



**The PRC logo:  
humans developing  
in a changing,  
multidimensional  
context.**

## Colophon

*People in Transition*

*Biannual newsletter of the  
Population Research Centre (PRC),  
Faculty of Spatial Sciences,  
University of Groningen,  
The Netherlands*

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*Editor: Anu Kōu*

*The PRC is an internationally  
oriented demographic research and  
training institute. Its focus is on  
"people behind population figures".*

*People in Transition reports about  
research and training activities of  
the PRC. An electronic version is  
available at: [www.rug.nl/prc](http://www.rug.nl/prc).*

*To be included in our mailing list,  
please email Anu Kōu  
([a.kou@rug.nl](mailto:a.kou@rug.nl))*

*Or write to:  
PRC Newsletter,  
Department of Demography,  
Faculty of Spatial Sciences,  
University of Groningen,  
P.O. Box 800,  
9700 AV Groningen,  
The Netherlands  
Tel: + 31 50 363 4421  
Fax: + 31 50 363 3901*



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# People in Transition

Newsletter of the Population Research Centre, Groningen

Issue No. 14

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PRC 'heidag' in June: after a long day discussing research, it is time for some outdoor activities!

## Editorial

Dear colleagues,

The new academic year has seen several changes taking place at the PRC. Clara became the new Head of the PRC as of 1st September. We have welcomed many new faces at the PRC: 14 Master's students, 9 PhD students and 2 senior staff members. It is more lively at the PRC than ever!

In this Newsletter, Inge looks back at the past eight years as the Head of the PRC. We wish Inge the best of luck in her new position as the Dean of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences and are happy that she has not left us completely as she will still spend two days a week on research and teaching. In the alumnus column, Alette Spriensma shares her memories and experiences of the MSc Population Studies programme. Meredith Tavener makes a convincing case for open questions in surveys.

We would also like to announce that this issue of the PRC Newsletter will be the last paper version. From the next issue onwards, the newsletter will only be available online. Therefore, and because our alumni email database is not entirely up to date, we would like you to send your email address to the editor ([a.kou@rug.nl](mailto:a.kou@rug.nl)) so that we can put you on our mailing list and send you future issues of the newsletter.

As the end of the year is approaching, we take this opportunity to wish you happy Christmas holidays and all the best for 2012!

For more information about the PRC, please visit our website [www.rug.nl/prc](http://www.rug.nl/prc).

Kind regards,

Clara Mulder (Head of the PRC)

Anu Kōu (Editor)





## Inge Hutter: eight years the Head of the PRC

As we move into autumn, and as evenings get longer, it is a good time for some thoughts and reflections. It has been two months since I stepped down as Head of the Department of Demography/ Director of PRC, and six months since I started as Dean of our Faculty of Spatial Sciences. I can certainly tell you that delegating former tasks and taking on new ones have proved to be a process in many ways.



When I took over the PRC's leadership from Frans Willekens in September 2003, the institute was different from what it is now. First of all, it was a very small institute; Frans had left for NIDI, Sergei for Vienna, and Harrie retired the year before. It was up to Karen Haandrikman, Stiny and me to hold and defend the PRC fort!! And so we did. In the course of the eight years that followed, many others have joined the PRC: first Leo and Fanny; then Ajay, Louise, Hinke and Meredith; and after that... many more postdoc and PhD researchers, all currently working on the first floor of Landleven 1. And, very recently, of course, Clara joined us.



However, when talking about the developments which the PRC underwent, I not only refer to the increase in staff – although I do believe that it has made us stronger and less vulnerable. But as Fanny reminded me recently, when she, Leo and I made up the PRC team our focus was on fertility/reproductive health, mortality and migration – the traditional demographic topics. It was all we could do at that time. Nowadays, PRC staff and affiliates are engaged in many different research perspectives and topics: quantitative and qualitative research; international and regional oriented research; and demography in relation to anthropology, economic and cultural geography, epidemiology, nutrition, and social gerontology. A major development, of course, has been the start of research on

Healthy Ageing and Population Decline, including HAPS (Healthy Ageing: Population and Society) in which we have the opportunity to make our mark in interdisciplinary research, as demographers working with epidemiologists and sociologists.

At a more personal level, what did I especially like about leading the PRC team?

First of all, it was the work and study relationships with researchers and students from all over the world; working together, getting to know different cultural and personal perspectives. It was fascinating and it was a great privilege to experience it all.

Then of course, the many different meetings and celebrations: the joint PhD meetings with Southampton; the two lustrum celebrations; the involvement in PopFest this year; the setting up of the Erasmus Mundus programme with Southampton and Lund; the visits to India, of course, also with deans of the faculty; and the current collaborative projects and programmes with African research institutes.



Also, it has been really great as Head of Department to see how people grow and develop, both in their job and personal life. When I handed the reins over to Clara in September, I not only felt that PRC will do well in her very capable hands, but also that the young and vibrant team of researchers and teachers will go on to make the PRC strong and vital.

