

## **Ageing, Life-course and Social Change**

Research programme of the  
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## **Executive summary**

*Aims* – This research programme forms the basis for further development of the Division Ageing and Social Change (ASC) as a leading Swedish and European research institution in the field of ageing and later life. The programme defines the conceptual framework of the division as well as the structure of its research themes. In doing so, it forms a proposal for cutting-edge research on ageing and later life within the institutional context of the Department of Social and Welfare Studies at Linköping University. The programme highlights the opportunities and connecting possibilities inherent in multidisciplinary cooperation. This approach is consistent with the key requirements for innovative research on ageing and later life i.e. the need for scientific excellence plus the need for a reliable core unit within Linköping University. At the same time, the programme reflects the basic orientations of ASC's professorships.

*Conceptual basis* – Research at ASC integrates analyses of social conditions with analyses of individual ageing processes. This is done within the theoretical framework of life-course research. The concept of the life-course as an institution, as a trajectory and as a lived biography within its macro-societal context is at the heart of ASC's agenda. It allows ASC to organize research from a truly multi-level perspective. ASC systematizes its multi-level- and life-course-oriented research on ageing and later life from two main angles. First, the structural and institutional dimensions of changing societies, populations and welfare systems that are related to changes in individual resources, performance and outcomes on all levels are emphasized. Second, ASC focusses on how the everyday life and health of older people are related to the social context of networks, families, local communities and local institutions and how they are embedded in macro environments such as economic and social security systems as well as their impact on these conditions.

*Research themes* – In researching ageing and later life from the multi-level perspective of the life-course, ASC devotes itself to three key research themes that are strongly interdependent. The first theme is 'ageing and social structure', and it focuses on the issues of social inequality, integration and exclusion within a changing welfare society. The second theme is 'ageing between health and disease' and has a focus on health behaviours, ageing with morbidities and disabilities, as well as support needs and care and care systems. The third theme is 'ageing in context', which deals with the changing social, technological and spatial environments of individual ageing and their impact on individual agency and autonomy. In general, 'future ageing' is a major focus of ASC's research. ASC's intent is to contribute to discussions on the future of later life in an ageing society by generating knowledge that facilitates social debate on how to configure and achieve a sustainable society for all ages in Sweden, Europe and beyond.

*Agenda* – Based on this comprehensive research program, ASC settles on a short-term research agenda that is adjusted on a yearly basis according to changes in scientific and societal debates, university needs and funding opportunities. The research agenda serves as a foundation for activity planning and for joint activities.

## Exekutiv sammanfattning

*Syfte* – Detta forskningsprogram lägger grunden för en fortsatt utveckling av ASC som ett ledande svenskt och europeiskt forskningsinriktning inom området äldre och åldrande. I programmet ges både en begreppslig ram för avdelningen och dess forskningsteman, samt en reflektion över den inbördes relationen mellan dessa teman. Ambitionen är att programmet ska fungera som en plan för forskningen inom området äldre och åldrande vid Institutionen för samhälls- och välfärdsstudier, Linköpings universitet, och därvid utgöra en bas för tvärvetenskapligt samarbete. Programmet stödjer utvecklingen av innovativ forskning inom området äldre och åldrande, lever upp till kraven på vetenskaplig excellens och bidrar till en grund för framtida forskningsverksamhet inom området äldre och åldrande vid Linköpings universitet. Programmet pekar också ut den grundläggande inriktningen för ASC:s professurer.

*Programmets begreppsliga ram* – ASC:s forskning innehåller analyser av de sociala villkoren för individuella åldrandeprocesser inom ramarna för livsloppsforskning. Begreppet livslopp utgör ett grundbegrepp i forskningen. Livslopp betecknar åldrandet både som ett förlopp och som levd biografi inom en samhällelig kontext. Livsloppsbegreppet utgör således en central teoretisk utgångspunkt. Begreppet pekar på nödvändigheten av analyser på flera nivåer och det innebär samtidigt att forskningen inriktas mot två perspektiv. Inom det första perspektivet betonas den strukturella och institutionella dimensionen av samhällen, befolkningar och välfärdssystem i förändring, liksom förändringar av individuella resurser, aktiviteter och utfall. Inom det andra perspektivet ställs fokus på integrationen av äldre personers vardagsliv och hälsa i relation till personernas sociala nätverk och olika lokala sammanhang och institutioner.

