

# 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.

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Old Age In Europe

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