

# A continuum for understanding the mobility of older people

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**new dynamics of ageing**  
a cross-council research programme



## Grey and pleasant land? An interdisciplinary exploration of the connectivity of older people in rural civic society

### Project Summary

The study will focus on the quality of life of older people in rural areas by analysing the extent of their involvement in their communities, leisure patterns and cultural interests. It will also address the barriers and opportunities for participation that they experience and their attitudes to the countryside as a social, cultural and environmental space.



## Overarching Aims

- Increase understanding of the needs of older people in rural areas
- Redress the lack of research on older people's participation in and contributions to rural community life
- Consider the well-being benefits of civic engagement in later life
- Older people's civic engagement as a source of social capital

# GPL Project Work Packages

PI Prof. Catherine Hennessy (Plymouth)  
DPI Prof. Robin Means (UWE)

**WP1:** The connectivity of older people in rural areas

**WP2:** Older people's participation in cultural and leisure activities in rural areas

**WP3:** Rural transport and mobility

**WP4:** Experiences of rural living and identity

**WP5:** The well-being and welfare of older people in low-income households

**WP6:** Connecting rural stakeholders/digital inclusion of older people in rural areas



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**better**together

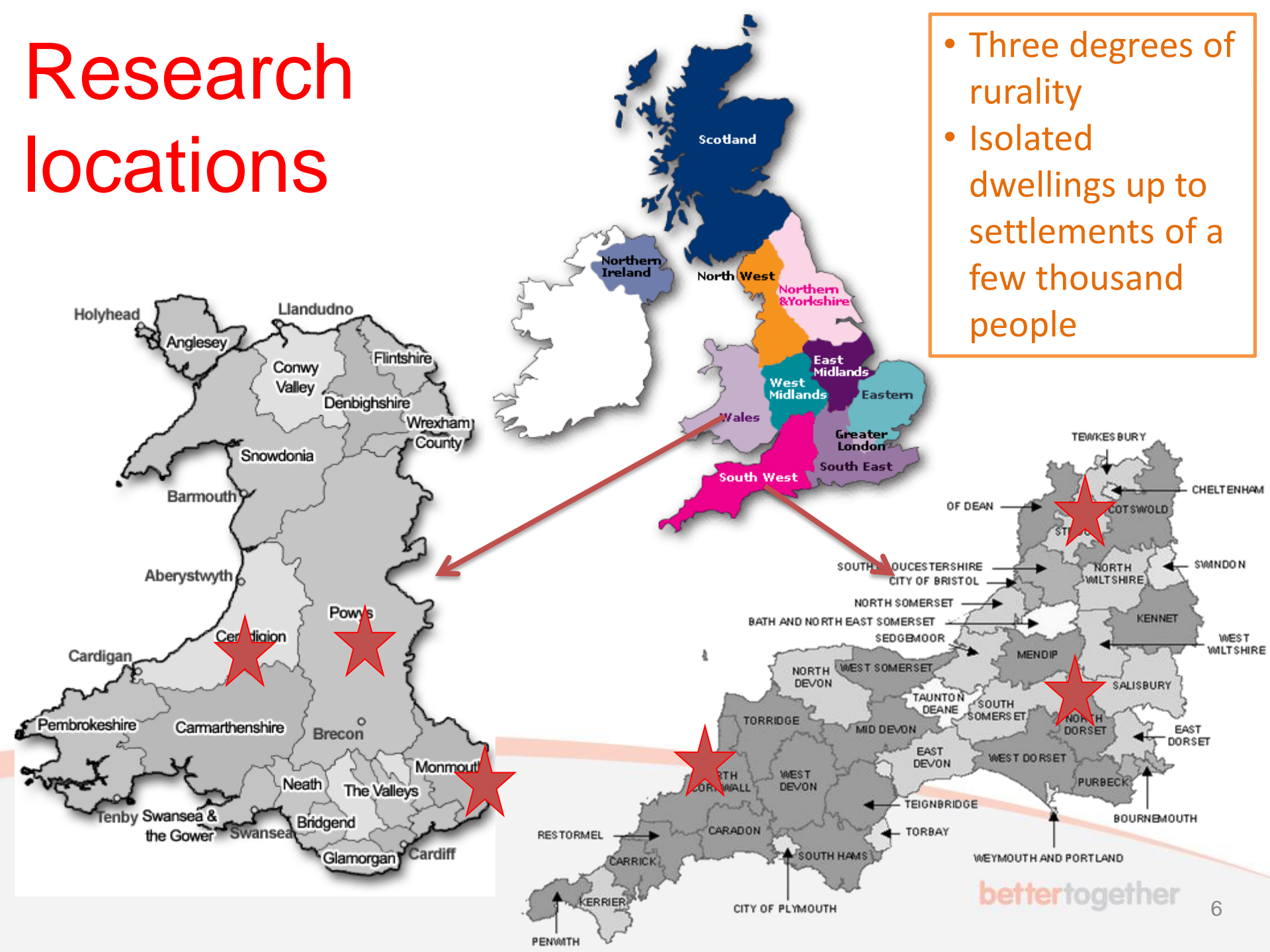
# WP3: Overview

- Note on methods
  - Quantitative survey, in-depth interviews, phenomenological interviews
- Need for a holistic approach to understanding mobility (i.e. transport)
  - Particularly for older people
- Application of the ‘continuum of mobilities’ approach
  - literal, virtual, potential, imaginative
- Practical implications and future questions

# METHODS

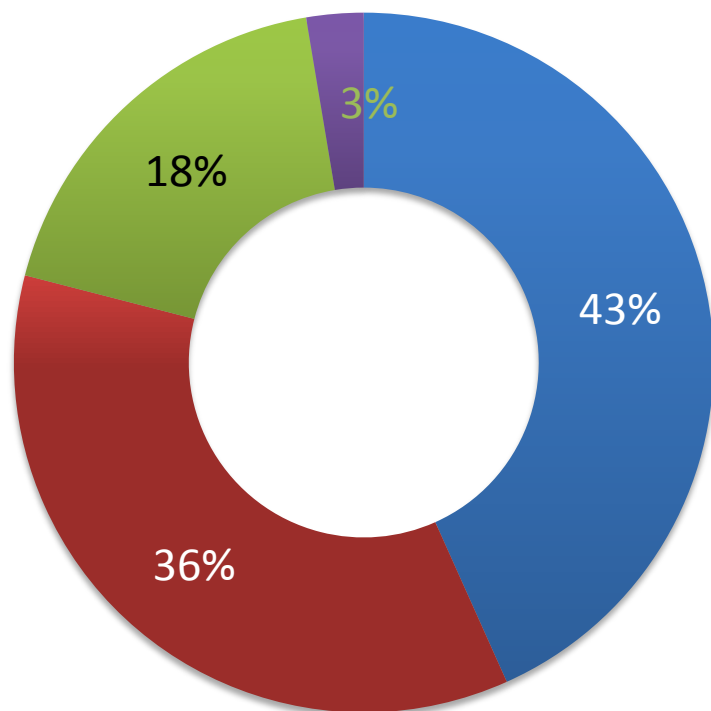
# Research locations

- Three degrees of rurality
- Isolated dwellings up to settlements of a few thousand people



