburon publishers.
- GIELE, J.Z. and ELDER, G.H. (1998). *Methods of life course research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks. Sage
- GONZÁLEZ PUGA, D. (2004a) El comportamiento residencial de los mayores. Análisis biográfico de la movilidad en la vejez. *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 105, 72-102.
- GONZÁLEZ PUGA, D. (2004b) *Estrategias residenciales de las personas de edad. Movilidad y curso de vida*, Barcelona, Fundación La Caixa.
- GRUNDY, E. (1991) Age-related changes in later life. *Population Studies*, 45, 133-156.
- GRUNDY, E. & JITLAL, M. (2007) Socio-demographic variations in moves to institutional care 1991-2001: a record linkage study from England and Wales. *Age and Ageing*, 36, 424-430.
- GURNEY, C. & MEANS, R. (1997). The meaning of home. IN ARBER, S. y EVANDROU, M. (Eds.) *Ageing, independence and the life course*. Londres, Jessica Kingley Publishers / British Society of Gerontology.
- HARPER, S. (2006) *Ageing societies; myths, challenges and opportunities*, Nueva York, Oxford University Press.
- HEINZ, W. R. & KRÜGER, H. (2001) Life course: innovations and challenges for social research. *Current Sociology*, 49, 29-45.
- HOOIMEIJER, P. (1991). Towards a spatial demography of housing. IN HAZEU, C. A. & FRINKING, G. A. B. (Eds.) *Emerging issues on demographic research*. Amsterdam, Elsevier Science Publishers.
- KOHLI, M & MEYER, J.W. (1986). Social structure and social construction of life stages. *Human Development*, 29, 145-149.
- KENDIG, H. L. (1984) Housing careers, life cycle and residential mobility: implications for the housing market. *Urban Studies*, 21, 271-283.

- KULU, H. & MILEWSKI, N. (2007) Family change and migration in the life course: an introduction. *Demographic Research*, 17, 567-590.
- LIEFBROER, A.C. (1999). From youth to adulthood: Understanding changing patterns of family formation from a life course perspective. IN WISSEN, L. V. & DYSKTRA, P. (Eds.) *Population Issues: An interdisciplinary focus*. Kluwer Academics / Plenum Publishers.
- LITWAK, E. & LOGINO, C. F. (1987) Migration patterns among the elderly: A developmental perspective. *The Gerontologist*, 27, 266-272.
- MACMILLAN, R. (2005). The structure of the life course: classic issues and current controversies. *Advances in life course research*, 9, 3-24.
- MALMBERG, B. (2010) Low fertility and the housing market: evidence from Swedish regional data. *European Journal of Population*, 26, 229-244.
- MAYER, K. U. (2009). New directions in life course research. *Annual review of Sociology*, 35, 413-433.
- MEANS, R. (2007). Safe as houses? Ageing in place and vulnerable people in the UK, *Social Policy and Administration*, 41, 1, 65-85.
- MULDER, C. & HOOIMEIJER, P. (1999) Residential relocations in the life course. IN WISSEN, L. V. & DYSKTRA, P. (Eds.) *Population issues: and interdisciplinary focus*. Kluwer Academics / Plenum Publishers.
- MYERS, D. (1990) *Housing demography*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press.
- RINDFUSS, R. R., SWICEGOOD, C. G. & ROSENFELD, R. A. (1987) Disorder in the life course: how common and does it matter? *American Sociological Review*, 52, 785-801.
- ROSSI, P.H. (1955). *Why families move? A study in the social psychology of urban residential mobility*. Glencoe, Illinois, Free Press.
- SETTERSTEND, R. (2003) *Invitation to the life course: to a new understanding of later life*, Amityville, Baywood Publishing Company.
- SJAASTAD, L. A. (1962). The costs and return of human migration. *The Journal of Political Economy*, 70, 80-93.
- WILLEKENS, F. (1991) Understanding the interdependence between parallel careers. IN SIEGERS, DEJONG, G. & IMHOF, V. (Eds.) *Female labour market behaviour and fertility. A rational-choice approach*. Berlin, Springer Verlag.
- WILLEKENS, F. (1999). The life course: Models and analysis. IN WISSEN, L. V. & DYSKTRA, P. (Eds.) *Population Issues: An interdisciplinary focus*. Kluwer Academics / Plenum Publishers.