

ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN CLIMATE CHANGE RESEARCH

Ageing, Wellbeing and Climate Change in the Arctic

An interdisciplinary analysis

Edited by
Päivi Naskali, Marjaana Seppänen and
Shahnaj Begum

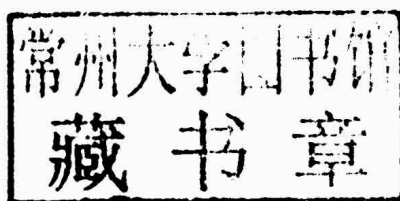
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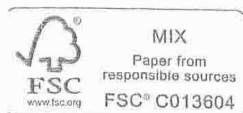
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Ageing, Wellbeing and Climate Change in the Arctic

The Arctic and its unique natural resources have become objects of increasing concern. Rapid climate change and ageing of the population are transforming the living conditions in the region. This translates into an urgent need for information that will contribute to a better understanding of these issues.

Ageing, Wellbeing and Climate Change in the Arctic addresses the important intersection of ageing, wellbeing and climate change in the Arctic region, making a key interdisciplinary contribution to an area of research on which little has been written and limited sources of information are currently available. The book explores three key areas of discussion: first, various political issues that are currently affecting the Arctic, such as the social categorisation 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. The book also features contributions from a number of key researchers in the field who examine a broad range of case studies, including the impact of climate change on health in Lapland and elderly people and geographical mobility in Norway.

This book will be of great interest to scholars of climate change, gerontology and social policy.

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**Ageing, Wellbeing and Climate
Change in the Arctic**

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Introduction

Ageing in the Arctic

*Päivi Naskali, Marjaana Seppänen
and Shahnaj Begum*

The research in this book seeks to contribute to the discussion on ageing populations in the Arctic in the era of climate change. In keeping with the epistemological premises of the work (Tanesini, 1999; Harding, 1998; Ronkainen and Naskali, 2007), place is seen as an important concept, one affirming the situatedness of knowledge. All knowledge is produced in a social and historical situation and it is important to focus on social and environmental circumstances if one is to discern valid knowledge. The articles in this volume represent research done in and on the Arctic. The knowledge produced in the work draws on and analyses the experiences of people living in the region.

The Arctic and its unique natural resources have become objects of increasing concern. Rapid climate change and ageing of the population are transforming the living conditions in the region, for these developments impact the people there in many ways. This translates into an urgent need for information that will contribute to a better understanding of these issues. Moreover, because of the global nature of climate change and the demographic changes analysed here, the results of the studies in the volume will resonate in other peripheral areas in the world.

This book provides an up-to-date introduction to many themes that have been given comparatively little attention in previous research. Its main focus is on the social and political conditions of those living in the Arctic, as well as the wellbeing of the region's increasing elderly population. *First*, the book examines various political considerations that currently affect the Arctic, such as the social categorisation of a group of people as "elderly". The approach taken is intersectional (e.g. McCall, 2005; Christensen and Jensen, 2012), while the focus is on ageing people, we have also taken into account gender and ethnic minorities as social categories (the Sami people in the Nordic countries, the Vepsian people in Russia and the Tornedalen minority in Sweden). *Second*, the book discusses the living conditions of the elderly as these conditions are affected by climate change in the Arctic. *Third*, the book studies the wellbeing of elderly people in terms of traditional knowledge and lifestyles. In studying these themes as it does, the volume constitutes an interdisciplinary ensemble spanning the viewpoints of anthropology, gerontology, feminist research and the social, natural and health sciences.

We define the Arctic not in terms of geographical, ecological, or climatic criteria but in political terms. The region is seen as both a direction and a

location; the definition varies according to the describer's position, so an exact geographical definition is difficult to give. Back in 1979, the Canadian geographer Louis-Edmond Hamelin described the Canadian North as a conceptual as well as a geographical area. In his book *Canadian Nordicity: It's Your North, Too* he launched the term "nordicity" (*nordicité*) meaning the North as a sum of how its physical, cultural and social parts are perceived. Even today, an idea of a particular northernness or nordicity can be found in popular and even political discourses. This idea of the North as a heroic land of freedom and adventure, where people fight against the power of nature, has been part of the mental and imaginary picture of the Arctic (see e.g. Rob Shields, 1991).

