

Pävi Naskali, Marjaana Seppänen & Shahnaj Begum (eds.), *Ageing, Wellbeing and Climate Change in the Arctic. An interdisciplinary analysis* (London: Routledge, 2015)

The rationale behind this book is that little has been written and limited sources of information are currently available about ageing, wellbeing and climate change in the Arctic region. The Arctic is defined in political terms, not in terms of geographical, ecological, or climatic criteria. "The region is seen as both a direction and a location; the definition varies according to the describer's position" (2). The editor's also point out that men and women are not affected equally by climate change and there exists a knowledge gap on this issue of the ageing population (4). The book addresses this and explores three important main discussion areas: "first, various political issues that are currently affecting the Arctic, such as the social categorization of elderly people; second, the living conditions of the elderly in relation to Arctic climate change; and third, the wellbeing of elderly people in terms of traditional knowledge and lifestyles" (1).

The book is interdisciplinary contribution to this interesting research area. The interdisciplinary ensemble span the viewpoints of anthropology, gerontology, feminist research and the social, natural and health sciences.

### **Summary of argument and content**

The book's arguments are at least as many as the authors, I will only mention a few. In the first part of the book, seven authors discuss in four chapters position of older people and policies in the Arctic. It is argued that older people have internalized two contradictory and oppressive ageist assumptions; they are constructed as independent citizens on the one hand and as economic burden on the other (4). The primary methods of data collection in part one were: literature review; examination of representations of elderly people in newspapers and the strategies in municipalities; targeted review of national MIPAA (the 2002 Madrid International plan of Action on Ageing) follow-ups, as well as nationwide policy and research reports; planning documents and working papers; registry data and survey data.

In the second part, two authors discuss in two chapters elderly people and climate change. It is argued that environmental changes interact with human health and affect especially gender differences of older people in the changing Arctic (100; 120). Selective and comprehensive literature reviews and content analysis were used in part two.

In the third part of the volume, six authors discuss in three chapters the wellbeing of elderly people. It is argued that it is important for the wellbeing of the elderly that they feel themselves valued and independent members of community (147). And that elderly people can be afraid of expressing their needs because they fear repercussions and wish to be good

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homecare clients (171). In the third part, survey data, qualitative inquires as narrative analysis, life-story approaches and inductive content analysis were used.

In part four, five authors discuss in four chapters local traditions of Arctic communities. It is emphasized the importance of listening sensitively, in ethnographic research, to indigenous people to understand important cultural meanings (184). It is also argued that it is crucial to understand the importance of a person's connection with nature if one is to understand the agency of older people in rural villages (196). The chapter *heritage language* and *traditional knowledge* even challenges the hierarchical idea of the superiority of written language and literacy (213). The primary methods of data collection in part four were interviews and sensitive listening, *co-operative inquiry* in storytelling, fieldwork and participant observation.

### **About the authors**

The three editors are all Finnish researchers: Pävi Naskali is Professor of Women's Studies in the Department of Gender Studies and serves as Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Lapland; Marjaana Seppänen is Professor of Social Work at the University of Helsinki; and Shahnaj Begum is a PhD candidate and researcher at the Unit for Gender Studies in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lapland. The other authors are from Norway, Finland, Canada, Sweden and Scotland, and represent different specialties, such as: Planning and Community Studies; Health Sciences and Social Work; Social Anthropology; Empirical Social Research; Nursing; Social Gerontology; Sociology of Education; Ethnology; Economics; Gender studies; Circumpolar Health and Wellbeing; Epidemiology and Public Health; Sociology; Social Policy; and Statistics.

### **Strengths and weaknesses**

The strengths of the book are the multidisciplinary research presented and the interdisciplinary ensemble spanning the viewpoints of anthropology, gerontology, feminist research and the social, natural and health sciences. The book brings forward the voices of the people living in the Arctic and presents a multidimensional picture of the Arctic by discussing not only the changing climate, but also social and cultural conditions of life of its elderly inhabitants.

The authors point out that old people are not a uniform group, and it is important to note the diversity of the older population in terms of gender, ethnicity, generation, social class and culture. It is also pointed out that public data are often failing in regard to gender differences and social stratification among elderly people. This is in my experience a great

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weakness of the social statistics in general.

## **Conclusion**

The book is made up of a series of articles but the topics are well defined and dealt with thoroughly. The authors take a sensible approach, are critical, and acknowledge that there are no simple solutions to the problems they identify. They provide references for their claims, and these are often illustrated with quotes from subjects interviewed for their research work. As an overview of the topic the book is likely to appeal especially to scholars of climate change, gerontology and social policy, but also to researchers of gender, health and economics. As a university teacher in sociology of health and illness I found the book illuminating and informative for the situation and wellbeing of elderly people in the Arctic. And I think it has much to offer for scholars of other and different specialties too.

I absolutely agree with the editors, that because of the global nature of climate change and the demographic changes analyzed, the results of the studies in the volume will resonate in other peripheral areas in the world.

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