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Editors

Old Age in Europe

A Textbook of Gerontology

 Springer

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Foreword

Everybody knows that the world is ageing, but Europe got there first (along with Japan). Therefore Europe has much to show the world, as well as itself, about the ageing process. This textbook sets out to do that and it will be a valuable source of reference for students of gerontology across the globe. The disciplinary approach provides easy access to the key dimensions of ageing which the editors knit together in their opening and concluding chapters.

Like the first such survey of ageing in Europe (Walker and Maltby 1997) this book's central message is one of heterogeneity. This 'unequal ageing' takes two forms. First, there are huge differences in the experience of ageing between European countries, on both the north/south and east/west axes. At their bluntest these differences are revealed in the very expectation of life. For example healthy life expectancy at age 65 is 3 years for both men and women in Estonia compared to 13 years for women and 14 for men in Denmark. Second, there are inequalities within countries with regard to life expectancy, healthy life expectancy and a wide range of indicators of economic, social and psychological well-being. These inequalities are created by social and economic forces, not biological ones, and are commonly expressed in terms of gender, age, social class, race and ethnicity (Cann and Dean 2009). For example in all European countries women are more likely than men to be poor in old age and in some countries, much more likely.

Thus, as this book demonstrates, we cannot understand the meaning of ageing in Europe without confronting unequal ageing. In practical policy terms this means that simplistic, one size fits all, approaches are likely to fail. Instead more sophisticated policy instruments are needed to recognise and then prevent or ameliorate inequalities. At the European level key policy goals, such as active ageing, have to be tailored to reflect the differences between and within countries in the experience of ageing. Only then can we claim to have a truly inclusive approach.

This book will help in that endeavour, by drawing on the best current scientific evidence and using it to illustrate the meaning and importance of ageing for Europe and its citizens.

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Preface

Europe is currently the oldest continent of the world and it is still ageing. For us as gerontologists, this fact seems obvious and it guides many of our considerations. It also is at the forefront of our minds when we talk to people working in other scientific disciplines. In our experience, population ageing is a fact found entrance into the discourses of many disciplines. How it is discussed, however, differs across disciplines. Every time we talk about population ageing with people working in a different discipline, we learn something new. New perspectives and new angles open themselves up to us. We want to share this experience and, therefore, devised this book.

With this book, we also tried to tell the European narrative about ageing. In previous collaborations and during previous research visits, we realized that the narrative of ageing differs across countries and continents. This does not only concern the number, situation, and perception of older people—it also concerns how ageing is scientifically explained and explored. The same phenomenon might be interpreted in different ways by scholars from different countries. We found this fact striking, especially because many introductory books on gerontology are written by American authors, targeting a U.S. audience. While those books can provide European readers with a basic understanding of the situation of older people, they cannot paint a concise picture of the situation in Europe today. We, therefore, decided to put this volume together, which explicitly portrays the situation and discourse in Europe.

In conceptualizing this book, we were able to draw on the expertise gained in the “European Masters Programme in Gerontology” (EuMaG). EuMaG has been developed and delivered by a core network of 5 universities, and lecturers from more than 20 European universities were involved in teaching. Its curriculum is multidisciplinary with a strong emphasis on international comparison. The programme was coordinated by the Department of Sociology at VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands, where the first editor used to work, and the second still does, and it has been managed by Marja Aartsen for many years. Several contributing authors in this book have also been involved with the EUMAG programme.

To round things off, we would like to thank a number of people. First, we thank all the contributors for their excellent and hard work on the book. It was a great pleasure to work with a multidisciplinary team of European experts and we learned a lot from the different contributions. Second, we thank the students and teachers in the EuMaG programme, who inspired this book and helped to shape it. Finally, we would like to thank the participants of the SHARE user conference in Venice, Italy, in June 2012, who agreed to a spontaneous focus group that clarified some questions about the final structure of this book.

Kathrin Komp
Marja Aartsen

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Abbreviations

AAL	Ambient Assisted Living
EC	European Commission
ES	Elective Selection
EU	European Union
EUROFAMCARE	Services for Supporting Family Carers of Elderly People in Europe: Characteristics, Coverage and Usage
fQOL	Functional Quality of Life
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPS	Global Positioning System
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ISSA	International Social Security Agency
LS	Loss-based Selection
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
oQOL	Objective Quality of Life
PPP	Purchasing Power Parities
QOL	Quality of Life
SEIQoL-DW	Schedule of Evaluation of Individual Quality of Life— Direct Weighting
SHARE	Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe
SOC	Selective Optimization with Compensation
sQOL	Subjective Quality of Life
SST	Socio-emotional Selectivity Theory
SWLS	Satisfaction with Life Scale
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization