

Older Person's Inclusion in the Arctic: An Assessment Based on Scientific Work of Arctic Change Network / Changes in Arctic Communities

Shahnaj Begum* & Päivi Naskali**

This assessment is based on the idea and the output of "The Arctic Change and Elderly Exclusion: A Gender based perspective" project which was funded by the *Nordic council of Ministers* (2012-2015), and hosted by the Unit of Gender Studies at the University of Lapland. This project was led by Prof. Päivi Naskali, and coordinated by researcher Shahnaj Begum. The contributors of this project are the members of "*Arctic change network*" who have multidisciplinary research background. Research scholars were from seven countries: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Russia, Italy, Germany and Canada. In this project, the network examined ageing, wellbeing and climate change in the Arctic. A notable outcome of that collaboration is a text edited by the Finnish principals which is already published by Routledge

series and shortly presented in the below assessment. The network has already demonstrated a strong foundation for ongoing collaborative productivity.

Introduction

In the Arctic, older people's well-being is connected very much with a pristine living environment. The findings of our previous study demonstrated that changes in climate and "... the living environment ... are strongly interwoven in past and present lives of people in the Arctic" (Naskali et al., 2016, p. 248). Not only the physical environment but also the social environment is changing as the population ages. As the older people form an increasing part of the population, their inclusions in decision-making process should be ensured in order to strengthen the impact of ageing people in the Arctic. Our intention is, therefore, to offer them possibilities to feel valued. Older people's inclusion is problematic in the Arctic for several reasons. For instance, direct and indirect impact of climate change has negatively affected the ageing population in the Arctic. For this reason, we wanted to show how elderly exclusion is increasing in the Arctic. How it is possible to reduce exclusion and how we can promote inclusion? We therefore have

* Researcher at the Unit for Gender Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Lapland, e-mail: shahnaj.begum@ulapland.fi.

** Professor at the Unit for Gender Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Lapland, e-mail: paivi.naskali@ulapland.fi.

highlighted on how, through inclusion, we can promote older peoples' well-being.

In this study, we suggest that in the Arctic, there is need to develop ways of recognition the resources the older people have: the older people's voice and the traditional knowledge that need to be heard better than it is heard in contemporary society, and how their knowledge should be used. In this context, it has to be noted that a significant number of indigenous peoples of the region holds traditional knowledge on various issues, in particular the older people are the main actors to transmit this knowledge to the next generations.

The aim of this short assessment is to strengthen the inclusion of ageing population in the Arctic region. Hence, the objectives of the "*Arctic Change*" project was to identify the specific challenges the ageing people face in the Arctic region that cause exclusion. We wanted to explore how the concept of inclusion takes place in regard to the older people in the Arctic context and how multiple dimensions play a role in exclusion. We promoted the rights of the older people. We also aimed to create an opportunity for the older people to produce knowledge about the drivers of exclusion they experience, and to use their knowledge in the promotion of social wellbeing.

Why elderly exclusion's conceptualization is important in the Arctic?

In general, social exclusion is considered as social marginalization. In this short assessment, the term "inclusion" is understood as opposed to the term "exclusion", which brings phenomenon with multiple dimensions (Scharf & Keating 2012), and also a process where different drivers can be identified. Thus "social exclusion" refers "...to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society" (Walker & Walker 1997). "Social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live" (Hilary, 2007, p. 15). Henceforth, social exclusion is the process in which individuals or groups are disadvantaged from various rights, resources and opportunities. Those opportunities are normally available to members of a different group. Social inclusion is a positive action to change the situations that lead to social exclusion. Inclusion is a process that improves the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people in society (World Bank, 2013).

Elderly exclusion and inclusion in the Arctic

The increase of the older people in the northern parts of Arctic countries is more than that of the general increase of population in these countries. Social exclusion has other causes than poverty: especially living in an unsafe environment cause also social exclusion (Nordic council of Ministers, report p. 25, 2009). Old people meet problems that are poorly recognized, e.g. problems with mental health have not been sufficiently understood, lack of proper care services in remote areas, loneliness and detachment from family members.

There is an urgent need for strengthening the conditions, which prevent exclusion and promote older peoples' inclusion in the society. Exclusion is a multidimensional phenomenon, and a central perspective to it is question of active citizenship. Being able to be a part of society and act as a fully competent citizen is self-evident right to working-age population, but when growing older many restrictions occur. Knowledge concerning the living conditions of the older people is needed for tackling the problem of exclusion. It is important to gain more knowledge from older people themselves about the special features in exclusion of the older people. To reduce exclusion, it is important for the Nordic countries to co-operate with the adjacent areas in forums that support sustainable development in the northern regions.