# Quantitative Sample (n=920)

## Age of respondents



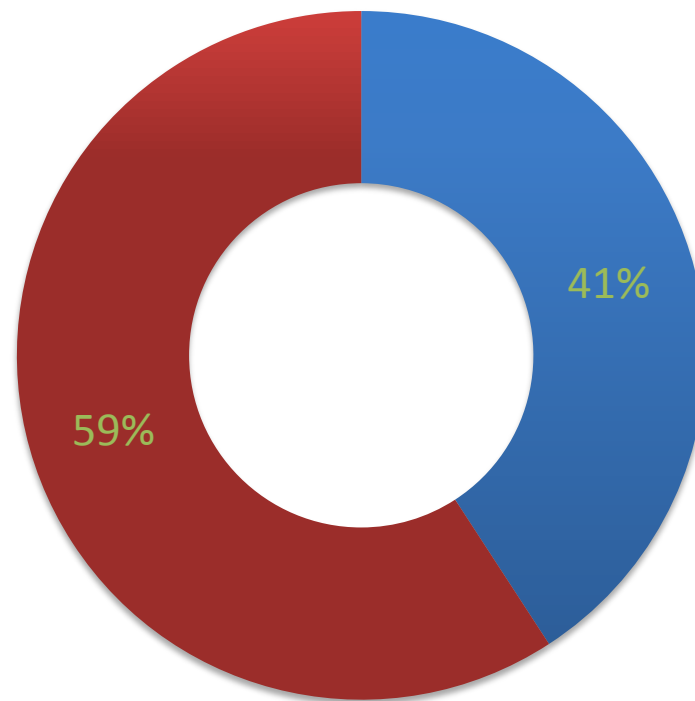
■ 60-69

■ 70-79

■ 80-89

■ 90-99

## Gender



■ Male ■ Female

- Stratified, random sampling
- Face-to-face interviewer-completed questionnaires
- Slight over-representation of women and 60-69 group



# Key questionnaire themes

- travel patterns and behaviours
- mode choice (including over time)
- exclusion from, or engagement with, the local community
- health and welfare





# 45 Semi-structured interviews

- Selected from quantitative participants for modes used, gender, age, location
  - Ended driving careers / motorists
  - Public transport/cycle/mobility scooter users
- Themes explored in 1hr interviews
  - meaning and importance of mobility
  - benefits/dis-benefits of mode(s) of travel
  - personal mobility biographies
  - forward-looking perspectives
- Analysis assisted with Nvivo

# 10 Phenomenological interviews

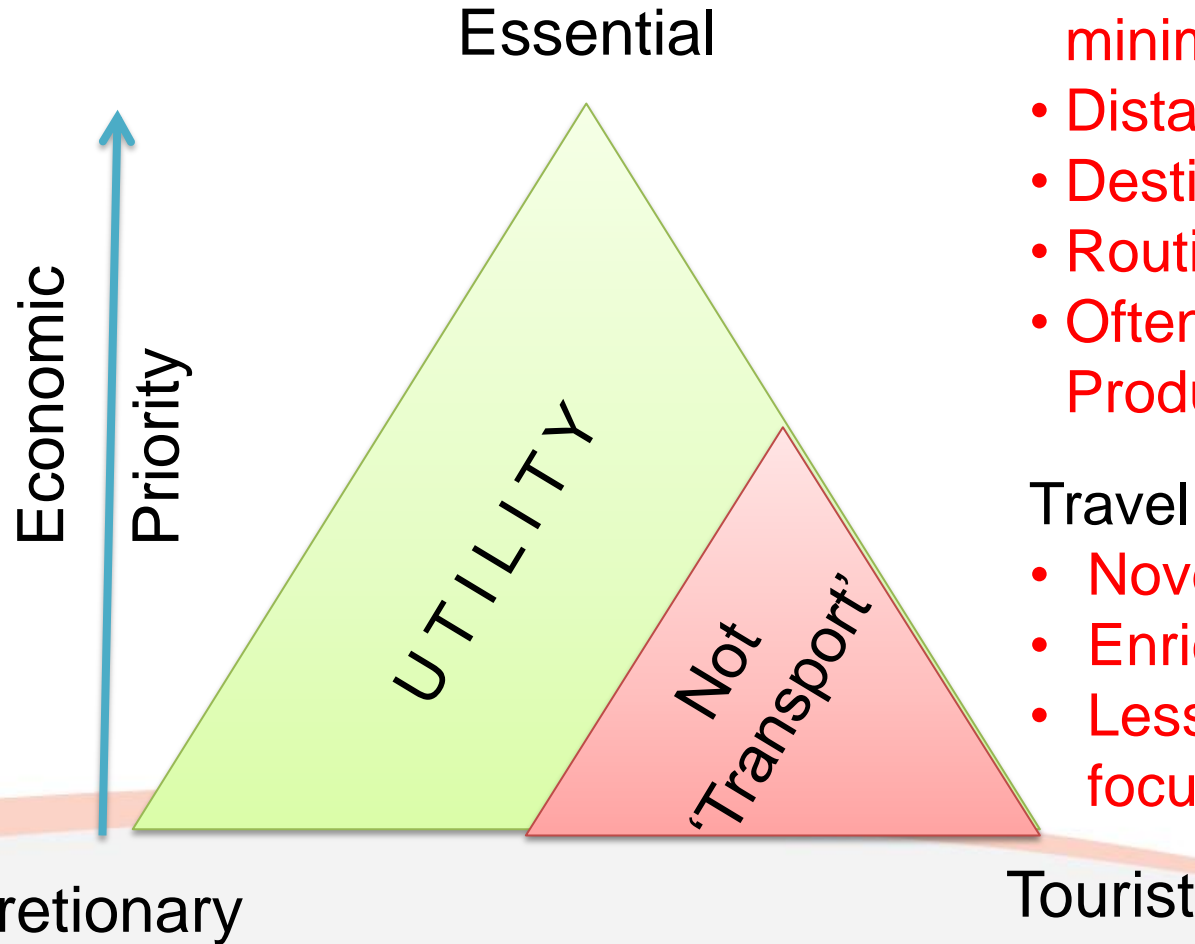
- Similar themes to SSIs but applying
  - “‘phenomenological attitude’... free of value judgements from an external frame of reference and instead focuses on the meaning of the situation purely as it is given in the participants’ experience” (Wertz, 2005, p. 172).
- Selection according to reported wellness/poor health and good/limited access to transport
  - Some with restricted mobility or homebound

# Phenomenological Int.(cont)

- Duration 1-3 hours
- Focus on understanding meaning of transport in life and of mobility in rural space
  - what it was like to live in the locality
  - trips classified as ‘must-do’ (e.g. shopping), ‘have-to’ (e.g. medical appointments), and ‘want-to’ (desired). The questions were developed to allow.
- Analysis
  - holistic and background understanding, followed by the identification of discrete ‘meaning units’

# **PERSPECTIVE ON THE ROLE OF MOBILITY**

# Traditional Categorisation of Trip Purposes



## Travel for Utility

- Time wasted: to be minimised
- Distance to be overcome
- Destination-focussed
- Routine
- Often Essential, Productive

## Travel for Tourism

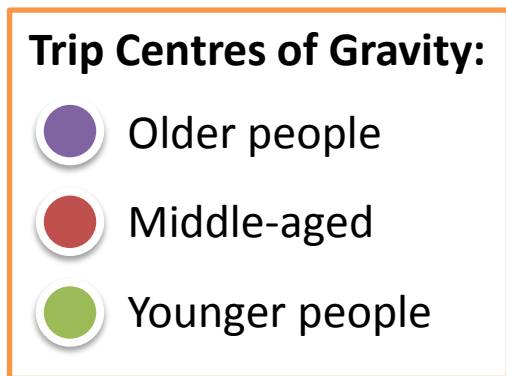
- Novel
- Enriching
- Less destination focussed