Hamelin (1979, p. 6) describes different visions of the Arctic: "The southern vision (the North is a hinterland to be exploited for the benefit of southern Canada) . . . The romanticized vision (wilderness must never be touched) . . . The pessimistic vision (which sees only the problems) and the developmental vision (with natural gas opportunities)". This description of Canada can be extended to the rest of the Arctic area. These representations are still alive in discourses on the Arctic, which has been described mainly from the outside, giving a picture not so recognisable or relevant to the people of the area in their everyday lives. In an attempt to counter these perceptions, the book brings the voices of the people living in the Arctic into current discussions of the region.

According to the idea of *region-building* (Neumann, 1999, pp. 113–117), areas do not naturally form a region but are constituted in and through processes of definition. The Arctic has been constituted during recent decades as a political construction that is discussed continuously on the international level in terms of frontiers, belonging and exclusion. The historical development of the region's political definition led in the 1980s to "The Arctic Eight" – Finland, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Canada, Iceland, Denmark and the USA – being designated official actors in the area (Keskitalo, 2004, pp. 3–7, 45–47). Nevertheless, many descriptions of the Arctic still use environmental, climatic and ecological features. For example, the Arctic Circle (at 66° 33'N) is well known as the limit of the midnight sun and the polar night, and the 10°C July isotherm roughly corresponds to the tree line in most of the Arctic.

Environment- or climate-based definitions create a one-dimensional picture of the Arctic. The region in fact encompasses a wide variety of social life, albeit shaped by the climate and environment. In this volume, we are interested in the everyday life of the people living in the Arctic and its multiple social and cultural communities. We stretch the borders of the region: the knowledge put forward in the chapters pertains to an area stretching from the northernmost communities in Greenland to the Karelian settlements in south-west Russia.

The social conditions of elderly people in the different peripheral areas vary much from one national state to another. In Russia, social services did not become a central part of policy until the beginning of the 1990s. A 1995 law there provides that welfare services are available to those who have no caring relatives (Isola, 2009, p. 11). The Nordic countries and Canada, on the other hand, being defined as modern welfare states, have been described as socially

progressive, liberal and politically advanced. However, even in the Nordic welfare countries gender and ageing have not been a focus of research, although the amount of research on these topics has increased of late. As a part of the sustainable development discourse, the positions of women and indigenous people have been included in the official politics of the Arctic, especially the work of the Arctic Council, a body representing the countries and organisations acting in the area. The region's ageing population is an issue that has rarely been seen on the political agenda.

In recent years, the understanding of age as a phase of life has changed. Research has questioned ageing as a uniform, chronological process and made it possible to consider the complexity of age, differentiating chronological, personal, social and subjective ages (e.g. Laslett, 1996). Within the research on ageing, this book belongs to the critical paradigm, for it seeks to identify the omissions and silences in earlier work, especially those that reveal ethnic and gendered inequalities (see Nikander, 2009, p. 650). The work also sheds light on the inter-relations between ageing persons and their physical-social environments. This relationship influences the ageing process in many different ways, and the outcomes affect the everyday wellbeing of older adults (Wahl and Oswald, 2010). The Arctic creates a unique context in which to grow old. The ageing process in the Arctic is shaped by the region's changing climate as well as its nature, local traditions, social relationships and different forms of support for coping in everyday life. The wellbeing of the elderly is constituted through these multifaceted living conditions. It is these conditions, which may either support or threaten that wellbeing, that are analysed in the chapters of this book.

Wellbeing is a broad concept which can be understood in many ways, although agreement prevails on its multidimensionality (e.g. Vanhoutte, 2014). In recent years, more emphasis has been placed on people's own experiences and evaluations of their wellbeing. These have highlighted the importance of physical and environmental considerations in studying wellbeing. This is visible especially in the case of older adults, who often have long-lasting ties to the place where they live (Seppänen et al., 2012) and who also spend more time in their homes and immediate home environment. This in turn is one reason why the discussion of climate change in the present volume focuses on ageing people in the Arctic; they are presumably a group who is particularly susceptible to the different impacts of climate change.