This assessment builds on the findings and conclusions of recent interdisciplinary work by the same network of experts who authored the book entitled *"Ageing, Wellbeing and Climate Change in the Arctic: An interdisciplinary analysis"*, published by Routledge in the year 2016. The book was prepared by 20 researchers into the following three main themes in which we intended to illuminate the exclusion and inclusion of older people in the Arctic. The themes are briefly described below.

The authors of the Part I discussed on *"Position of older people and policies in the Arctic"*. Anastasia Emelyanova and Arja Rautio stated in their chapter that the population aging is a mega-force changing a demographic face of the Arctic, though fairly under researched within the science and not given enough policy attention within the circumpolar localities. An issue of societal exclusion and a level of empowerment and protection of senior people living in the Arctic is a specific theme asking for research analysis. Such 'exclusion vs. inclusion' focus is needed in order to understand how regional policy can optimize older peoples' participation in the community they belong to. If this diverse age group is prevented from being excluded from the public activities, the elderly people will benefit from national development to a full extent.

Joan Harbison stated that there is general lack of attention to the rights of people in later life. Within a context of ongoing globalization, author argues that contradictory ageist assumptions underpin current constructions of older people: on the one hand their health and wealth are portrayed as limiting their needs for state welfare, on the other they are cast as vulnerable, and in need of protection, which places restrictions on their rights and freedoms. Both these oppressive assumptions are internalized by older people. Together they remove older people's incentive to challenge the larger social structures on behalf of their own human rights. Feminist authors Seija Keskitalo-Foley and Päivi Naskali emphasizes that ageing is a strongly gendered issue but most of the research, politics and public discussions bypass the issues concerning gender or sexuality.

Authors Marit Aure and Sindre Myhr have pronounced that life quality among older people is related to where they live: the distance to family and relatives influences their social contact, the provision of help they may receive from relatives, and their ability to assist family members. These changes and the increased mobility generally have raised the question of whether elderly people are more mobile than previous generations and how this increased mobility may affect their life and societies that show the picture of exclusion and inclusion.

In Part II "*Elderly People and climate change*", authors (Barbara Schumann and Shahnaj Begum) claimed that because of climate change and other anthropogenic changes, Arctic population faces a huge transformation, one posing challenges to its society, economy, culture, environment and infrastructure. Climate change is also likely to affect human health. Increased temperatures might facilitate the spread of infectious diseases and warmer winter temperatures might reduce the burden of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. Older people are particularly affected by these challenges. Differences in gender roles among this age group suggest that the changes in the Arctic will impact men and women differently. They referred to a number of studies showing that elderly women are disproportionately vulnerable to climate change. Access to health care is limited in sparsely populated regions such as Lapland, making it more difficult for its communities to adapt to adverse impacts of climate change in the context of demographic, economic and social changes.

In Part III – "*Wellbeing of elderly people*" authors Elina Vaara, Ilkka Haapola, Marjaana Seppänen and Antti Karisto specified that the perceived content of well-being may vary; there may be systematic differences in assessments during life course, between men and women, and citizens living in urban areas and those living in countryside. When well-being is defined

as a subjective experience, the knowledge people have about their own situation needs to be considered. Experience is always contextual and complex, sensitive to cultural and individual interpretations. Well-being is not a steady state but a process of shifts. They claimed that individual's definitions of a good life varied based on his or her lived experiences, relationship with nature, an enabling home and neighbourhood, social and physical surroundings.

Author Eija Jumisko mentioned in her chapter that in social and health policy, homecare is directly connected with inclusion of older people. Findings show that communication and interaction skills are crucial components of client-centered care, but are not all of it. Older people are cautious at some aspects about criticizing current care as they looked back at the history of old people care.

Author Marianne Liliequist stressed on the well-being of the older Sami people. The reindeer herding constitutes a lifestyle that symbolizes the good in life for everyone in the Sami village. She has discovered two things that are highlighted by the older Sami who still live among their relatives in the Sami village, is to be active in the reindeer herding as long as possible and also for the older Sami who lives outside of the reindeer herding, is to mount the role as a creator of Sami identity for the younger generation.

In Part IV– “*Local traditions of Arctic communities*” author Trine Kvitberg and Rune Flikke, have identified that Arctic change has impact on Greenlandic indigenous women's health and illness experiences. Author Tarja Tapio has emphasized on nature, freedom and willingness to live the rest of one's life in that particular village in Tornedalen, North Sweden. These were repeatedly presented as interconnected, and illustrated along the lines of particular relationship in connection with nature, which do establish an agency for older people. Author Laura Siragusa has emphasized on the importance of nature and the ability to relate to the world as a way to engage with human and non-human beings among the Vepsian people that heritage language and traditional knowledge are connected to exclusion and inclusion of older people. For her, this relationship provides an experience of feelings and emotions, and know how to engage with the rural environment in which the elderly traditionally live. Author Mona Kiil stated that traditional healing practices among Northern Troms (Northern Norway) are part of a longstanding local knowledge tradition consisting of traditional healers and networks of care that aim at preventing or treating illness or crisis.