# Importance of 'discretionary' trips

- *I could shop online, give up using the greengrocers... But you make friends... if you don't go in the shops as a regular customer you would miss that (Female 60s)*
- *Certainly Tesco's deliver here to my neighbours... Once again as far as we are concerned it's an outing, my wife enjoys it, it's an outing you know...(M45b – Male).*
- *Nowadays its part of life to go and wander around the supermarket and have a cup of coffee and a cake... (Male 60s).*



# Implications for older people



Essential

Low priority for

- Travel for volunteering, social trips
- Long-term benefits e.g. Of exercise, avoiding isolation

Discretionary

Tourist

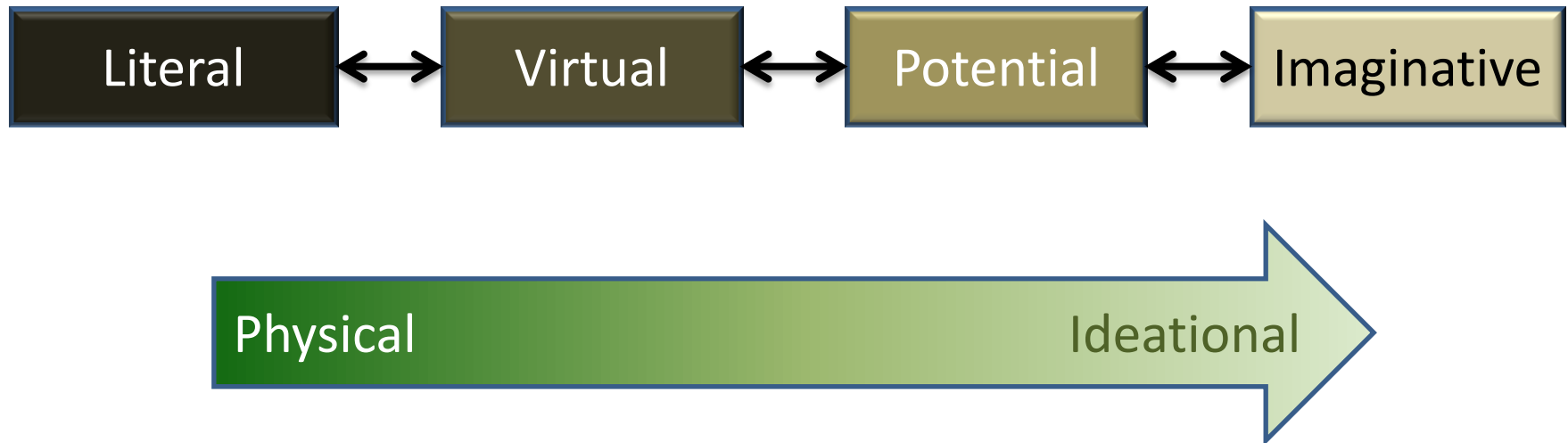
# Holistic conception of mobility

- to be mobile is to participate in society
- movement may not have an explicit, conscious purpose
- there are physical and mental health benefits to maintaining active travel and passive transport
- **All of these are important to quality of life and wellbeing**