Climate change is a global issue (Ford and Smit, 2004), and it has significant consequence in the Arctic (Ford et al., 2006, pp. 145–160). The region as a whole experiences numerous pressures resulting from climate change (IPCC, 2012). It is warming at a rate twice as fast as the global average (ACIA, 2005; Young, 2009). Globalisation, the emergence of a market economy and new economic activities – developments sparked by climate change – have caused significant socio-economic, environmental and infrastructural changes in the Arctic. While climate change may benefit the region economically because of easier access to resources, it may also cause devastating environmental consequences. Vulnerability stemming from climate change is not limited to developing countries;

elderly people in a community can be vulnerable in developed countries as well (O'Brien and Leichenko, 2007, pp. 1–2).

The impacts of climate change are likely to vary in both extent and rate of advance even within the Arctic itself (Ford and Smit, 2004). In any case, the changes occurring will affect individuals and groups differently. In this book, we highlight the effects of climate change on individuals and communities, focusing on the elderly in particular. In its Human Development Reports of 2005 and 2007, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) states that climate change exacerbates existing inequalities (O'Brien and Leichenko 2007; Dankelman, 2010, p. 14). In discussing the effects on the Arctic inhabitants, the very recently published Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR, 2015, p. 491) notes that men and women are not affected equally by climate change; yet it does not mention the ageing population and their different context in this regard. Clearly, there exists a knowledge gap on this issue.

We have arranged the book's chapters in four parts. The first part, *Position of older people and policies in the Arctic*, paints a general picture of the issues concerning elderly people's position in neoliberal societies. The research focuses on the inclusive and exclusive processes that construct the possibilities for agency for the elderly in different Arctic countries.

In the first chapter, Joan Harbison asks: *How does ageism undermine older people's human rights and social inclusion?* She examines the implications of ageism, the nature of advocacy for older people's human rights, the present constrained manifestations of older people's agency and the links between all three. She argues that older people have internalised two contradictory and oppressive ageist assumptions. On the one hand, their health and wealth are portrayed as limiting their needs for state welfare; on the other, they are cast as being vulnerable and in need of protection, a characterisation that places restrictions on their rights and freedoms. This leads to older people's dependency on the assistance of others and restricts their agency in working for their human rights.

Representations of the elderly in local politics and media are analysed in the chapter by Seija Keskitalo-Foley and Päivi Naskali, "Tracing gender in political ageing strategies and the press in Finnish Lapland". The researchers investigate the elderly strategies of six municipalities in Finnish Lapland as well as articles in three of the region's leading newspapers in order to determine how elderly people are discussed in the local media. The discourses identified bear out Joan Harbison's claim that elderly people are constructed as independent citizens on the one hand and as an economic burden on the other. The focus of this chapter is on feminist ageing research and the analysis indicates that gender neutrality in political and media discourses plays down the gendered dimensions of elderly people's wellbeing.

Marit Aure and Sindre Myhr retrace the changed picture of elderly people in their chapter, "New moving patterns among middle-aged and elderly people in Norway". They ask if elderly people are more mobile than in previous generations and, if so, how increased mobility may affect their lives and the societies in which they live. The analysis is differentiated with regard to gender, educational level

and age, and the findings are compared to those for other age groups. According to the analysis, family-related motives for moving play a more central role for elderly people than for others, who stress work, family, housing and place/environment.

In the chapter "Policies of Arctic countries to promote volunteering in old age", Anastasia Emelyanova and Arja Rautio focus on the inclusion of older people through volunteering. It is argued that participation in voluntary work benefits the community and has positive effects on the wellbeing of older adults. The authors analyse governmental and research publications in eight Arctic states in order to identify practices and challenges in facilitating volunteering. They find that better funding of voluntary sector organisations and public recognition and promotion of interests for volunteering are important challenges for national policies in the Arctic.

The second part of the volume, titled *Elderly people and climate change*, focuses on analyses of climate change as a crucial phenomenon in the Arctic and on its specific implications for the living conditions of old people in the region.

