

Reviews

Tony Carter and Peter Beresford, *Age and Change: Models of Involvement for Older People*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, 2000, 46 pp., £6.00 pbk, ISBN 1 902633 81 4.

In the context of the current interest in democratic renewal, this volume makes a timely contribution to debates on how older people can be engaged, not only as service users but also as citizens, to inform and influence decisions which affect all aspects of their lives. The aim of the report is twofold. First, it has been produced as a brief guide to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Older People's Steering Group as a basis for further work and discussion. Secondly, it is designed to be of wider use to older people and their organisations seeking to increase their say and involvement.

The section 'Models and forms of involvement', the main focus of the report, provides a useful overview of the range of approaches to older people's participation, and helps the reader distinguish between the different terms that are used to characterise these (*e.g.* forums, user panels, networks, etc.). The authors stress that there is no 'right way' to be involved, the list of models is not exhaustive and that many of them overlap. Nevertheless, the rather formulaic guide to ten forms of participation, together with their perceived strengths and weaknesses, is presented to enable the reader 'to choose the approach that best suits their requirements', the ultimate aim of the book.

The earlier section of the book 'Setting the scene' is more useful in raising questions about the process of involvement. Here issues such as 'Being clear about involvement' (pro-active and responsive participation) and 'Key components for involvement' (access and support) are discussed to enable readers to think through the aims of participation, who controls it and issues of inclusion. However, there is still an underlying assumption that the purpose of thinking through these questions is to inform a choice between the different models.

What is not acknowledged in this essentially structural analysis is that the difference within each model, in terms of effectiveness and inclusiveness, can vary as much as between models. Our evaluation of *Better Government for Older People* (Hayden and Boaz 2000) illustrates that these outcomes can depend on the particular practice of any older people's organisation, and the co-determined 'terms of engagement' with government and other agencies, as much as on which model is chosen.

Effective influence over government decisions and local community facilities increasingly means that older people's organisations will need to work in partnership with a number of different voluntary and statutory agencies. This new paradigm of networked governance is far more complex than relationships implied by the traditional distinction between agency-led consultation and older people-led campaigning that underlies Carter and Beresford's guide. Older people will find themselves needing to address important but difficult

questions around how their organisations can maintain their integrity and independence while at the same time participating fully in inter-agency problem decision-making and activities.

The construct of ‘models’ also means that issues of inclusion, whilst raised and acknowledged as needing further work and consideration, cannot be adequately explored in the report. The under-representation of women and minority ethnic elders in older people’s organisations is seen as needing to be addressed by increasing efforts to attract individuals from these groups, rather than looking at how the practice of the organisations might need to change for them to become more inclusive. For example, it seems to be taken for granted that ‘positions of power’ in pensioners groups need to be filled with people with ‘considerable organisational experience and a robust attitude to authority’ to explain why they have been filled by men, often with a trade union background. The ageing of second wave feminists is seen as potentially improving this gender imbalance through increasing the number of older women with the requisite skills, rather than enabling the more far-reaching contribution of developing a more creative, less hierarchical organisational practice.

As argued in Thornton (2000), a companion volume from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, we need to know more about which methods of involvement different groups of older people prefer for various purposes. These are likely to include forms of creative participation such as drama and letter-writing groups (used in the Newcastle and Coventry *Better Government for Older People* pilots respectively) as well as ‘meeting based’ forums. We also need to know more about how best older people can organise for positive results for themselves and on what they want to influence.

Notwithstanding these limitations, Carter and Beresford’s report makes interesting reading for older people and others working with them, who want to effect change. It will be best used as a background ‘starter pack’ to facilitate discussion around the questions it raises as well as on the issues it explicitly addresses.

References

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John van Willigen and Narender K. Chadha, *Social Ageing in a Delhi Neighbourhood*, Bergin and Garvey, Westport, Connecticut, 1999, 161 pp., hbk, ISBN 0 89789 675 0.

The authors state that the aim of this book is to piece together a theory of ageing that helps express what they have learned in the process of undertaking research in India. Overall I did not feel that this aim was achieved. Up to the

present date much of the gerontological research carried out in India has been exploratory rather than theoretical, and it was disappointing to find that this book replicates this.

The first two chapters set the scene for the book. Chapter 1 informs the reader that a lifecourse perspective will be adopted and the second chapter describes the political economy, cultural institutions and community in India. The project is conducted in a neighbourhood in Delhi but the authors fail to explain how representative this neighbourhood may be of India as a whole. Replicating many South Asian study populations, this project focuses on middle class urban Indians and several concepts were used that I felt were not relevant to the majority in India. In the political economy section the notion of 'retirement' was one such example. In the Indian context 'retirement' may only be applicable to upper middle class men. Although the authors state that Indian people retire with very little financial security other than that provided by the family, the extent to which financial constraints exist for older people elsewhere in the country is understated. The chapter improved with the description of *ashrama* (the four-state ideal life) which was expertly illustrated. This is particularly important in the practices that an older person may engage in prior to death. Van Willigen and Chadha are careful to ensure that the reader is able to comprehend *ashrama* in terms of the disengagement model of ageing. The chapter continues with a dry summary of research literature in India in which the authors fail consistently to discuss the geographical location of the studies, the gender and age distribution of respondents. The reader is left in some doubt as to the relevance of the findings that are reported.