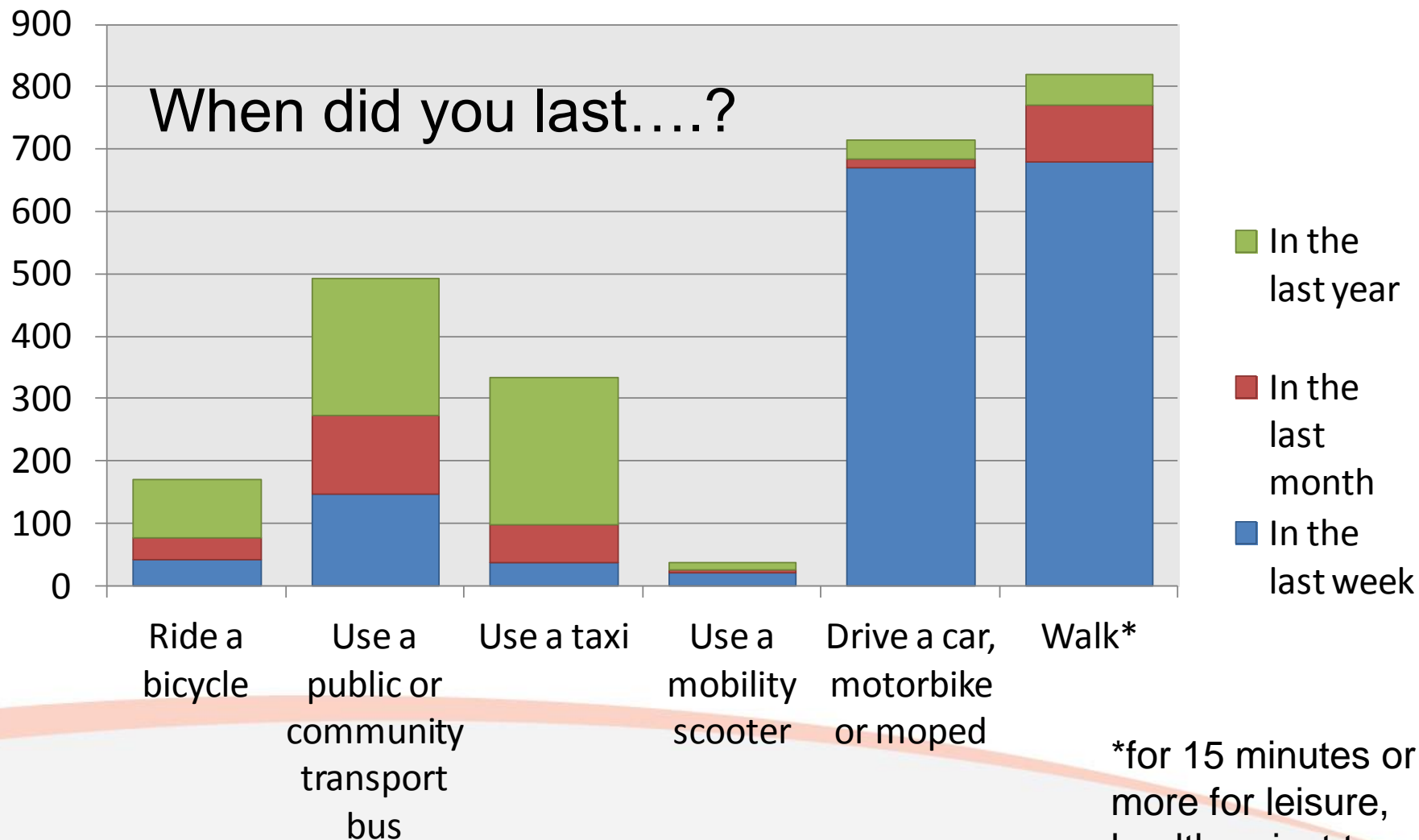


# APPLICATION OF THE CONTINUUM APPROACH

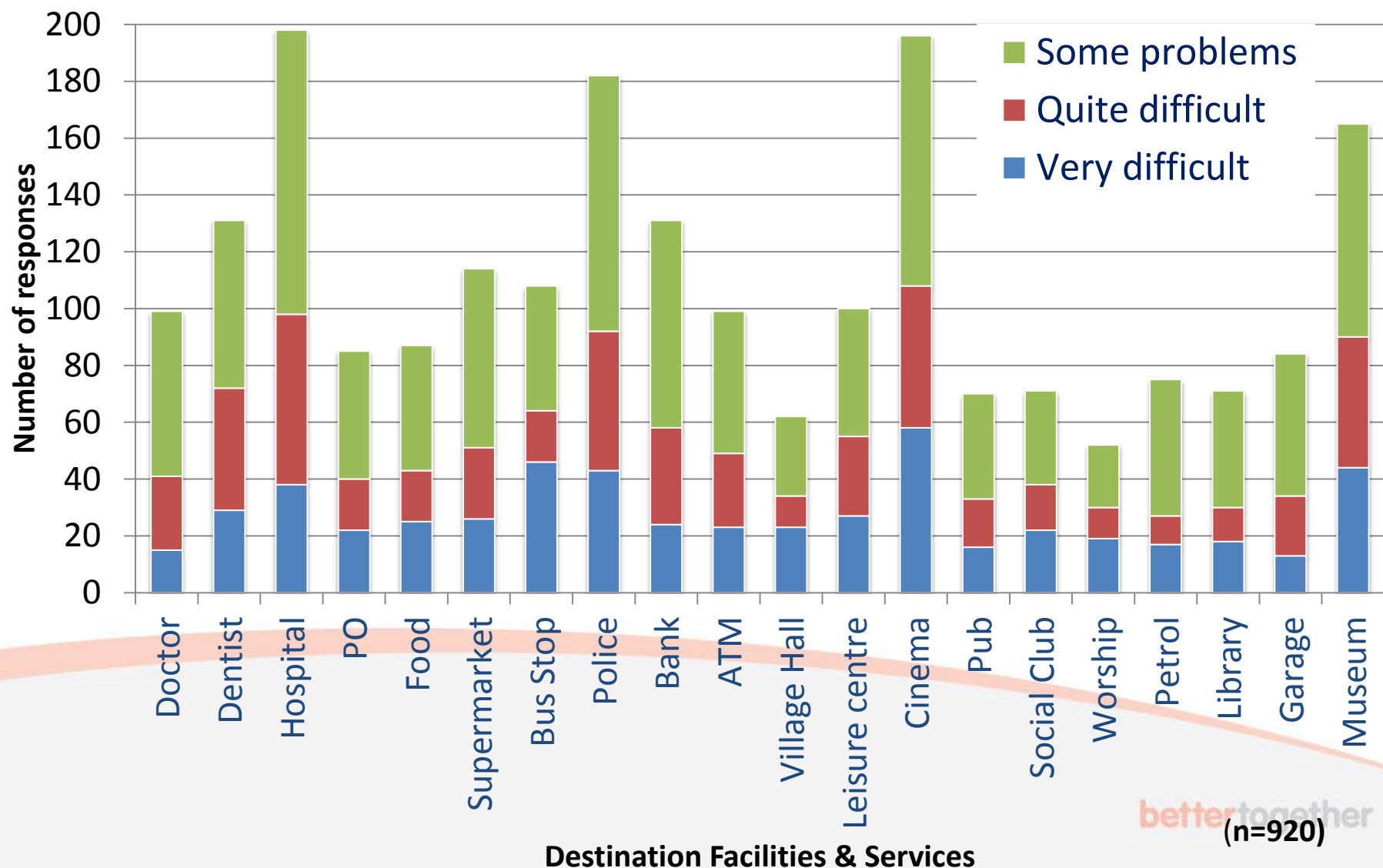
# Continuum of Mobilities



# Ways of Being Literally Mobile

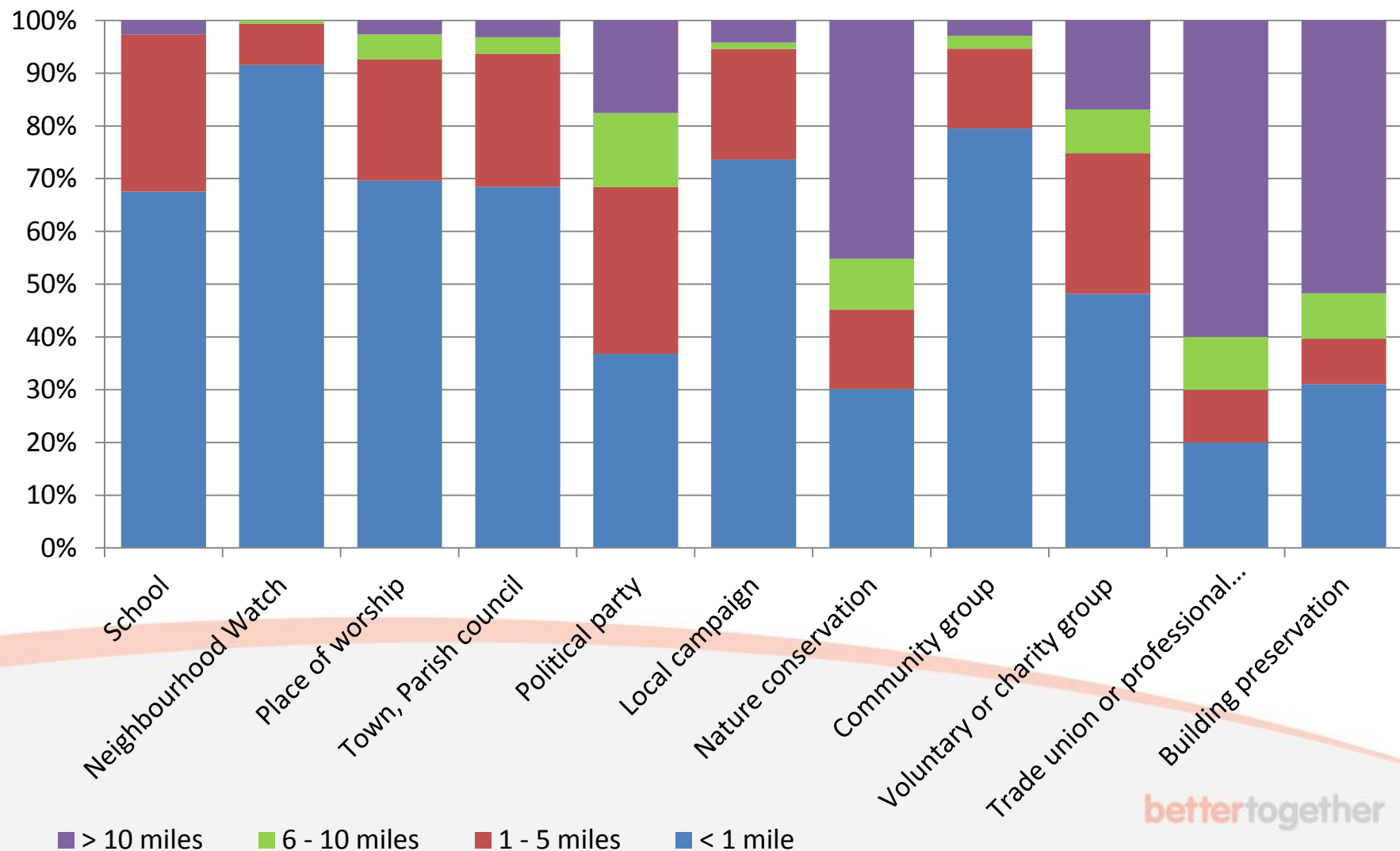


# Literal mobility unproblematic for most 'essential' and 