Conclusions and identified benefits for Arctic region

This assessment attaches a great importance to environmental issues and challenges, and enhances the need for international co-operation amongst the Arctic countries. Such a need is already increasingly becoming evident and important in a globalised world. One of the findings of this study suggests that the diversity within and between older groups of Arctic population is little recognized and that their voices are infrequently sought or heard. Our findings also suggest that climate change motivated factors provide an important consequence – the region's older people greatly suffer from multifaceted changes including social, cultural, environmental, and economic. Older people's agency becomes confined within parameters that are provided for them by more powerful actors in mainstream structures. There is need to assist older people to restore their agency, human rights, and ultimately social inclusion. Loss of agency challenges active ageing. Active ageing refers to the opportunity for the ageing population to keep playing an active role in society and live as healthy and fulfilling lives as possible. We conceive the idea that older people are active citizens with extensive knowledge of their particular living conditions.

There is a need to promote a broader understanding in this regard. In the Arctic region, the question is very

topical. Since the aging population in the region is on the rise, it is extremely important to find methods to encourage the older people to express themselves and to find ways to pass the information to the central actors responsible for local development in municipal and regional levels. An important element and anticipated outcome of this assessment therefore further seeks to develop new ways to access and understand older Arctic people's subjective experiences of wellbeing in relation to broadly conceived opportunities for meeting their social needs.

The importance of the assessment thus lies in the attainment of new knowledge developed on the needs of these older people and about the reality of the older members of diverse and isolated communities in the context of changing Arctic. In this assessment, we treated human rights as one of the central issues to consider eligibility for inclusion. While we have identified a number of challenges facing the older people (Naskali et al., 2016), we however believe that it is essential to conduct follow-up investigation concerning the method to promote inclusion. While for older people, in order to ensure social inclusion, a policy concerning the promotion of active aging is required, the lack of knowledge, and policy framework, from local, regional and national levels hinder the process.

Arctic change has already formed an argument about the need for new ways

of thinking about wellbeing. The social, political and environmental issues will create awareness among the people. If we are thinking to enhance sustainability without having our wellbeing threatened, we need to find out novel, innovative solutions. This assessment will effect, and give an incentive to balance, the regional development tools for education, social policy and social welfare system. In particular, it is important to note that the knowledge of older people has been powerful forces in social development, which can be enhanced by encouraging, and channelling through, the smooth flow of ideas, best practices, people, knowledge, values and culture across borders. Initiatives taken by the networks will surely promote further cross border research, education and development works.

The knowledge gathered by *Arctic change network* will lead towards undertaking the growing social problems of ageing population as well as environmental problems. It addresses several threats or obstacles causing hindrance for inclusion, and also health related problems with a strong need of sustainable environmental development in the project region. The regional stakeholders need more knowledge on the perspective of the ageing population and ways to support their inclusion. By highlighting the information on ageing population, their exclusion and drivers of exclusion, the regional population will be benefited from increased

expertise in these areas in the long term. The produced knowledge will contribute to social development across borders. It will also lead to develop well trained professionals and researchers. In this way, the region will be benefited from improved skills in these areas. Educational and social institutions should get opportunities to strengthen cross-border relations and build strong network through disseminating common materials regarding ageing and environmental issues for social and economic development. It offers older people who live in the Arctic region with possibility to develop new ways to produce, interact, and communicate knowledge experiences about their living conditions.

References:

- Nordic Council of Ministers. (2009) "Gender and Climate Change". Copenhagen, p.10; ANP: 765; ISBN 978-92-893-1953-9.
- Walker, Alan. & Walker, Carol. eds. (1997) *Britain Divided: The Growth of Social Exclusion in the 1980s and 1990s*. London: Child Poverty Action Group.
- Naskali, Päivi., Seppänen, Marjaana. & Begum, Shahnaj. (2016) (eds.). *Ageing, Wellbeing and Climate Change in the Arctic: An interdisciplinary analysis*. Routledge – Earthscan.
- Scharf, Thomas and Keating, Norah. (2012) *Social exclusion in later life: a*

global challenge. In Thomas Scharf & Norah Keating (eds.) *From Exclusion to Inclusion in Old Age. A global challenge*. Bristol: Policy Press, 1-16.

World Bank. (2013) *Inclusion Matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Hilary, Silver. (2007). *Social Exclusion: Comparative Analysis of Europe and Middle East Youth*, Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper (September 2007), p.15.

