Dear colleagues,

Despite the cold winter this year, our department has been buzzing with vibrant energy. In the past few months, we have welcomed new researchers and PhD students. Hinke, Meredith, Alessandra and Billie, welcome to our department! In the coming months more new researchers connected with the HAPS (Healthy Aging: Population and Society) project will join us. While we said hello to newcomers, we have had to say goodbye to two of our PhD students, Beata and Biswmitra, who will finalize their PhD research in their own country, Poland and India.

Research as well as educational activities are proceeding smoothly. With the conclusion of the first semester many Bachelor’s and Master’s students have deepened their knowledge about the demography of the world, Europe and the Netherlands; theories of demographic behavior; various methods to analyze macro and micro data; and some went through the research process to prepare for their Master’s thesis.

In this newsletter, Louise Meijering explains her ideas on how to improve research methodology in the Bachelor’s teaching programme of the Faculty. Rosalind Franklin Fellow Hinke Haisma tells us more about herself, her interests and future plans. You can also read about the career path of alumnus Marja Exterkate since her graduation from studies in non-Western demography in 1990. Finally, PhD student Rizwan Ul Haq, who is conducting fieldwork in Pakistan, sent us an update for this newsletter.

For your information, we plan to develop a network of our alumni, through Facebook, where we can exchange information and be in touch with each other. If you want to join this network, please add ‘PRC Alumni’ to your Facebook profile.

We hope you will enjoy reading this newsletter, and we will keep you updated about PRC’s movers and shakers in our next issue.

Kind regards,

Marieke van der Pers (Editor)
Louise Meijering: Methodology in the Bachelor’s Programme

The Department of Demography / PRC is involved in conducting courses for the Bachelor’s degrees in Human Geography and Spatial Planning and Technical Planning at the Faculty. Besides the Minor Population Studies, our major contribution is the development of research methodology. In February 2009, Louise Meijering joined PRC as assistant professor of methodology. As coordinator of the research component, she is responsible for the coherence between the methodology courses and she also runs some of these courses herself.

The research strand Socio-Spatial Research (Sociaal-Ruimtelijk Onderzoek) in the teaching programmes consists of courses in research methodology, methods of data collection and methods of data analysis. Together, these courses constitute the methodological preparation that students undergo before carrying out their Bachelor’s projects. The Figure shows the courses that are part of the research strand Socio-Spatial Research.

The Figure also illustrates the emphasis on quantitative research methodologies in the teaching programme.

The main objective of Louise’s position is to improve the methodological quality of the Bachelor’s projects at our Faculty. Special focus is on improving the rigour with which methods of data collection and data analysis are selected and applied. To achieve this objective, two directions for improvement are pursued. First, the cohesion within the research strand will be improved. The participating staff members work on providing courses that equip the students with the necessary methodological skills and background to carry out a Bachelor’s project of high quality. Second, the link between methodology and the substantive part of the curriculum will be improved, for instance through exposing students to GIS, statistics, in-depth interviewing and writing papers.

Currently, creating this link is pursued in several pilot projects. A more integrated teaching programme will make it easier for the students to recognise the use of the courses in socio-spatial research for their further studies, in which skills – that are learned in the research component – are applied in other courses.

Interview with an alumnus
Marja Exterkate, Non-Western Demography, 1990

Why did you study demography?
I liked the combination of the ‘non-Western’ angle and statistical estimation techniques.

What is your main field of interest and how did your work career turn out?
Immediately after my graduation, I hesitated between two options: focus on pure modelling (population forecasting) or focus on practice-based modelling through working in non-Western cultures (health surveys, setting up health information systems). Although I started with population forecasting for European countries (via the Population Research Centre and Eurostat), I became more and more involved in working in non-Western cultures (Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Yemen). I was responsible for the whole chain: primary data collection (developing questionnaires, sampling, training interviewers), analyses and reporting, to the translation of the results into policy measures. The focus during work abroad was always related to mother-and-child health: on plantations in Sri Lanka, in slum and rural areas in Yemen and in refugee camps in Pakistan. At the end of 1996, I returned to Holland, and started working at NIDI. Again reproductive health and monitoring were common threads in my work, but then at a macro level. More and more I realized that monitoring was not enough for me: I wanted to know what actually happened in the field. The stories behind all those figures were missing. From monitoring I almost automatically stepped into the ‘evaluation world’ of development cooperation. After a few years of policy evaluation, I realized that this was not my cup of tea. Since the end of 2008, I have been working as a manager of a programme dealing with issues surrounding female genital mutilation at Pharos in Utrecht. Pharos is a Dutch knowledge centre that is specialised in the field of health care for refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants and other migrants in the Netherlands. In my view, Pharos provides a meeting ground for issues such as (reproductive) health and health care, action research, and working closely with migrant groups in the Netherlands.

Do you still use the knowledge that you have attained in Groningen?
Not directly, but the methodical way of thinking is always there.
People in Transition

Message from the Field
Rizwan Ul Haq, Pakistan (December 2009-March 2010)

PhD researcher Rizwan Ul Haq is conducting his fieldwork in Islamabad, Pakistan. As part of his research on the quality of life of elderly people, he is conducting a survey based on the qualitative research carried out during his feasibility study last year.

This is my second fieldwork in the course of my PhD study in Islamabad, Pakistan. This time I have planned a survey, where I will use a questionnaire designed based on interviews that I conducted during my previous visit. The purpose of this survey is to find out the prevailing situation among the elderly people in Islamabad about the progress, commitment, and importance of different goals in their lives; and how these goals affect their subjective well-being. My target population is the middle class elderly in Islamabad.

Before my arrival, I had no idea about the magnitude of work entailed in this survey; discussing the questionnaire with some experts, conducting pilot interviews, revising the questionnaire accordingly, appointing interviewers, finalising sampling plan, translating the questionnaire, training the interviewers, going into the field for the survey, editing the questionnaires, and data entry. As such, I am grateful to my supervisors, Leo and Inge, whose estimation of 3 months for this survey was more realistic, although the actual field work was not anticipated to take longer than 3 weeks.

At the time of writing, I have finalized the sampling plan, conducted a few pilot interviews, and selected the interviewers. Last week I received the green light on my questionnaire and sampling plan from my supervisors. I hope that I would be able to start training the interviewers this week, in order to begin the fieldwork from next week onwards, which would be the hardest part, in view of the current state of law and order situation in the country.

The Rosalind Franklin Fellowship is a prestigious fellowship programme of the University of Groningen. One of its aims is to strengthen the presence of women at the highest levels of the institution and to attract female academics who aim for a career towards full professorship in a European top research university. Hinke Haima shares her story with us.

From the time I was a student at Wageningen Agricultural University I have been interested in inequalities in child health. My first experience in a developing country was in the Kilimanjaro region, Tanzania. My research was on the etiology of anemia in children under five. I would recruit the mothers at birth, and then follow their children over time. This included riding around on my motorbike to find the mothers in their houses. Very often, a little boy would ride pillion and show me the way. That was for me the best part of doing research, to be right in the middle of it. In subsequent research in other developing countries and in Brazil, small-scale surveys have been my way of looking at reality. Recently, in Groningen, I have become interested in qualitative research, to obtain more in-depth information on behaviour underlying the associations of interest.

At PRC, my research programme will focus on the question of how the use of resources affects inequalities in child health. The use of resources includes for example, land use, health care facilities or interventions, knowledge; and inequalities can be of a social, gender, or regional (rural/urban) nature.

At the population level, I am interested in nutrition patterns across populations and how they influence health outcomes. Following the nutrition transition theory proposed by Popkin (2002), populations go through different stages of the transition, starting with (1) the hunter gatherers who need to actively look for their food, with few health problems, albeit short life expectancy, through (2) a stage where malnutrition is common, and infectious diseases prevail, to (3) our current stage where overnutrition is more prevalent and cardiovascular diseases are important causes of disability and death. I want to look at inequalities in child health in different populations in different stages of the nutrition transition: Groningen, Brazil, Tanzania. I will use both qualitative and quantitative methods (survey, DHS and cohort data). In my view, new insights are to be gained from interdisciplinary research. In the past, I have worked on the edges of biology, epidemiology, medical science, and agriculture, and within the spatial sciences and the healthy ageing programme, I see many opportunities to work across disciplines. The challenge is not just to work “with” other disciplines, but truly grasp and internalise the epistemologies and methodologies of the other disciplines.