'discretionary' purposes



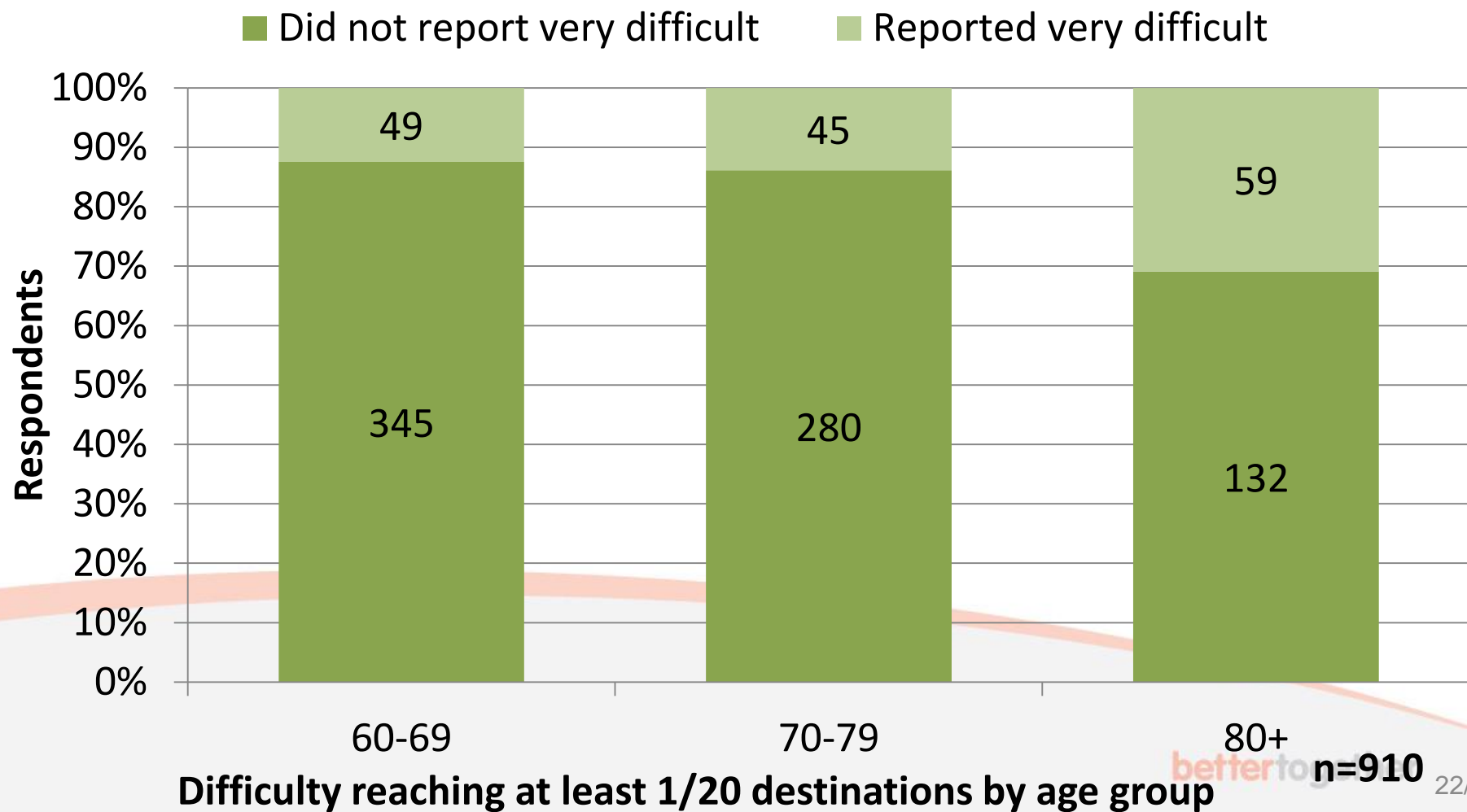


# For social and community activities many of the distances travelled were short

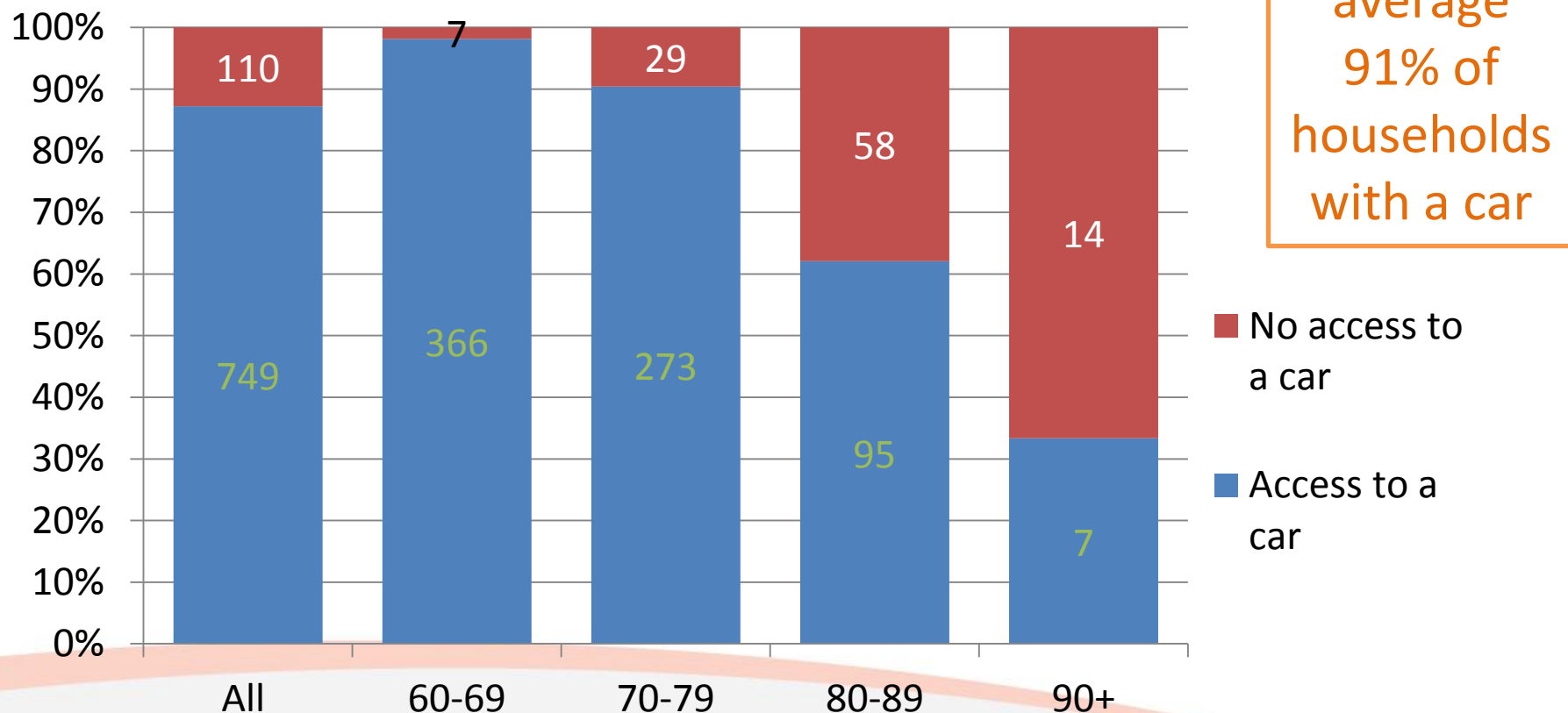


# ...although significantly greater problems for the oldest old

( $\chi^2 = 41.670$ ,  $df3$ ,  $p < .001$ )