*Forskningsteman* – Forskningen om äldre och åldrande i ett livsloppsperspektiv har fokus på tre sammanlänkande forskningsteman. Det första är "Åldrande och social struktur" och koncentreras på frågor om social ojämlikhet, integration och utanförskap i ett samhälle med förändrade välfärdssystem. Det andra, "Åldrande mellan hälsa och sjukdom", har fokus på hälsobeteenden, att åldras och leva med flera sjukdomar och funktionsnedsättningar samt behov av stöd, vård och vårdsystemen. Slutligen, det tredje temat, "Åldrandets sammanhang", har att göra med förändringar av åldrandets sociala, tekniska och rumsliga sammanhang och hur detta påverkar det individuella agentskapet och autonomi. I mer allmänna termer utgör åldrande i framtiden ett centralt tema för ASC:s forskning. Detta tema öppnar för att forskningen kan bidra med kunskap om möjligheterna att skapa ett hållbart samhälle för alla åldrar i Sverige, Europa och resten av världen.

*Aktuell forskning* – Baserat på detta övergripande och långsiktiga forskningsprogram har ASC också mer kortsiktiga planer vilka revideras årligen utifrån aktuella diskussioner och möjligheter till forskningsfinansiering, och som utgör grunden för verksamhetsplanering och gemensamma aktiviteter.

## **1. Ageing, life-course and social change: a framework for ASC's research**

The ageing of societies has spurred ongoing expansion of research on ageing and later life in most parts of the world. It is one of the global social megatrends and Sweden is by no means an exception (United Nations, 2001; Bengtsson, 2010; Bengtsson & Scott, 2013). This shift towards an older population with longer lives and a larger proportion of older people is related to profound social change. Specifically, changing political, economic and institutional conditions transform social and demographic structures as well as people's lives, and vice versa (Bengtsson & Scott, 2011; Alwin & McCammon, 2006; Heinz & Marshall, 2003). While current societies tend to be more diverse and unequal, life-courses show increasing plurality, rising inhomogeneity and a previously unknown mobility. All of these trends – i.e. population ageing and structural shifts at the macro societal level plus the transformation of the life-course and individual ways of living – are closely intertwined in the complex process of social change, which is frequently discussed in terms of modernisation (Kelly & Cutright, 1980; Kirk, 1996).

The major consequences are changes in the prerequisites and trajectories of later life in Sweden and in most other European societies. New cohorts of older people, who exhibit previously unwitnessed diversity due to different life experiences and increasingly diverse ethnic backgrounds, have extended potential and face new risks. Current social security reforms in Sweden (Larsson et al., 2012) and elsewhere (Brown et al., 2005; Hemerijck, 2013; Poterba, 2014), as well as earlier reorganization measures (Korpi, 2003) only partly address these issues. In addition, social change is also driven by other events such as recurring economic crises, European integration and globalised competition between societies and shifts in social policies.

As a result of the ongoing changes in population structures, the role of old age in societies in terms of population patterns, individual life spans, corporate planning, health care systems and social policy discourse is greater than ever before. The relevance of age as a category in social structure has grown accordingly, and ageing issues are more integral to descriptions of social change as well as to individual lives and biographical planning. Consequently, ageing and later life has become a major interdisciplinary issue in the analysis of changing contemporary societies, (late-/post-) modern life, individual living conditions and outcomes like life satisfaction, overall well-being and quality of life. Further, the social, structural and institutional perspectives on it are highly relevant, as seems natural against this backdrop.

Research on ageing and later life must deal with these highly complex issues of social development and institutional change in dynamic times, as well as with the individual lives embedded into them. Consequently, there is a need for a theoretical approach that integrates both. In the future, ageing research needs to integrate a variety of fields, and include research on the welfare state, demographic developments, socio-economic and health-economic issues, families, health, minorities, work and retirement as well as social structure and social inequality. Hence, ageing research must be interdisciplinary, which implies that the research activities are interconnected. However, social sciences are the

most integrative disciplinary focus in research on ageing, and cooperation within the university and its faculties and departments is essential, as is European and international networking.

