Ageing, adventure and the outdoors: issues, contexts, perspectives and learning

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Ageing, adventure and the outdoors: issues, contexts, perspectives and learning

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In many countries, and particularly in economically advanced nations, ageing populations constitute important and pressing issues (Office for National Statistics, 2016; United Nations, 2013) which impinge on, for example: political, economic and social domains. Thus, social gerontology in the twenty-first century, and ‘older adulthood’ as a recognised life phase, have emerged as distinctive from traditional problematisations and constructions of ‘old’ age and geriatric care (Wrosch, Jobin, & Scheier, 2016). In relation to this, the act and processes of ‘learning to age’ in relation to a life connected with outdoor adventure and activities represents an area of increasing interest and understanding (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2007; Humberstone, 2011, 2016).

Integral to these considerations, age is also intertwined with diachronic transformations in stereotypes operating for participants in outdoor contexts and activities. For example, historical conventional portrayals of participation in outdoor pursuits frequently conjured up images of adversity against the elements, ‘conquering’ physical challenges and derring-do. Such representations tended to centre on a virile, strong and, above all, youthful and primarily male gender bias. Equally, it might be said that such representations of outdoor activities were dominated by particular social classes—that is, especially middle and upper classes in the United Kingdom—and different national contexts evolve their own narratives in relation to the outdoors and these connect in various ways in relation to age (Cook, 1978; Elkin, 1991; Stokes, 2008). In the current epoch, it can be argued that clichéd representations are being recontextualised to explore more variegated and inclusive accounts of the outdoors (see, e.g., Barnfield and Humberstone, 2008, on gay and lesbian outdoor practitioners).

Conventionally, commentaries on ageing have exhibited a propensity towards problematising old age; that is, pathologising rather than celebrating the lived experience, benefits and opportunities of ageing (Phillipson, 1998). However, growing evidence suggests a positive correlation between older adults finding well-being and maintenance of skills through physical activity in outdoor contexts (Arthur, Bennet, Stanush, & McNelly, 1998; Brennan, 2008; Nimrod, 2011; Sugerman, 2007). This is evolving in tandem with changing understandings of ‘leisure’ (Nimrod & Janke, 2012; Stebbins 2014) and the rebranding of the outdoors as a public health resource (Hickman, Beynon, & Inkster, 2014; Varney & Whyte, 2015). The confluence of the phenomenon of the older adult and the outdoors has given rise to notions of \textit{inter alia} ‘savouring’, the capacity to ‘appreciate, and enhance the positive experiences [in life]’ (Bryant & Veroff, 2007, p. 2), or, for example, nostalgia, anticipation and recasting of outdoor activities (O’Connell, 2010).

In summary, there are a significant and timely range of issues to be considered in relation to ageing and outdoor activities, and this special issue encourages such lines of enquiry. Strands for

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submissions to the forthcoming special issue might include the following (although not exclusively):

- Ageing, the older adult and adventure sports.
- Narratives of learning in relation to ageing and the outdoors.
- Analyses of ‘stages and ‘phases’ of ageing in relation to outdoor adventure and learning.
- Accounts of lived experience(s) among older adults in relation to the outdoors.
- Politics and ageing in relation to the outdoors.
- Studies of varying national contexts and cases of older adults in the outdoors.
- Comparative studies examining, for example, ageing and the outdoors across national contexts; sport/activity domains, learning environment and socio-political populations.
- Notions of ‘community’ and social connectivity for older adults in outdoor contexts.
- Engagement and motivations of older adults in (niche) outdoor activities (e.g. tree-climbing).

The special issue welcomes studies from a range of methodological approaches including innovative and developmental stances, both theoretical and empirical. The initial submission deadline is 15 August 2017. The proposed publication release is the end of 2018. If you wish to discuss your submission further please contact: Dr Mark Hickman (Email: mthickman@uclan.ac.uk) or Prof. Peter Stokes (Email: peterstokesmail@gmail.com).

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

**References**