As Dean in charge of the research portfolio, I will continue working in research management, with researchers in demography, geography and spatial planning, thus developing the faculty's research programme tWIST (towards Well-being, Innovation and Spatial Transformation).



Personally, in my own research, a highlight during the past years has been the discovery of the participative qualitative approach to research, which I have applied to research in India and Malawi. It has proven its utility as well in healthy ageing research in northern Netherlands. As Dean for three days a week, I will still have time for some teaching and research (especially PhD supervision) at PRC. My focus will be on qualitative research and development of the participative approach to ageing and health, in Asia, Africa and northern Netherlands!



## Alumnus PRC: Alette Spruiensma

### What made you decide to do the Master's in Population Studies in Groningen?

The demographic courses that were run during my Bachelor's studies made me think about pursuing the Master's in population studies. To be absolutely sure, I followed the minor in demography. The topic intrigued me so much that I decided to specialize further in this area.

### Can you tell us something about your experiences during your Master's studies?

Looking back, it was a rewarding time and I have very warm memories. Both the students and teachers created a very pleasant learning environment; there was time to joke around, but when needed we were serious. Because of the different cultural backgrounds we learned a lot from each other.

### What did you do after your Master's?

After finishing my Master's I started looking for a job. My plan was to leave the northern part of the Netherlands and move to the Randstad. In November 2010 I found a very interesting PhD position at the VU University Medical Center in Amsterdam. My research focuses on analyzing longitudinal outcome variables that have an excess of zeros, in other words, experience left censoring.

### Do you still use the knowledge that you acquired in Groningen?

The topic of my PhD is highly oriented towards research methodology. As I use a lot of statistics, the statistical knowledge gathered during my earlier study has proved to be highly valuable. Insights drawn from my days as a student assistant provide useful material for teaching seminar classes in statistics.



## “Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?” Including open questions in surveys.

### Meredith Tavener

A survey is a common method for data collection, and is used across many different disciplines. I'm sure most of us have come across a survey at one time or another: usually one or more pages of mostly closed questions accompanied by a fixed number of options to choose from. But what I really like to see is a survey that allows the respondents to not only tick a box, but to also add free text comments of their own.



For a few years now I have had enormous fun working with written narratives, recorded contemporaneously on postal surveys. For example, one longitudinal health survey with which I have been involved has collected 34,315 free text comments written by 19,391 survey respondents over a period of 13 years. The types of narrative provided has covered issues such as disability, experiences of violence, housing, the environment, major life events such as divorce, disaster and widowhood, and family issues such as children leaving home or getting married. Personally, I have analysed written narratives that describe informal care experiences, transitions between work and retirement, physical activity and leisure time, and personal health economics.

Of course, in fairness, my passion for written survey narrative should be tempered with an alternative argument (however, given that I'm writing this article, any contentions will be brief). Depending upon how much space is provided for survey respondents to write free text comments, researchers may be left with a lot of extra data to analyse. This type of data (i.e. written material) may not specifically relate to other issues in the survey, or may be considered too negative or critical. Also, respondents may take the opportunity to ask for information or clarification, which then requires a response by the researcher.

On the other hand, respondent comments can highlight where survey questions are ambiguous. The wide range of topics recorded by respondents can point towards new research topics, and can help redress the power balance between closed questions which represent the researcher's agenda and 'other comments' made by the research participant. My own philosophy regarding open ended comments in surveys is based on a line of reasoning which says that recording free text comments reflects a relative level of importance of that information to an individual, and also signifies a need to share that part of their experience. That is, if someone has something to say, maybe we should let them. So next time you are developing a survey, take some time to consider including some space for people to write more about the beliefs and experiences which matter to them – it could enrich your overall research.

## Visitors to the PRC

**Dr. Anindita Datta** from the Department of Geography, Delhi School of Economics, visited the PRC to discuss with Ajay Bailey about future collaboration between the two institutes. She gave a talk at the PRC on 'Natural Landscapes and Regional Constructs of Gender: Theorising Linkages in the Indian Context'.

## Recent publications

Amiri, M., **Janssen, F.** and A. Kunst (2011), The decline in ischemic heart disease mortality in seven European countries: exploration of future trends. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 65(8): 676-681. doi:10.1136/jech.2010.109058

**Bailey, A.** (2011) Left at Sea: HIV vulnerability among migrant fishermen in Goa, India. *International Maritime Health*, 62(2), 116-122

**Bijlsma, M.J.,** Bos HJ, de Jong-van den Berg LTW, **Janssen, F.** Periodepatronen, leeftijdpatronen en cohortpatronen in de prevalentie van benzodiazepinegebruik en statinegebruik: de invloed van veranderde richtlijnen. *PW Wetenschappelijk Platform*. 2011;5:a1140

Blaauboer, M., **Mulder, C. H.,** & Zorlu, A. (2011). Distances between couples and the man's and woman's parents. *Population, Space and Place*, 17(5), 597-610.