### *Ageing and later life...*

*Old age as a late stage in life* shapes the structure and the development of contemporary societies. Age has become a major aspect of social structure during the last centuries, and population ageing contributes to overall social change. At the same time, population ageing is one of the major outcomes of social change, and such transformations impact the social conditions of ageing processes and the ways individuals attain later life. These shifts result in new challenges and opportunities both at the individual level as well as at the level of societies and social policy interventions. Research and teaching on ageing and later life must focus on living situations as well as their individual and social dynamics over time – and must be considered against the background of crucial premises and related to ongoing societal discourses.

*Human ageing* is a fundamentally open biological and social process that encompasses the entire life span. However, in its later phases, the risks of deterioration and the likelihood of loss increase in many quality of life aspects, such as physical and psychological health as well as partnership and social networks (Motel-Klingebiel & Tesch-Römer, 2006). *Later life* is a relatively new societal phenomenon in terms of being an institutionalised part of the life-course and a stage of life that most individuals commonly experience. Entry into *old age* is defined socially by the transition from working life to retirement. Hence, later life is strongly connected to welfare state institutions and to their development. Somewhat paradoxically, considering the clear distinction between work and retirement, later life is (a) characterized by substantial heterogeneity in individual trajectories and life situations and (b) has a cultural, normative and institutional structure that is somewhat indistinct.

*Population ageing* implies opportunities, challenges and risks for societies and for individual lives. It is a distinct aspect of social change that has a profound influence on societies and is the context in which changes in ageing and later life play out. But above and beyond the processes of social and demographic transformation, ageing and later life are highly relevant to research and to society. In recent years, the gaps in knowledge have been narrowing. Nevertheless, our knowledge base is insufficient, with the result that there is an urgent need for empirical research as well as research-oriented training.

### *... and what life-course theory has to do with it – the life-course perspective in ageing research*

*Human ageing is universal, but...* – The ageing of human beings is a universal fact, but despite its openness and plasticity, the individual course of life is constrained. On the one hand, the life-course is restricted by biological preconditions, personal resources and the simple reality that it is limited through losses and that life universally ends in death. On the other hand, and more crucially from a sociology standpoint, individual ageing is specifically

shaped by social and cultural conditions as well as by the societal context; these are constitutive and formative for the ageing processes and the life-course. Furthermore, ageing is a social construct and, as such, it reflects how social and cultural conceptions and ideas function. While ageing at first seems to be merely a biological issue, comprehensive interpretation in social discourses and social construction is required in order both to decipher being born, living and dying as ordered processes that take place simultaneously over individual and social time and to give the issue of ageing its place in the social order and according to the specific societal challenges.

*Life-courses: time and society* – ‘Life-course’ is an iridescent term in both current social sciences and policy that allows us to merge the aspects of time and society in one comprehensive concept. Essentially, ‘life-course’ is a heterogeneous, yet appealing and useful theoretical perspective or model that engenders a scientific understanding that emerged in its current form from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century on. In the early 1960s, Glen Elder started to develop a model from his studies of children. He initiated and coined the term ‘life-course theory’ with his analyses of the life paths of the children of the Great Depression (Elder, 1974). The starting point was human development, which is a psychological concept. But Elder added substantial social science value to this concept by looking at the impact of obviously momentous historical circumstances on the American birth cohorts of the 1930s in various areas of life, such as family and network structures, educational participation and employment (Hutchison, 2003).

Taking these beginnings into account along with the steps suggested by Hareven (2001), Mayer (2009) and many others, the concept of life-course and life-course research are closely related to studies of cohorts and generations, and hence to a historical and the socio-structural perspective (Alwin & McCammon, 2006). A thorough analysis of consecutive cohorts and generations over time traces the impact of social change on individual lives. Conversely, life-courses mirror the transformation of social institutions in a way that allows us to deduce insights on social developments from changes that are assessable at the individual micro level (Mayer, 2004).