In her chapter "Climate change in Lapland and its role in the health of the elderly and rural populations", Barbara Schumann analyses the interaction of environmental changes and human life, especially health. Her emphasis is on the Sami population living in Nordic Lapland and a particularly vulnerable group, the elderly, whose access to health care is limited because of the long distances. She argues that this makes it difficult for these communities to adapt to adverse impacts of climate change amid demographic, economic and social change.

In the chapter "Gender differences of older people in the changing Arctic", Shahnaj Begum reviews scientific articles and other literature from central databases in order to analyse the current knowledge on how climate change might affect the living conditions of elderly people. She studies how the gender dimension manifests itself among elderly men and women (including indigenous elders) as the Arctic comes to grips with climate change. The chapter also shows how the anticipated differences stem from inequality between the genders. She places a particular focus on the gendered differences in vulnerability among indigenous and other elderly persons.

The third part of the book is titled *Wellbeing of elderly people*. The first chapter, by Elina Vaara, Ilkka Haapola, Marjaana Seppänen and Antti Karisto, asks the fundamental question: "What is wellbeing for the elderly?" The research is based on the premise that the perceived content of wellbeing may vary; there may be systematic differences in assessments during the life course between men and women and among citizens living in urban and rural areas. When wellbeing is defined as a subjective experience, the knowledge people have about their own situation needs to be considered. Experience is always contextual and complex and sensitive to cultural and individual interpretations. The chapter addresses these issues by analysing how elderly persons emphasise the significance of various aspects of life.

In her chapter "Elderly Sami and quality of life: creative strategies applied by the elderly within a Swedish Sami context", Marianne Liliequist examines the

position of elderly Swedish Sami who focus their agency on achieving quality of life. She discusses the negotiations between intersectional differences such as ethnicity, gender and social class. Two dominant creative strategies are identified for inclusion of the elderly and helping them feel that they are valued and independent members of the community: encouraging them to participate actively in reindeer herding for as long as possible and highlighting their role as creators of the Sami identity for the younger generation.

Health and care are the focus of the next chapter, "Elderly homecare recipients' experiences of homecare: Client centered or not?", written by Eija Jumisko. The context of her research is homecare in northern Finland. Ms Jumisko claims that elderly people's experiences do not bear out the value of a client-centred care approach in social and health policy. The elderly people studied were afraid of expressing their needs because they feared repercussions and wish to be good clients. Ms Jumisko calls for a more clearly articulated elderly-driven approach in homecare and more reflective practices in the communication and interaction of those delivering care and giving support to elderly people.

Part four of the volume, *Local traditions of Arctic communities*, consists of four chapters that illuminate the cultural diversity of the Nordic and Russian Arctic. The studies examine elderly people's living conditions in different local communities, each of which has its distinctive ethnic and gendered structures.

"Wanting Greenlandic food": A story of food, health, and illness in the life of an elderly Greenlandic woman", a chapter by Trine Kvitberg and Rune Flikke, concerns the right of elderly people to traditional food. As in Eija Jumisko's chapter, the focus in this text is on researchers having a serious desire to listen to the experiences of older people and not confining themselves to official guidelines and principles. The chapter emphasises the importance of listening sensitively to indigenous women in ethnographic research. In this case, the approach required a capacity to pay attention to body language in order to get knowledge on the meaning of traditional food for indigenous elderly people.

In "'Our forest': Ageing, agency and 'connection with nature' in rural Tornedalen, northern Sweden", Tarja Tapio analyses the life of another Swedish ethnic group, the *Meänkieli*-speaking national minority. Her specific interest is the possibility of the members of the minority to live lives centred on traditional activities, lives allowing them to retain ownership of their lifestyle and have freedom for agency. Ms Tapio argues 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.

Laura Siragusa's chapter goes on to examine a population that has not been a focus of research in the North, the Vepsian people. In her chapter "Towards a broader inclusion of *heritage language* and *traditional knowledge* in the Vepsian revival movement: Cultural, ideological and economic issues", Ms Siragusa focuses on the traditional knowledge of Vepsian elderly who still speak their severely endangered language. This spoken heritage language, as Ms Siragusa calls it, constructs a world that is related not only to human but also non-human beings. The chapter challenges the hierarchical idea of the superiority of written language and literacy, a notion seen as marginalising the inhabitants of this territory.