Dewilde, C., **Mulder, C.H.** & Smits, A. (2011) Housing and the life course. In I. Anderson & D. Sim (Ed.), *Housing and inequality* (pp.167-186). Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing.

**Kibele, E.** (2011) Regionale Demografie in Deutschland: Der Süden erwartet mehr vom Leben. *Yearbook of the Max Planck Society*.

Rijsdijk, L.E., A.E.R. Bos, R.A.C. Ruiter, J.N. Leerlooijer, **B. de Haas, H.P. Schaalma,** 2011. The World Starts With Me: A multilevel evaluation of a comprehensive sex education programme targeting adolescents in Uganda. *BMC Public Health* (11), pp 334. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-11-334

## Short courses

May 23-27, Ajay Bailey, Meredith Tavener, Hinke Haisma and Inge Hutter taught the course '**Introduction to Qualitative Methods**' to researchers at the University Medical Center Groningen in association with SHARE/Center for Metamedica and Ethics, UMCG.

January to February 2012, PRC and NIDI will organize a short course in Dutch, '**Demographic Measures, Methods and Forecasts**', which is especially geared towards those working in municipalities and provinces and who deal with population issues such as population decline and population ageing. See: <http://www.rug.nl/prc/education/kortecursus/index>.

## External activities

June 14-17, Hans Elshof and Clara Mulder held presentations at the **6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Population Geographies** at Umeå University, Sweden.

June 18, Fanny Janssen appeared on **Noord TV** in the television programme *Adamsappel* which dealt with the topic 'The end of the world'. The programme discussed world population growth and how some scientists regard this as a prelude to the end of the world.

June 21-26, Kim van Dam participated at the **International Arctic Social Sciences Association VII** meeting on

Circumpolar Perspectives in Global Dialogue: Social Sciences beyond the International Polar Year, at the Steffasson Arctic Institute in Akureyri, Iceland.

June 27-29, an international postgraduate Population Studies conference **PopFest 2011** was organized by PRC's Research Master's and PhD students Liili Abuladze, Alessandra Carioli, Nina Conkova, Anu Kōu, Sjaak Moerman and Marieke van der Pers, with Inge Hutter as advisor. Nearly all of them presented a paper at the conference, as did Maarten Bijlsema, Billie de Haas and Bettie Oosterhof. The PRC was one of the sponsors of the event.

June 27-29, the **IUSSP Panel on Qualitative Research in Population Studies** was held in Groningen. Inge Hutter is one of the Panel Members.

June 29, Inge Hutter was one of the speakers at the seminar **Healthy Ageing: the Need for Qualitative Research**, organized by the PRC. The seminar also hosted the launching of *Qualitative Research Methods* written by Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey.

August, Ajay Bailey presented a paper on 'Cultural rationality in HIV risk assessment among labour migrants from Karnataka in Goa' at the workshop '**Facets of research and teaching in anthropology in Karnataka: retrospect and prospect**' organized by the Anthropological Survey of India and Karnatak University Dharwad.

September 1-3, Eva Kibele and Fanny Janssen presented their paper 'Distortion of regional old-age mortality rates due to migration prior to death?' at the **EAPS workshop Health, Morbidity and Mortality: the State of the Art** held in Vienna, Austria.

## PRC news

Ajay Bailey has received a grant from the Gratama Stichting for a project '**Care from India, exploring Indian nurse migration and reception in Northern Netherlands**'. He has also obtained a separate grant from UNFPA-India to conduct research, together with Dr. Jyoti Hallad (Population Research Centre, Dharwad) and Prof. K. S. James, on '**Ageing and wellbeing in migrant households in Dharwad, Karnataka**'. Both these projects are part of the 'New India Programme'.

May to July, Anu Kōu conducted fieldwork in the United Kingdom for her PhD research on the **life course of highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and UK**. During her stay, she was hosted at the ESRC Research Centre for Population Change at the University of Southampton and supervised by Dr Sabu Padmadas.

June 17, Louise Meijering's son Morris was born.

July 1, Mirjam Klaassens joined the PRC as a postdoc researcher and will be working on the project 'Care without rules', within the Health, Ageing, Population and Society (HAPS) programme.

September 1, Kim van Dam was appointed **Policy Advisor for Research** at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences.

August to December, Bille de Haas's fieldwork in Kampala, Uganda, to explore the role of teachers' perceptions and personal experiences regarding sexuality in **teaching sexuality education to secondary school students**. She is a research affiliate at Makerere Institute for Social Research and her supervisors are Stella Nyanzi and Richard Kibombo.

September and October, several new PhD students commenced with their PhD research: Mackfallen Anasel, Maarten Bijlsma (externally), Vera Dimitrievska, Linden Douma, **Daniël** Herbers, Emmy Metta, Daniel Nyato, Nazia Parveen Gill and Sanne Visser.