*Age and ageing as social properties* – Elder’s early works (Elder, 1974) already pointed out that the course of human lives is embedded in, intertwined with and substantially bound up in and even defined by political, cultural, and economic circumstances. Human lives are only superficially of an individual nature; as a whole and in their specific stages, they are a property of society and social structure (Dannefer & Settersten, 2010). In modern societies, the life-course has developed into an institution that manages sociation under the condition of ongoing individualisation (Kohli, 1985; Kohli, 2007) that expresses the social age structuring of modern society (Settersten, 2006). From another perspective, the life-course, as a sequence of situations and transitions over time, directly links the macro level of society and the micro levels of individual life styles, living situations, planning and decision making (Mayer, 2009). Changes in the institutional configuration of society lead to changes in trajectories and their outcomes, in the configuration of life phases such as childhood and later life, as well as in their societal conceptions. They also affect family structures and living arrangements, which strongly depend on individual fertility, housing

and migration decisions that are based on changing resources and preferences, as well as on shifting institutional challenges with which individuals are confronted.

*The causal system of the life-course and interdependencies over time* – Aside from the macro perspective, it is also true that from a purely micro perspective of life span and human development, early events and decisions have a robust impact on later outcomes due to the resources, constraints and experiences that stem from and are the consequence of these previous phases (Elder & Shanahan, 2006). Dannefer (2003) describes this from the sociological perspective of the hypothesis of cumulative (dis)advantage over the life-course. This perspective was later adapted as the concept of cumulative inequality by Ferraro et al. (2009) and applied to numerous analyses on later life inequality (e.g. Prokos & Keene, 2012; Motel-Klingebiel, 2007). Related approaches, such as life-course epidemiology (Ben-Shlomo & Kuh, 2002; Kuh et al., 2003), are also inspired by the idea that later life outcomes like morbidity or mortality patterns may be related to the interaction of previous, current and future situations over the life-course. It also seems that age-specific markers such as the overall decline in health or the transition into retirement may moderate the process in a way that decreases intra-cohort inequalities in the process of ageing. Consequently, the two trends – increases and decreases of inequality over the life course – may run parallel and overlap, so that they result in a more complex picture of intra-cohort inequality patterns and their dynamics over the life-course (Schöllgen et al., 2010). From another perspective, individual lives are linked to or synchronised by the lives of others, such as partners, parents or children. In addition, their lives are linked to social networks of non-relatives like friends, workmates and others, with families playing a dominant role in life-course research of this kind (Hareven, 1996). This leads to the idea of linked lives beyond sharing the same structural contexts of history or society (Macmillan & Copher, 2005).

*Life-courses as biographies* – In addition, life-courses gain relevance from being operative as biographies. Biographies are individual life stories and represent the individual's understanding of these series of events. Hence, the life-course not only includes more or less objective facts (Kohli, 2009), it also describes undergone life history as a planned and experienced journey through life, highlighting individual agency. Life-courses as biographies are based on individual expectations, proposals and interpreted actions that may change over historical time but which have a high degree of autonomy from institutional structures. Therefore, they are significant units of analysis for biography-oriented life-course and ageing research (Öberg et al., 2004). In fact, life stories are central to an understanding and furthering of the decision-making of individuals in life planning and action. Hence, this perspective is very relevant to reflections on demographic phenomena.

*Heterogeneous perspectives on the life-course* – The various aspects of ageing can be categorised or summarised as four prototypical, more or less distinct perspectives of the life-course that can be used to discuss interconnections between life-courses and demographic structures (Motel-Klingebiel, 2015):

- Life-courses reflect institutional arrangements in society and their changes over time.
- The life-course is a social institution with distinct outcomes and dynamics.
- Life-courses express individual ageing processes as objective conditions and are cumulative and self-referential.
- Life-courses are connected to life stories that indicate conceptions and understandings of events and life.

A social policy perspective on life-course policies in contemporary welfare states may be added as a fifth perspective (Naegele, 2010; Berner et al., 2010). These policies describe a set of institutional reactions to on-going changes in trajectories as well as active policies that aim to shape life-courses and to induce transformations or stability in individual plans and decisions, hence in life-course patterns.