Chapter 3, which describes the study population and methodology, raises some concerns. During the course of the book, I frequently wondered about the quality of the data collected from female respondents as all the interviews were conducted by men. Methodological issues aside, Chapter 4 describes the neighbourhood within which the study was undertaken. I felt that this chapter provided the most interesting material in the book. The authors describe Ran Pratap Bagh (the study neighbourhood in Delhi), sources of employment, housing, health and health services, older people's activities and daily schedules. One major disappointment was the quality of the photographs that were used to illustrate the chapter. In Chapter 2 the authors drew the reader's attention to *ashrama* and in this chapter this is extended. However, the reader is not given enough detail to form an opinion about the importance of *vana-prasthra* and *sannyasa* (the last two stages of life) in the process of withdrawal of some older people from social interaction.

In Chapter 5 the authors note that there are two conflicting pictures of ageing in India in the familial context: (i) the joint family is strong and old people are cared for within the family, and (ii) the joint family is disintegrating. The endurance of these contrasting images is evidence of the lack of empirical research on the ageing process in India. However the authors try to support or reject these notions by reporting on studies which look at co-resident households. I would argue that the existence of co-residence households does not give us an idea of the quality of intergenerational relations and therefore tells us very little about the strength of the joint family. Here one encounters a problem of definition. Are the authors talking about *nuclear families* or *nuclear households*? Do nuclear households necessarily imply that the joint family is

disintegrating? The authors themselves point to instances where families live proximally close and provide emotional and functional help, without sharing a household. The division of household type into nuclear, lineal joint and collateral joint does nothing to clarify where the strengths and weaknesses in relationships may lie in the different forms of household composition.

Chapter 6 looks at network composition and the activities that older people engage in outside family activities. Once again little attention is paid to the quality of these extra-familial relationships. Although the book describes its aims as setting social ageing in a lifecourse perspective, the likelihood of network shrinkage in this age group is not discussed, for example through attrition due to death of peers. In addition, the authors state that people's average network size would only be affected if there were some instrumental reason, such as increasing frailty or lack of economic resources, that decrease the opportunities for social engagement. This precludes the notion that there may be people whose preferred lifestyle consists of a lifelong adaptation to isolation and independence and the influence of *ashrama* on social engagement.

Disappointingly, the book concludes with a comparative analysis of social ageing in a Kentucky sample of older people and in the Indian sample. This seems to add little to the interpretation of the data that have already been presented. I would rather have been given some idea of how the authors interpreted the data in terms of their generalisability to other areas in India.

Overall *Ageing in a Delhi Neighbourhood* provides some useful baseline data. However, with the description of social ageing there needs to be some quantification of the quality of relationships. Counting encounters and numbers of people co-residing in a household tells us little about the nature of relationships of older people in India. Given the attention paid to the importance of religious beliefs elsewhere in the book, I would have expected the correlation between life satisfaction and religiosity to be tested. Without this information the conclusion that an association exists between social engagement and high life satisfaction is incomplete. There seems to be a certain amount of danger in suggesting that social workers may assess risk factors in the ageing process by counting the number of persons within a network. One is almost left with the vision of a zealous social worker trying to encourage social engagement for an older person who has chosen to pursue *sannyasa*.

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Thomas Scharf, *Ageing and Ageing Policy in Germany*, Berg, Oxford,
1998, 218 pp., hbk, ISBN 1 85973 191 0.

Everyone who has spent a long time period in a foreign country has experienced the phenomenon of returning home with a fresh look at one's own culture. Traditions and institutions previously taken for granted become

questionable, and the national situation is seen from a different perspective. A comparable experience might result if a scientist from another country were to analyse one's own culture and write a book about his or her studies. Such is the case with *Ageing and Ageing Policy in Germany* by Thomas Scharf – a book written with excellent scholarship, concise criticism, and a great deal of basic sympathy, which is not only a pleasure to read, but should be necessary reading for scientists and politicians interested in contemporary German social policy.

