



ISPA Early Career Network: Långholmen Writing Retreat

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In Partnership with



IN CONVERSATION WITH THE EARLY CAREER NETWORK FOR THE INTERSECTIONAL STIGMA OF PLACE-BASED AGEING PROJECT

The Intersectional Stigma of Place-based Ageing (ISPA) project is about creating inclusive change that can tackle stigma around age, disability and place, while shaping the future of inclusive, values-driven research. This is realised through our Early Career Network (ECN), where ISPA supports a group of around 20 PhD students and postdoctoral researchers from a range of disciplines and institutions.

The ECN provides dedicated mentorship, peer learning spaces, and training opportunities through online reading groups, in-person events, and support for external engagement. As part of this, ISPA has enabled several ECRs to attend and contribute to international networking activities.

In this blog, Lucia Crowther, University of Hull, and Sadhana Jagannath, Imperial College London (members of the ISPA early career network) share their experiences of being part of ISPA and attending an international writing retreat that was a collaboration between the British Society of Gerontology Emerging Researchers in Ageing (BSG ERA) and the SWEAH Alumni Interdisciplinary Network (SAIN).



Figure 1: The island of Långholmen in Stockholm

Often, our development happens outside of workplace and this writing retreat was nothing but a fitting example of the same. The retreat was hosted at Långholmen Hotel, a hotel and conference centre on the island of Långholmen in Stockholm. The action-packed 2-day programme involved dedicated writing time, networking activities, opportunities to share ECR research through 3 minute presentations, a workshop on funding and extra curricular activities such as a tour of the prison grounds and Långholmen museum.

The hotel is based in an adapted nineteenth-century prison which was historically Sweden's largest gaol. Although the site has been converted, many areas of the hotel, including single rooms and communal landings, still clearly show the evidence the building's past. This made the residential trip a highly unusual and interesting experience in which the attendees worked, ate and socialised together on an island apart from the city centre, providing the true experience of a 'retreat' and time for focus and sharing ideas.

For Lucia Crowther, whose research involves analysing historic buildings which have been converted into contemporary healthcare settings, it was a particularly welcome opportunity to explore an example of a large-scale adaptive-use architectural project in which the character of an historic building has been thoughtfully, and sometimes humorously, carried forwards into its present-day appearance.

As well as time for writing, the programme offered opportunities for attendees to appreciate differences in approaches to planning and funding research from both interdisciplinary and international perspectives. Dr Brian Beach of University College London and Karolinska Institutet, hosted a workshop on funding opportunities, highlighting key differences between the UK, Sweden and USA and an overview of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA). The workshop gave attendees the role of funding application assessors, rather than applicants, which Lucia thought gave a useful and unexpected insight into the importance of abstracts and summaries and the role they play in catching the eye of potential funders.



Figure 2: Pictures of inside the Långholmen Hotel and Museum, Stockholm formerly a nineteenth-century prison



Unique benefits of writing retreats outside of academic settings

Sadhana identified two key, unique benefits of the Långholmen writing retreat: dedicated writing time in a non-traditional setting, and reconnecting with colleagues and networks.

She reflects on the experience, indicating that having dedicated time on a retreat physically away from her (wonderful) work environment in a relevantly dramatic setting successfully nudged her to complete revisions on a manuscript and think deeply about framing and structuring another. Being 'locked' away in a converted prison, having three sit down meals a day and plenty of (healthy) cakes and treats to keep us going truly contributed to a refreshing, relaxing and inspiring environment to get writing done.

Another wonderful benefit of the event, Sadhana suggests, was being able to reconnect with old colleagues and networks. "I very much see myself as an accidental and temporary gerontologist and I don't often run into the same networks and conferences as my lovely peers and it was a great opportunity to catch up, exchange ideas, visions, plans and frustrations, and just enjoy each other's brilliant company. An additional benefit was being able to network with many others in similar/relevant fields, career stages, and situate my research approach and goals within contexts and disciplines that I do not usually consider (e.g., role of housing design within domestic abuse in older adults)".

Sadhana reflects that it was a pleasure and privilege to attend the writing retreat organised by SAIN and ERA at Långholmen Hotel, Stockholm. She truly enjoyed the human bingo networking activity and Dr Brian Beach's talk on funding and career progression. Sadhana also made the most out of the location, enjoying morning runs around the island, an evening/end of retreat walk around Stockholm.

Both ECRs expressed their gratitude to the organisers for throwing a seamless event and making us feel very welcome, comfortable, productive, and motivated! They excitedly await other upcoming activities with BSG ERA and SAIN and are grateful for ISPA ECR Network for funding this opportunity.

Reflection

What shines through from Lucia and Sadhana's reflections is how important spaces like this are for building inclusive, values-driven research cultures. Writing retreats are not only about productivity, but about creating time and space to connect across disciplines, perspectives, and lived experiences. These exchanges mirror the core ISPA ambition: to bring together diverse voices in order to challenge stigma and design futures that are more just and inclusive for older and disabled people. Through the ISPA Early Career Network we are proud to nurture this next generation of researchers, supporting them to integrate collaboration, care, and creativity into their research lens. In doing so, the ECR network is already showing how early investment in people can help shift the research culture and, in turn, the systems and structures that ISPA seeks to transform.

Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) Project

The ISPA project is an ambitious 5-year participatory mixed method study that will explore and understand how the stigma attached to where people live can intersect with experiences of disability and ageing. This will provide nuanced insights into the structures and systems that drive exclusion and allow us to tackle the inequalities experienced by older disabled adults. Do visit <https://www.youtube.com/@ispaproject> for an audio and visual overview.

We aim to develop interventions related to home and environmental modifications that encourage interventions for inclusive approaches within housing, health and social care delivery. This in turn supports people to age well within homes and communities across England, Scotland, and Wales. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Ref: ES/W012677/1) and runs from September 2022 to September 2027.

The Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) Project is a collaboration between the University of Stirling and the University of St Andrews, Newcastle University and University of Bristol. We are also partnered with the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (Housing LIN) and Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA).

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