#### *Research on life-course, ageing and later life in a changing society*

According to conventional concepts of quality of life and its operationalization, a 'good life' at any age is objectively and subjectively defined mainly by physical and psychological health, social relations and integration and by material living conditions (WHOQOL Group, 1998; World Health Organization, 1995; 1996). Hence, issues related to material living conditions, health and health services and social integration are core themes of research on ageing and later life. In addition, a sociological and social-gerontological view of later life and addressing questions of living situations and quality of life in the context of life-course and society are essential and add value to the overall discourse on age and ageing.

Consequently, ASC's research themes will focus on the following three main perspectives: *Diversity, distributions and social inequality; life-course and individual development; and social and cultural change*. First, differences in life expectancy and quality of life are strongly connected to social inequality structures and their dynamics. The analysis of *differential ageing and inequality* indicates that individual development and social change are closely linked. Second, ongoing modernization of societies leads to an increasing plurality of life situations and life styles as well as to *new biographies and life-courses*. From this perspective, it is crucial to ask how these changes are related to quality of later life and how social security systems can adjust to or affect these developments. Third, *social change* challenges the sustainability of modern societies. Changes in population patterns are part of profound processes of transformation of the welfare system, changes in the economy and in the labour markets, modifications of gender relations, increases in migration and globalization, shifts in normative patterns (e.g. concerning family relations and life style), changes in family structures and social networks, as well as adjustments in the relationship between individuals and societal institutions (e.g. the extent and meaning of volunteering).

Research on ageing and later life must ask the following questions: What are the changes in living situations of ageing and older people? Which factors impact social cohesion, given the changes in the relations between welfare state generations and the relationships between individuals of different generations? In addition, in the analysis of ageing issues

from a societal and individual perspective and their systematic interplay as a crucial question of social sciences (Coleman, 1990; Ferraro, 1997), it is crucial to take a *multi-level standpoint*. This involves correlating institutional patterns, social change and life-courses as well as decisions, agency, distributions and inequality structures with a specific interest in ageing and later life. These must be modelled in proper complexity and analysed with a historic and international comparative focus to allow for discussions on plausible future changes and intervention perspectives. Ageing research also implies an *interdisciplinary perspective*, which calls for cooperation within the university as well as at national and international levels.

Employing this comprehensive conceptual framework requires complex research approaches with complementary perspectives from the macro- as well as from the micro-angle even within ASC, to best address the issues of ageing, life-course and social change.

## **2. The social-structural perspective on ageing and later life: A multilevel approach to welfare and quality of life with an emphasis on a macro-to-micro view**

Individual welfare and a 'good life' are mainly defined by health and well-being, social relationships and integration and by material living conditions. From an institutional point of view, welfare describes measures to improve individual life quality, and the societal systems that provide such measures. Both can be taken for granted as core themes of social research and, in particular, as themes of research in ageing and later life. In sociological and social-gerontology terms, it is essential to address living situations and quality of life in the context of life-course and society. Doing so adds value to the overall discourse on age and ageing.

Given the central importance of the 'good life' and its structural and individual conditions in research on ageing and later life, the question of *quality of (later) life* is raised. This question addresses the living situations of ageing and old people, and their evaluation, preconditions and outcomes in the contexts of time and society. From a structural perspective, one must first investigate the creation of later life chances and the generation of living conditions as well as their distribution and development over time. Hence, this approach is about diversity in old age, social inequality and inclusion in changing societies. Second, the challenges for welfare systems, social security and policy intervention in a changing ageing society must be explored. This implies taking a policy-oriented view on institutions and their impact on later life. Both of these call for a time-sensitive multi-level perspective on ageing at the national as well as at the international comparative level. As noted, these two main aspects should thus be developed in three interconnected but distinct perspectives:

*Distributions: Diversity and social inequality* – Differences in life expectancy and other core aspects of quality of life are strongly connected to social inequality structures and their dynamics. In the analysis of differential ageing and inequality, it is clear that individual development and social change are closely linked.

*Individual time: Life-course transitions and individual development* – Ongoing modernization of societies leads to an increasing plurality of life situations and life styles, and to new biographies and life-courses. The results are heterogeneous and partly contradictory. From this perspective, it crucial to ask how these changes are related to the quality of later life and how social security systems can contribute and adjust to these developments.