The book's seven chapters cover classical areas of social gerontology. After an introduction on the changing demographic structure of the German population and a short discussion of the often emotionally laden debate about *Überalterung* (over-ageing) and *Alterslast* (burden of the elderly), the second chapter presents the history of German social policies from the 1880s (Bismarck) to the 1990s (Köhl), describing also the culpable involvement of social policy in National Socialism. Scharf analyses clear-sighted multiple intentions of political decisions, like the introduction of the Pension Reform Law in 1957 which not only improved tremendously the economic situation of German elderly people, but also led to a triumphant victory of Adenauer's then ruling Christian Democratic Union. The third chapter is devoted to the financial situation of older people. Although Scharf concedes that the majority of German elderly people are well-off for the time being, he questions the contributory principle, the basic principle of the German pension system. Social insurance in Germany is based upon the contribution of employees, not on direct taxation. Hence, the system favours full-time, uninterrupted (mostly male) employment, works to the disadvantage of women and/or people with irregular career patterns, and contributes to growing income inequalities in old age. However, the poverty rates of elderly people in Germany are well below the average poverty rates of the total population (and especially lower than those of children and youth). But, income is only one aspect of the life situation of elderly people.

In the fourth chapter the book portrays the current housing situation in Germany. Although this is generally quite good, there remain some key issues, notably the fact that the difference between East and West Germany is most pronounced in terms of housing. Moreover, the adaptation of existing apartments and houses is a future challenge, and the implementation of innovative housing concepts (like intergenerational and sheltered housing) is still rather slow.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the health and care systems in Germany. In 1995, the new long-term care insurance came into being; the last pillar of the German social insurance system (the other four pillars concern insurance for the risk of old age, unemployment, invalidity, and illness). Although the new long-term care insurance has changed the situation of people in need of care, Scharf points to a variety of problems: the responsibility of care continues to be placed upon families; community services are still inadequate (although there has been a tremendous improvement in the last few years); and there is a tendency to place frail elderly people into institutions when families are no longer able to organise care. These problems, however, are now in the open and there is a lively public debate in Germany about quality and standards

of social care. The sixth chapter of the book describes social integration of elderly people in Germany. As in most other industrialised countries, the work force participation of older people has been decreasing for decades, although pensioners as a group do seem to be socially integrated. However, the political power of elderly people is, nevertheless, still a 'latent' force, a situation quite different from the US where the American Association of Retired Persons is a major political organisation lobbying for the interests of older people. The final, seventh, chapter of the book places Germany in a European perspective and describes future perspectives concerning ageing policy.

This book provides an excellent overview of German social policies relating to elderly people. The factual information is precise and well presented, and the author has used the most important sources in this area. Looking at the vast gerontological literature which is produced in German, I wonder if we (German social gerontologists) should publish more in the current *lingua franca*: English. However, this would mean that we would lose Thomas Scharf's well-informed, clearly written and sharp analysis of German ageing policy. Rather, we should encourage the author to continue working on this topic in the future, incorporating new material like that from the Berlin Aging Study (Baltes and Mayer 1999) or the German Ageing Survey (Kohli and Künemund 2000).

References

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Jo Moriarty and Sarah Webb, *Part of their Lives: Community Care for Older People with Dementia*, The Policy Press, Bristol, 2000, 118 pp., pbk £14.99, ISBN 1 86134 217 9.

This book describes a study of people with dementia referred to three social service departments, based on formal records, interviews with direct and proxy carers and assessors, and ground-breaking interviews with the subjects of the study. It follows the care paths over 17 months, examining them both as processes and as experiences for the people with dementia and their carers. There is a separately authored section on the costs of care. Set in the context of summaries of existing research, this could be valuable reading for specialists in dementia care, whether academic or practitioner.

Assessments at the time of referral led to successful and lasting care packages. Assessment is a costly process requiring skilled input, but the cost is justified by the outcome. There was no association between the number of services received and the characteristics of the people with dementia or their

carers, but people living alone (*i.e.* with non-resident carers) were more likely to receive home care, and people with a spouse carer were more likely to use day care and short breaks. Here, the findings on carer stress are relevant – the spouse and daughter carers of people reported to have sleep disturbance, aggression and ‘trying behaviours’ were found to have a higher level of psychological ill-health, yet spouse carers were found to receive less help within the home – one must ask whether this is because they declined the service or whether they were assumed by assessors to be managing with a lower level of practical help. Home-based carer support was not widely offered, but all recipients said that they would have liked more. Community-based care packages were not intensive, with home care concentrating on practical help, at the expense of social and leisure needs of the people with dementia and their carers.

There are related pointers for service planning and costing. People with dementia have an increased risk of entering long-term care, but this study identifies a link between the level of dementia and admission, a finding which poses a number of questions:

- should people be screened for level of dementia at assessment to help predict the outcome?
- could this finding be used to target and cost service provision?
- alternatively, could it be used to argue for a different level of community support if the predicted outcome is not the preferred outcome?