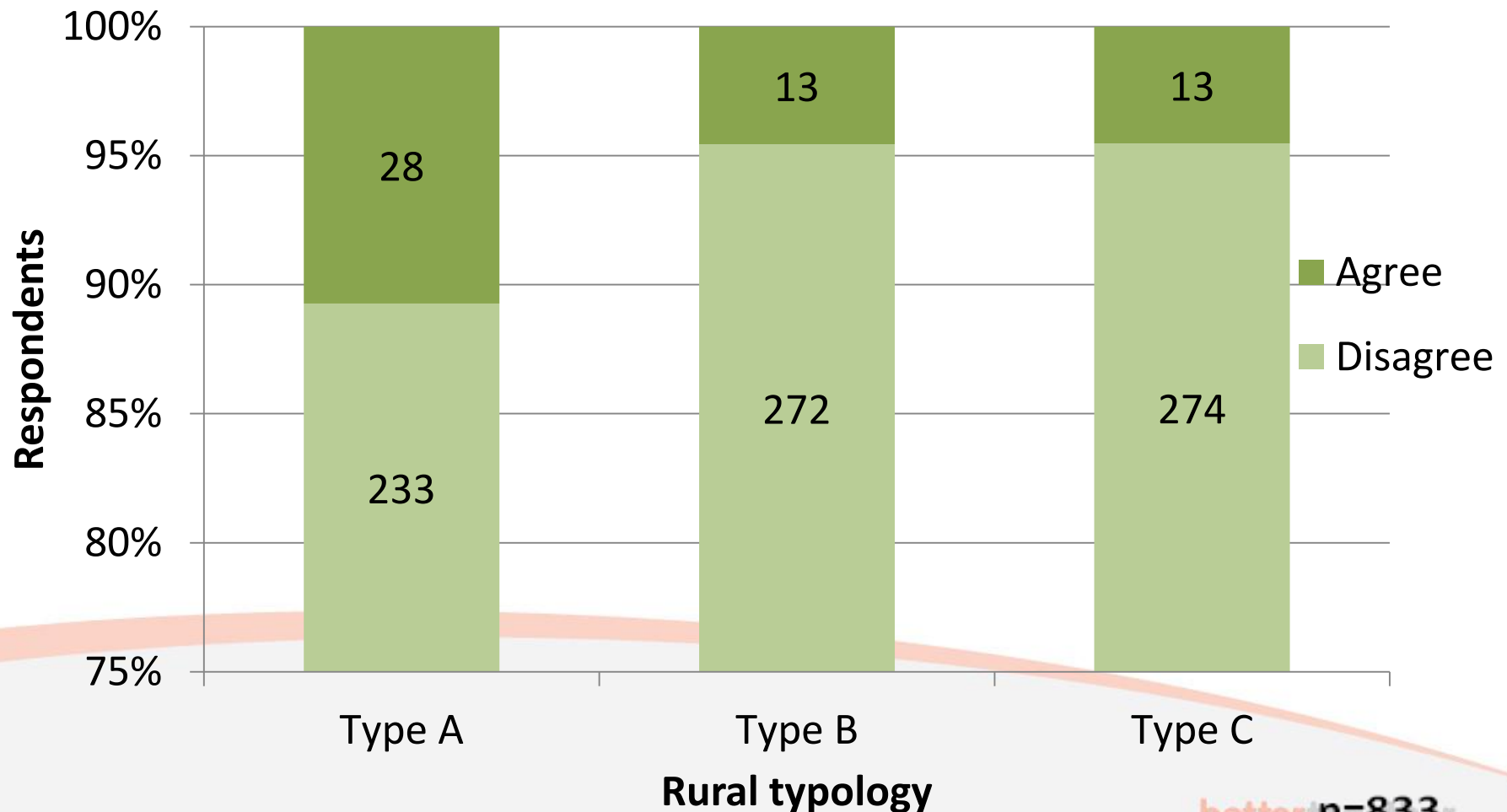
# High Car Availability Except for 80+ Groups



Do you, or does your household own or have the use of a car or other motor vehicle?(n = 859)

# Self-reported exclusion by degree of rurality

( $\chi^2$  15.236, df 2,  $p > .001$ )



# Constraints very real for specific individuals

“...everything that I need is outside of this village, so if I can’t get out for any reason then I am really stuck”. (Female, in 70s)

“It would be nice to have hospitals closer. I did worry when I first had the heart thing that I might die in an ambulance on the way...”  
(Male, aged in 60s)

“...we accept we have got 25 miles to get to anywhere, and 50 miles to get to anywhere decent. (Male, in 60s)”

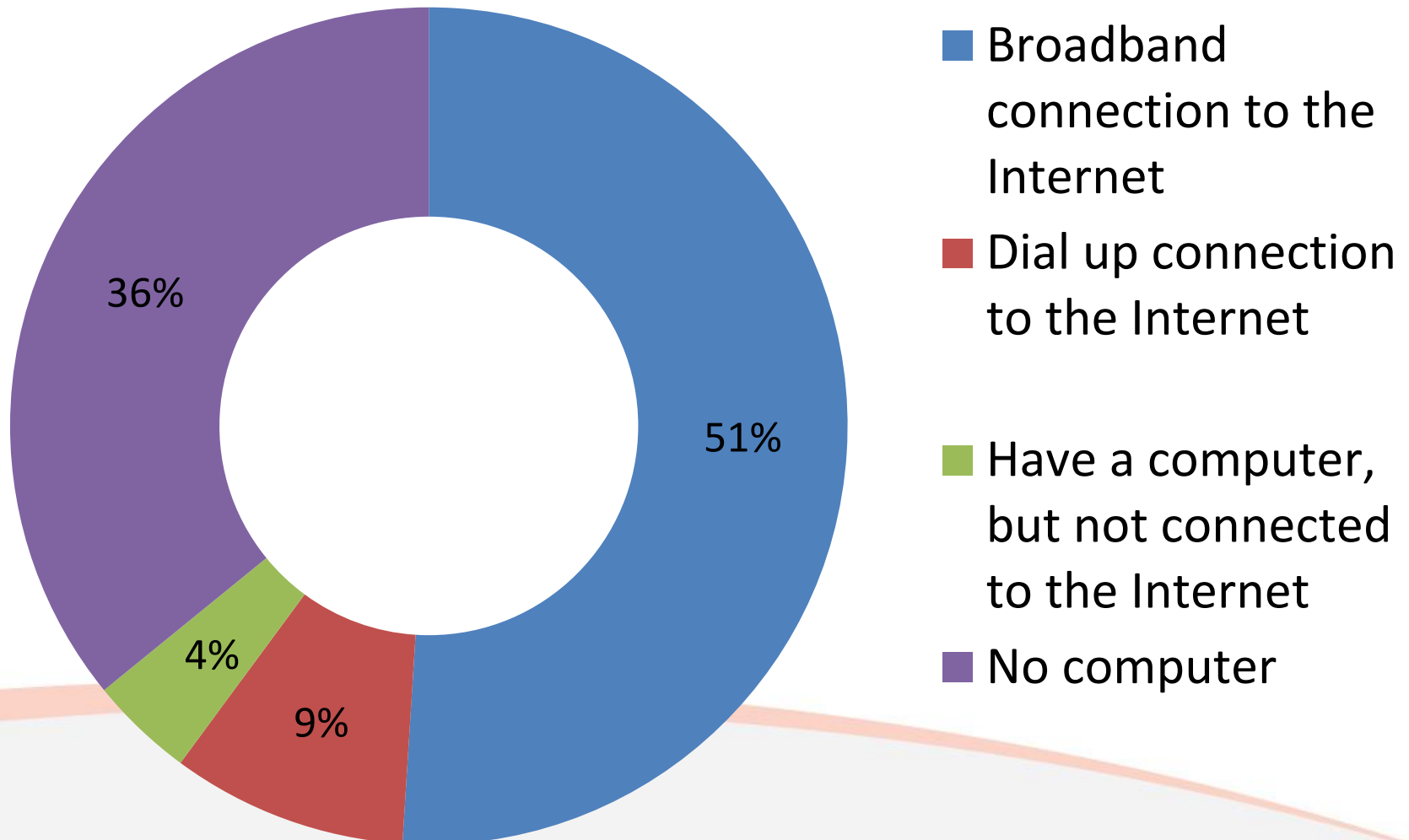
# But 'Textured Locale' of rural environment of importance

