

# Preface

Working on an edited collection, especially in the midst of a pandemic, with all of the professional and personal challenges that we and our contributors have experienced, has been challenging, but also more stimulating than we had anticipated. An edited collection is always a collective effort that is often generated through a series of serendipitous moments, and when one works along with so many scholars who also have a background as social workers one cannot help but feel energised. When reflecting on how this book came to be, we can, however, clearly trace its original conceptualisation back to April 2018 and the European Conference for Social Work Research that took place in Edinburgh. Discussions during the Special Interest Group for Gerontological Social Work (or the European Network for Gerontological Social Work as it later became known as) identified the need for a book that approached gerontological social work from an angle that aimed to empower social work scholars, policy makers and practitioners. As a group we were frustrated about the lack of status and attention given to social work with older people generally, and, parallel to this, we had concerns relating to ageism experienced by older people in our communities and societies stemming from increased neoliberal, reductionist social policies in many countries across Europe. While there were several excellent published texts relating to social work and older people, we felt that there was gap for a book with a critical lens, which would act as a call to arms to the social work profession, encouraging an embracement of the activist and social justice mandate.

Firstly, we must thank Professor Mo Ray and Professor Marjaana Seppänen for their incredible vision and leadership in establishing the Gerontological Social Work Special Interest Group/European Network for Gerontological Social Work in the first place. We would also like to sincerely thank and acknowledge Marjaana, Professor Janet Anand and Dr Anna Olaison for their important contributions to the initial conceptualisation of this book project. Marjaana spent part of her sabbatical at the Department of Sociology, Uppsala University – which houses the Centre for Social Work – with one of us (Sandra) and together they did the thorough inventory of the book market that is always needed when formulating how the book we were planning would differentiate itself from what was already available. That inventory was used when we put together the synopsis for this edited collection, and helped inform how this edited collection would be arranged. We settled on twelve chapters by some of the leading scholars in social work from around the world, and decided that we would aim for two different parts: one about the key concepts in critical gerontology, and another on how these concepts can inform social work policy and practice. Our book project received the

support of the European Social Work Research Association (ESWRA) who deemed it interesting enough for the series known as 'Research in Social Work' that they publish. Special thanks must also go to the staff of Policy Press for their unwavering support, particularly Isobel Bainton and Sarah Bird.

It is our sincere hope that this edited collection will introduce social work scholars, policy makers, practitioners and students to critical gerontology and encourage them to deem their unique expertise as pivotal if we are to responsibly address the needs of older people now that population ageing is a societal challenge we all must reckon with. Needless to say, we also hope that this book offers the kind of inspiration necessary to maintain their commitment to continue to better the lives of the older communities that they serve. We have, without a doubt, renewed our commitment while working on this edited collection and look forward to seeing how this work stimulate much-needed discussion about the role of critical gerontology in social work, and the ways in which working with the older segments of our populations enriches our practices.

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