But, if screening for level of dementia became a normal part of assessment, this would be in defiance of the confirmed finding that people with dementia can find the testing process distressing. Also, the authors suggest that people with dementia could learn to recognise more frequent testing, and withdraw co-operation.

112 people with dementia were interviewed, including 43 identified as having severe dementia. The authors confirm that though some people were unable to speak, many more were able to express an opinion on their current and past care, and on the assessment process. This adds unarguably to the integrity of the research, but the absence of a discrete section on the findings points to the continuing need for the development of techniques for hearing the views of people with dementia – not only how we ask the questions, but what we should be asking.

This Department of Health funded study is based on clients referred to three social services departments, and makes no claim that the findings are transferable to a wider population. It points to areas for further study and tempted this reader with other questions, for example: given the quoted finding of a separate study that 65 per cent of a sample of social workers gave a correct identification of dementia, was there any qualitative difference between assessments by specialist and non-specialist social services teams? The average home care visit lasted 45 minutes – did the carers find this sufficient? Home care workers being trained by Dementia Voice consistently say that time allocations for people with dementia are not consistent with a person-centred approach; there appears to be an unmet need for personal and social support to carers – would home care workers with specialist training be able to meet this need?

The path to long-term care is described as ‘a series of complex and inter-related factors’, and the same could be said of the learning path of improving dementia care. This study has contributed to defining some of the factors and their relationship, and has contributed to the process of user involvement.

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Andrew Jackson, *The Book of Life: One Man's Search for the Wisdom of Age*, Orion, London, UK, 1999, 348 pp., hbk £18.99, ISBN 0 575 06686 5.

Travelogues are not generally reviewed in academic journals. Their inclusion may seem slightly strange. But this book is justifiably part of gerontology for it is a study of ageing and people in old age. Non-academics, especially younger people, rarely write about these topics. This book then provides a fresh perspective.

Jackson devised and undertook a research project on his own, supported not by a research funder or the attraction of an academic prize, but rather by his generally good-humoured and companionable wife. The research project is described as a search for the wisdom of age and his ‘methodology’ included visits to old people in different areas of the world. There is no pretence that these are a representative sample. Jackson seems to have followed a mixture of the serendipity approach and a search for particularly engaging or remarkable individuals. As the photographs illustrate, the range of individuals was considerable: from hill farmers to politicians, from a McDonald's waitress in her 90s to desert herdsmen.

Largely written in conversational style, Jackson paints a picture of the social context and atmosphere. He is a good writer with an eye for detail and humour. To maintain the pace, there is little about the probably very tedious times and life's discomforts. At times it is not always clear how or why Jackson and his wife moved from A to B, but this is a travelogue not a research report.

In more philosophical vein, Jackson tries to look for the secret of old age. What are the special qualities of old people he asks? At times he attributes their contribution to ‘giving’, at other times he is more persuaded by older people's subtle sense of confidence, particularly thinking that people aged over 100 have a certain sense of superiority, as well they might. His interview with the world's (then) oldest person Jeanne Calment brings this musing to a more concretised exchange. Madame Calment describes her decision to stop smoking and riding a bicycle but has no real message about longevity. Her attention is far more directed to her present of chocolates.

Not surprisingly, having taken the decision to take a belated ‘gap year’ or two and to remove himself from the rat race of a busy life in the advertising business, Jackson visits the sites of longevity. He wanders around Uzurihara in Japan and the Hunza valley in Pakistan to soak in the atmosphere of Shangri-La or its equivalent. Again he is impressed by the simplicity of life

although he remains a little sceptical about geographical contributors to old age.

For gerontologists taking a 'busman's holiday' by reading this book, one intriguing visit may be the Museum of Gerontology in Ukraine. For Jackson there may not have been the amusing gasp of recognition as he was shown round displays of conferences about gerontology, photos of people at such conferences, stamps and scarves with ageing 'messages' and selections of products designed to enhance long life or other desirable youthful attributes. Many of us might like to consider the content of a possible similar museum from our own contexts.

Jackson's book contains a more personal sub-story about his own family. Influenced by and fond of his grandfather, he remembers him in his old age. Half way round the world, Jackson is able to call on his father who has built a new life away from the UK. And to continue the genealogy, in their travels Jackson and his wife make their own decisions that they too would like to have children.

Stories of older people are a useful resource for those who wish to read accounts which are lively and interesting. They serve at times as the antithesis of statistics and generalised populations. In a similar vein Davies (1998) interviewed 21 people born in 1900 though confined this to the UK. Jackson's work conveys a more global picture. For those with a sense of adventure, a quest for the unusual and for challenges, Jackson's example may prompt radical change. For armchair travellers with an interest in their own ageing or the ageing world, this book presents a refreshing sense of excitement about the ageing planet.

Reference

Davies, H. 1998. *Born 1900*. Little Brown Books, London.

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