*“...my granddaughter says they we live in the middle of nowhere, but we live in the middle of everywhere.”*

- journey experiences become narratives
- local rural vicinity as a 'storied' place rich with personal, communal and landscaped history



# Virtual Mobility: access to computers and internet

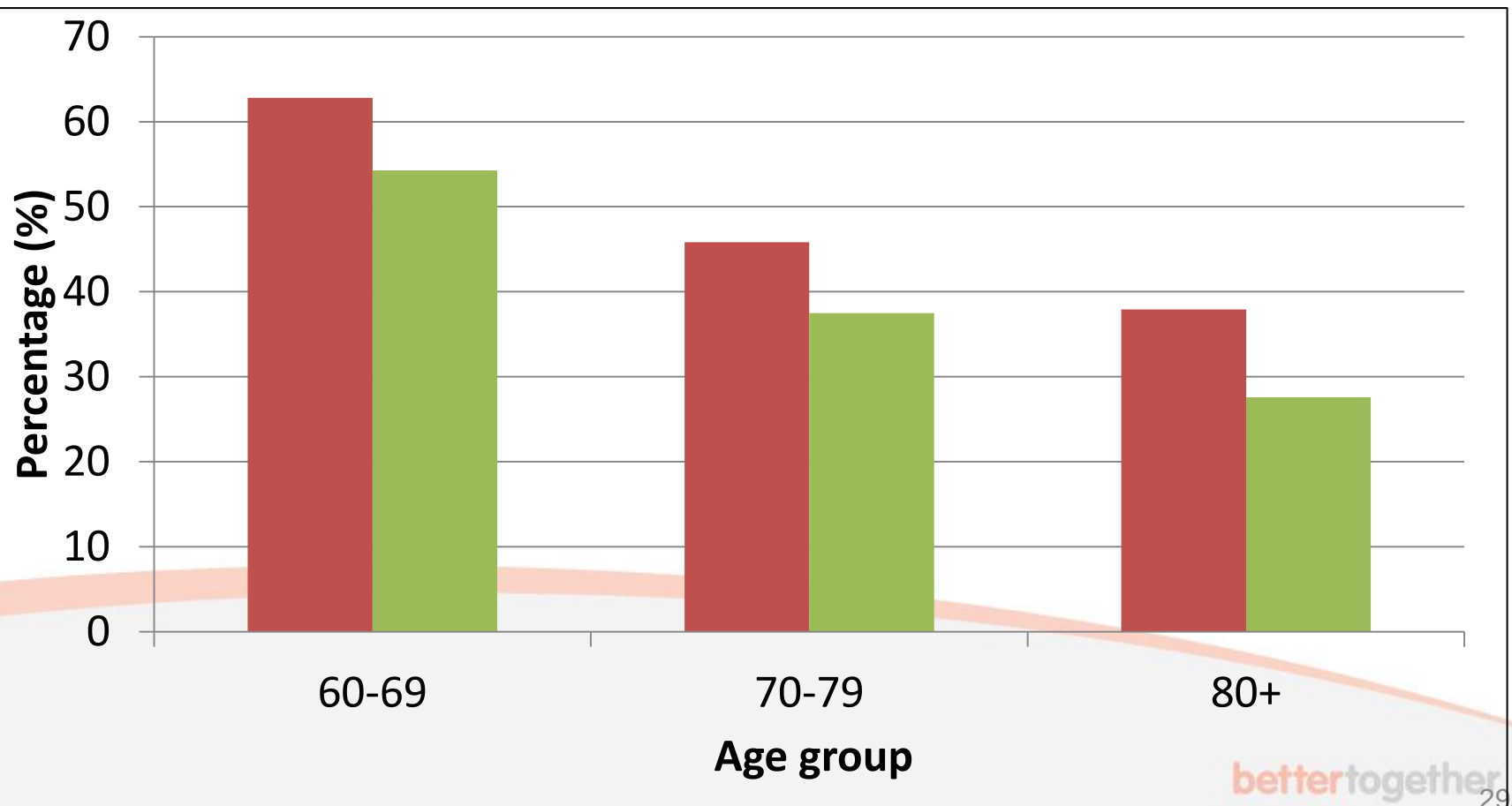


# Perceived 'desocialisation' threats

“If I couldn’t get to places..., although I’ve got a computer, I would stagnate. Because I like the social aspect of things. And I like the different characters you come across and it stimulates your thinking and makes life worthwhile to be able to go out and meet others (Male 70s)”

“People will be able to access things like food and stuff well do their food shopping from home. And I bet everyone will do it...I don’t think I would personally, but I imagine the missus would miss running into people she knew. (Po2)”

# Reported use of internet for banking and shopping by age group



# Motivations for ICT use

- Practical advantage

“I will order stuff on the Internet rather than going to town to buy it, so I don't make that journey and it is just so much simpler on the Internet. Somebody else comes and drives and delivers it to your door (Male 60s).”

- Social connectivity

“My daughters, all four daughters phone me up at least once a week, and we keep in touch...The phone is my link, and if I don't phone them they will phone me. (Male C12)”

# Additional mobility

- “We keep in touch with family, grandson and so on from overseas on Skype, and it keeps the family together, it keeps the family as a unit (M18).”
- “I certainly see more of my grandson because of Skype (Female 60s).”
- “Well we’ve got family in Sussex.... and we talk to them regularly on the phone, internet, Skype and things (Male 70).”

# But ICT solutions can be tried and rejected

“Two of my eldest daughters have said, why don’t you get a computer daddy, a laptop... but you know I’ve already had a computer and I gave it away because I did not see the sense in having it. I said what is wrong with picking up the phone and phoning me, or me phoning you, which we do (Male C12).”



# Importance of potential mobility to wellbeing...

...even though desire is not expressed

- Metz (2000: 150)
  - *“potential travel - knowing that a trip could be made even if not actually undertaken”* is an important element of mobility.
- Davey (2007: 50)
  - the possible need to travel at short notice to respond to family emergencies, or “journeys ‘on a whim’ for pleasure or aesthetic enjoyment”.