*Societal time: Social, cultural and demographic change* – Social change challenges the sustainability of societies. Demographic changes are only part of deeper processes of transformation. Different aspects of that change interact with each other, not only in Sweden but also in Europe and beyond.

When conducting research on issues of ageing, a multi-level perspective should be adopted on individuals and the societies in which they live. Specifically social change and individual dynamics need to be correlated as well as distributions and inequality structures. It is crucial that the analyses be appropriately complex and nuanced and that they have a historic and international comparative perspective. The life-course, as the integrative concept for ASC's research on ageing and later life (Silverstein, 2012), integrates the concepts of individual and societal time, individual decision making and institutional frameworks, social structure and later life outcomes (Dannefer & Settersten, 2010; Kohli, 2007; Mayer, 2004). This also utilizes a perspective on cohorts and generations (Alwin & McCammon, 2006); this in turn leads to a cohort-sequential view and a prospective approach to ageing and policy intervention.

Research at ASC will encompass later employment and family phases and the entry into retirement up to the latest stages in life. Nevertheless, the characteristics of earlier life stages must also be taken into account by life-course-oriented research on ageing. Social background, growing up in the family of origin, schooling and vocational education, labour market entries and family formation may all play important roles in later development. As very old age is habitually under-researched and in politics merely discussed from the perspective of morbidity and care, it may be worth considering very old age comprehensively as an issue for future ageing research, including paths into oldest age, the living situations of the oldest people and the implications of the findings for social policies.

Policy-oriented social research on ageing needs current, relevant, reliable and valid data to attain its goals. However, research activities should not only seek to collect new data. There have been efforts to establish useful research data infrastructure in many countries and in Europe as a whole; accordingly, research on ageing is well-advised to utilize these resources. There is a rich corpus of registry and survey data in Sweden, but there is room for improvement in terms of its availability for scientific research as accessibility is restricted for many reasons (some good and some not-so-good). Approaches to data organization at the project level may lead to, data infrastructures which are both heterogeneous and short-lived. Consequently, it may be helpful and worth investing in a 'research data centre' or a 'data service centre' on ageing. Such a resource would help establish reliable research data infrastructure for research on ageing and later life based on

Swedish registry data and selected survey information. It would also undergo constant development and be available in the long-term. The research data infrastructure could include several other research institutions, but should be initiated and led by ASC.

### **3. The perspective of individual agency and action: A multilevel approach to welfare and quality of life with an emphasis on a micro-to-macro view**

#### *Older people as actors in the context of a changing society*

Old age is a distinct part of the life-course, and the institutionalization of old age can be understood as underlying the emergence of age discrimination, ageism, and stereotyping of older people (Macnicol, 2006; Nilsson, 2008). From this perspective, there should be a focus on older people as actors and creators of society in terms of being active members in different settings. In the interaction between older people and society, it is important to emphasize that older people are fellow citizens and bearers of cultural and social values from both societal and individual perspectives. Research should thus be developed to investigate the roles and participation of older people in society. Such research should describe and analyse attitudes and power relations between different age groups in terms of economic and political influence and with different implications for the status of citizens in society. One characteristic of complex modern societies is that there are parallel processes that institutionalize, deinstitutionalize or individualize the life-course. Instead of regarding age-categories as fixed descriptive markers, they can be viewed as part of an ongoing negotiation of the status of old age. An important goal for research on ageing and later life is to critically investigate the different meanings of later life in society. 'Old age' can then be investigated as a continuously (re)produced social construct, similar to other kinds of social categories. ASC should investigate the relationships between the individual and general view of ageing. This will provide information that is relevant to different types of studies that focus on later life and the ageing process.

#### *Addressing the potentials of ageing and later life*

Research on ageing must try to develop the potentials of ageing rather than emphasizing ageing solely as an individual and social problem. Society's current images and definitions of the phenomenon of ageing should not limit the research approach. This assumes that research can identify the attitudes towards ageing in different groups of society and thus also make society more open to the scrutiny of many social practices that are linked to ageing. Accordingly, research should not be based on the perspective that people grow old merely in a biological sense. Rather, they become older people by virtue of the attitudes of others as well as themselves. Considering some persons to be old is a form of social categorization, and this happens in different ways in different arenas of society (e.g. Coupland & Nussbaum, 1993). Studies that investigate this should focus on how norms regarding older people create and reinforce, but also undermine, the social category of 'older people' or 'senior citizens'.