Hinke Haima: Rosalind Franklin Fellow

On November 16, Rosalind Franklin Fellow Hinke Haima, appointed by the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, started working at the PRC. Hinke used to work at the Hanze University for Applied Sciences in Groningen, both as a lecturer (Nutrition and Dietetics) and researcher (in the area of infant feeding in different cultural settings). She graduated with a MSc in Human Nutrition from the Wageningen Agricultural University and a PhD in Medical Sciences from the University of Groningen.

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Hinke Haima: Rosalind Franklin Fellow

Source: U.S Department of State, 2009
Visitors to the PRC

- Former Master’s student Ignace Habimana Kapano, presented in October 2009 a lunch seminar on ‘The effect of pregnancy and birth spacing on pregnancy outcome and infant mortality in Rwanda, evidence from the Rwanda demographic and Health Survey 2005’. Ignace is now a PhD researcher at Utrecht University.
- Coen van Duin (Statistics Netherlands) conducted a seminar in December 2009 on the methodology behind population forecasts.
- Mieke Reuser (NIDI/PRC) conducted a seminar on ‘Demographic methods applied to population health research’ in January 2010 in a PRC seminar.
- Dr Marjo Buitelaar presented her new book on highly educated Moroccan migrant daughters in the Netherlands, in January 2010, on the occasion of the launch of the discussion group ‘Migration and Culture’. Dr Buitelaar is an Associate Professor of Contemporary Islam at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies.

Recent publications


Short courses

- The short course Demographic Methods and Analysis, part of the Master’s of Science in Population Studies, was a great success this year. While in the past years, only one or two external students participated, this year the course has attracted 8 participants from outside. Four of the participants are from the National AIDS Coordinating Agency (NACA) in Botswana, the others are from Ghana, Bangladesh, Nepal and Indonesia and work at statistical offices and demographic departments of various universities.

External activities

- April-September, Aagie Papineau Salm participated in an evaluation of a Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme funded by the European Commission and executed by UNFPA and IPPF in 22 countries between 2003 and 2008.
- September 11, at AG/AI in Utrecht Fanny Janssen presented findings of her research together with Leo van Wissen and Anton Kunst (University of Amsterdam) on the future trends of mortality in the Netherlands.
- September 27-October 2, the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) organized the XXVI IUSSP International Population Conference in Marrakech, Morocco. Inge Hutter, Ajay Bailey, Karen Haandrikman, Anu Kou and Mieke Reuser successfully presented their work and enjoyed the conference in Marrakech.
- In October, Karen Haandrikman, Anu Kou, Mieke Reuser, Billie de Haas and Wike Been presented their work at the third Dutch Demography Day in Utrecht. Ajay Bailey chaired the session on migration and employment, Fanny Janssen was chair for the session on mortality and well-being, while Aagie Papineau-Salm chaired the session about policies. Other staff and students attended the various sessions.

PRC News

- In November, Fanny Janssen contributed to a study visit of Turkish actuaries to the Social Security Institution, Department of Actuary and Fund, Management. This was part of a project ‘Actuarial topics insocial security’ for the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.
- In November, Erka Caro participated in the workshop ‘101 Problems of 90,000 Inhabitants. Problems and solution for Kamza’ organized by the Municipality of Kamza, Albania.
- In November, Inge Hutter visited Malawi to work with counterpart Mary Sibance on papers about the participation-based reproductive health project in Mangochi.
- In January Inge Hutter participated in a EU Joint Programming Initiative meeting on demographic change in Berlin, with a focus on population decline and healthy ageing, in Europe.
- In January, Leo van Wissen presented at the Statenconferentie Conference of the Provincial Council- on population decline held in Groningen.