# Some unprompted evidence to support the role of potential mobility

I kept my driving licence, there is no reason why I shouldn't.... but I consider that my reflexes aren't good enough for driving, I don't need to drive, she can drive, but I kept my driving licence in case there was an emergency and I had to drive" (Male 80s).

# With the role of public transport newly identified

....it is actually a social thing because you meet up with people and you can sit there and admire the view on the way. It's like being chauffeur-driven on the bus. You can stop for coffee and sandwiches... I haven't done it myself (Male late 60s)

In fact some people go all over the place [by bus] don't they? We don't... but could do (Male late 70s).

# Imaginative mobility

- (Re)creation of semblances of motion in the mind in the absence of actual movement
  - memory, engagement with media, through accessing the experiences of others (who may be co-present or remote);
  - ways in which people extend their senses of connectedness and engagement to life activities that were previously addressed by physical mobility
  - distinct from potential mobility in that the imaginations are not linked to real possibilities for literal mobility

# Example of how imaginative mobility is developed during travel

I suppose most fine days in the evenings I go out on the scooter and go and see what the local farmers are doing...just getting out of the house and keeping an eye on what the local farmers are doing, I see the sheep, see the dairy cows out, I see the barley harvesting and all that sort of thing. I am naturally a farmer anyway.

# Importance of 'dwelling'

We picked here (to live) because of sustainability and access, there is no doubt about that, but the basic goal was to come back to our roots for some unknown reason. I mean I am happy, but it was driven by my wife and not by me (Male M45b)

....you deliberately live in an isolated village because you want the peace and quiet (Male 70s).

I would miss not getting out and about. But look at the view from my garden of the fields. Look at it. If I really couldn't go out again I'd be a lot more better off than other people and other people in urban areas (Po2).

...we hope we can finish our life up here... (Female 60s).

# In some cases linked to a sense of...



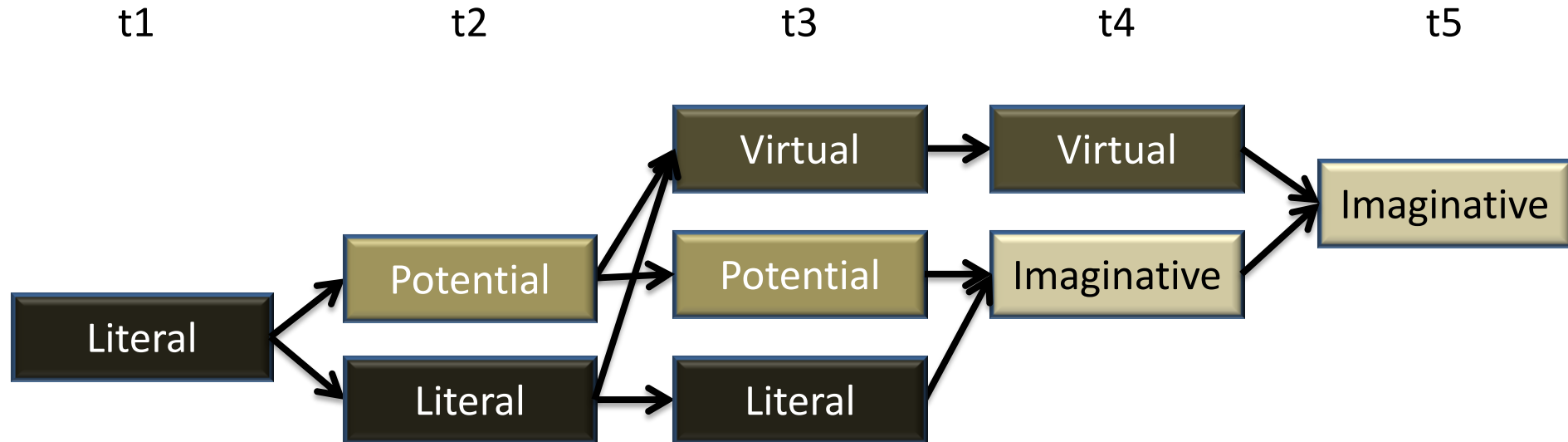
- I don't want to travel. I like it here. I go for walks here and I take my dog for a walk...I love living here (Female P27)
- “As far as I am concerned, I have spent 40 years of my life overseas anyway so **I have no desire to go** to these places or to move around” (Male Dyfed)
- “**We don't go anywhere that far these days** ... I did a lot of travelling when I was working, from South Africa up to all over the place... this is where I lived before I moved out to work overseas”. (Male)

# Natural and social worlds important in experiences

- “....so I'm not worried if I don't get to shopping or the sea because I know that as regards shopping it will be done for me by my lovely neighbours, and the sea is always going to be there” (Male late 70s)
- “look out my window don't you think I am very privileged.... people have got pictures like that hanging on their walls...I sit by here and I see the changing seasons and the sunrise on it....” (Female 80s)
- ...look out my window don't you think I am very privileged.... people have got pictures like that hanging on their walls...I sit by here and I see the changing seasons and the sunrise on it.... (Female 80s).



# Example Sequence of Mobility Transition

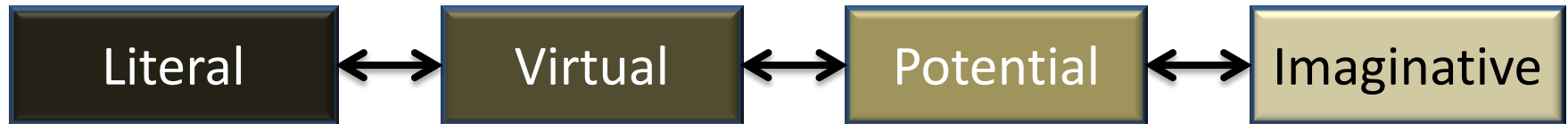


# Questions for future research

- How far will the cohort effect of increased ICT literacy mean virtual mobility enriches/replaces the need for imaginative mobility?
- Will greater virtual mobility place greater emphasis on maintaining literal mobility for connectivity rather than physiological needs?

If I couldn't get to places..., although I've got a computer, I would stagnate. Because I like the social aspect of things. And I like the different characters you come across and it stimulates your thinking and makes life worthwhile to be able to go out and meet others (Male 70s)


# Concluding thoughts...



- Continuum approach better able than traditional approach to reflect:
  - the importance of mobility for social and environmental connectivity
  - how the nature of being ‘mobile’ varies between individuals and across the lifecycle
  - forms of mobility which are not literal
- Avoids the premise that lack of literal mobility is *necessarily* a ‘problem’

# Implications for practice

- Reconfirmed importance of literal and non-literal mobilities for well-being
  - Output measures of physical accessibility only examine specific aspects of well-being
- Importance of a known locality to well-being
  - (suggests relative advantage of relocating for literal mobility efficiency reasons may be overstated)
- Emphasis on ‘good’ (legible, memorable) design of the built environment to enhance imaginative mobility
  - Potential of imaginative mobility as a therapeutic tool

A photograph of a tree-lined road with autumn foliage. The road is paved and has a white crosswalk in the foreground. On either side of the road, there are trees with yellow and orange leaves. There are also road signs on both sides, including a 'No Entry' sign and a 'No Parking' sign. The text 'Thank you! Questions?' is overlaid in red on a semi-transparent grey background.

Thank you! Questions?

Project website

<http://ehealth.chiirup.org.uk/greyandpleasantland/>