Hence, ASC will study older people, their actions and their potential within contexts both outside and inside the institutions that are defined by society. The starting point is the interplay between different perspectives on ageing – social, cultural and political. This may touch on social implications and the value of older people's expression of cultural forms, e.g. their leisure activities and activities within civil society organizations. Social club activities and cultural institutions are based to a large extent on the efforts of the older generation. Research should also draw attention to older people and to ageing processes in terms of working life and work as a possibility for creating and maintaining social networks that have value for the individual.

#### **4. Ageing, later life and social change: Performing ageing research using a multilevel perspective**

To develop a comprehensive institutional scope and identity for ASC, it will be helpful to integrate the specific macro- and micro-dominated perspectives that were outlined above. This is of special importance as research themes and research perspectives may converge, and it is related to conceptual ideas that defined ASC in the past. Nevertheless, such integration will change the relative weight of the different research perspectives.

A research programme on *ageing, later life and social change* will integrate the three main aspects as described above and will add research data infrastructure as a practical consideration. Social, cultural and demographic change will serve as a leitmotif with individual and societal time as well as social, regional and cultural inequality and heterogeneity forming the basis of empirical analyses.

A programme of this nature will pose three main questions related to the analysis of social change in general; (a) the character of, and pathways for ongoing changes in later life: "what is changing and in what way?", (b) the causes of these dynamics: "why is it changing?", and (c) the relevance and consequences for social structure and individual life situations: "What does this change imply?"

Comprehensive interdisciplinary approaches are needed to address the complexity of social change. Nevertheless, sociology and gerontology can serve as the leading disciplines that have the proven potential to integrate the cacophony of disciplinary approaches on theoretical and empirical levels. Here, gerontology is seen as a discipline with a specific conceptual framework and not just a particular research field. A main issue concerns the direction of impact of such research. In this case, it mainly targets society, the development of social institutions as well as social and economic policies as measures that shape society.

In this sense, ASC's approach should set an agenda that is oriented towards major scientific ventures and the research-political agenda-setting. From this point of view, the European Union's research programme Horizon 2020 appears to be a disappointment. The agenda-setting approach of the FUTURAGE project concentrates mainly on research on health and ageing. Sweden, together with the Netherlands and Germany, plays a major role in the strategic research agenda of the Joint Programming Initiative "More Years, Better Lives - The Potential and Challenges of Demographic Change" (JPIMYBL). This initiative has the

valuable potential to address the complexity of individual and demographic ageing in the context of social change. Not only does it provide an appropriate research agenda, it will also be influential for furthering national funding strategies and, at the same time, it indicates international research and economic ambitions.

## **5. Themes for research on ageing**

Apart from the broad, unique scope mentioned above, further development of ASC will require straightforward strategic efforts to define a characteristic brand within the landscape of ageing research and social sciences in general. One goal is to induce substantial growth of the division in terms of the number of projects and fully funded positions, especially at the post-doc level and perhaps also at the Ph.D. student level. Such growth will stabilise ASC as a research body within the changing fields of ageing research and academic environments. This goal can be achieved with a key programme or centre grant.

To receive comprehensive funding by a major grant, ASC needs to concentrate on a limited number of major issues that define a distinct profile. Within the conceptual framework of 'ageing, later life and social change', this can be the life-course-oriented analysis of changing later life from a perspective of cohort change and institutional/policy dynamics. This will influence the research project applications that ASC submits. In addition to actual scientific interest, these issues will attract funding and further develop ASC's competencies. The goal is to have diverse perspectives within a strong common framework that can be identified by the scientists engaged in it. This will serve as a foundation for establishing a doctoral programme necessary to overcome recruiting problems in a longer-term perspective, since talented junior researchers will be needed to further develop the division. Accordingly, ASC defines three thematic areas as pillars of its research activities.

### *Thematic area I: Ageing and social structure*

#### *Social inequality of ageing, social integration, social exclusion and changing welfare systems*

Under the heading of social inequality of ageing, research will focus on the social structure relevance of gender and sexual identity, migration and ethnicity, social segregation, regional structures, class and strata, cohort and generation, culture and images of ageing. The theme of social integration will include research on families, social networks and civic engagement as the institutional frameworks of ageing. These institutional structures need to be taken into account systematically as changing welfare systems produce and (re)distribute resources and, hence, life chances in the process of ageing.

### *Thematic area II: Ageing between health and disease*

#### *Health, morbidity and care, support needs and living with morbidity*

In the last few decades, changes in health and mortality challenged traditional beliefs of normal ageing as a process of decline and disease. Notably, health is defined differently by older people as compared to younger people, and the definition is changing quickly over

time. First, from the perspective of ageing and health, the social distribution of health and life expectancy as well as risk for diseases and mortality in the ageing population needs to be analysed together with the access to social and medical services. Second, ageing research at ASC will focus on the norms, stereotypes and expectations about health, on healthy later life and their negotiation by people with different social, economic and ethnic background as well as the connection between diseases, living arrangements and institutions. Third, research must include a perspective that shows how people with emerging health issues live and shape their everyday life in different contexts. Of special interest are the ways in which people with cognitive impairments and dementia organize themselves so that they can continue to live meaningful lives.

*Thematic area III: Ageing in local context*

*Changing social, technological and spatial environments*

This theme focuses on how contextual aspects play an important role in later life. People live and age in a physical environment of places, buildings, roads, tools, machines and many other artefacts. The local environment as well as the technological landscape are analysed within these settings with a focus on ageing in the context of the constraints and opportunities of older individuals in everyday life. Here we address questions that are central for ageing policies, both at the local and the national levels, and questions about the ways in which political ideas impact policy and practice. Issues that merit study include the possibilities and obstacles that old and new technology generates for older people, including information and communication technology.

*The future of ageing and later life in a changing society*

All three thematic fields outlined above are integrally connected to the framework of ASC's professorships. The fields all strive to adhere to a multilevel perspective based life-course theory and to integrate social structural, institutional, relational and individual aspects of ageing and later life in a changing society. Transitions and life-events, cohorts and generations, as well as issues of equity and sustainability, serve as guiding markers for all three fields and emphasise that time is a crucial aspect of these fields.

Basically, a life-course approach serves as an integrative theoretical framework for the division's research agenda, taking into account the main perspectives described above. The life-course is defined as (a) a reflection of institutional arrangements in society and changes in these arrangements over time; (b) an institutionalised programme; (c) an individual, cumulative and self-referential ageing process with dynamic variation over time; and (d) an individual proposal and subjective representation of events and life-planning as discussed earlier in this document.

From a gerontological perspective on ageing and later life, the repercussions of ongoing change in later life phases are and will be of great importance, although from a sociological point of view, the structural changes that result from changes in later life may be more

relevant. In any case, it makes sense to define research themes that can be followed in the perspective of demographic and social change.

At the heart of these analyses, there is more than just the description and analytical understanding of prior occurrences. Even if the analyses comprise the scientific core of the research programme, the intention that drives the proposed research is contribution to discussions on the future of later life and ageing society by generating knowledge for social debates on how to configure and achieve a sustainable society for all ages in Sweden, Europe and beyond. The research questions and methodological approaches must reflect this multi-faceted ambition.

The success and relevance of academic research is measured in terms of participation in scientific and societal discourse. Hence, research activities based on this programme must strive to create applicable output. The raising of research funds at national and international levels will be essential for attaining the ambitious goals described by this programme.

## **6. From programming research on ageing towards a short-term agenda for action**

Based on the research programme, ASC defines a short-term agenda to guide action. This agenda includes the following:

- Research on ageing, diversity and inequality
- Research on ageing and health
- Research on ageing in local context
- Cross-sectional issues and the interactions between grand themes
- Research data infrastructure

The agenda will be revised regularly to adjust for changing scientific and societal debates, institutional needs and funding opportunities.

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