Editorial

Welcome to this Special Issue of People in Transition, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of our international Master of Science in Population Studies. A truly international programme: in the past 10 years students from more than 30 countries participated in our courses.

In this Special Issue, founder Frans Willekens elaborates on the history of Dutch demography in general, our department in particular, and describes how the Master came into being in the 1990s.

Having started in 1999, the Master became an 'official' master (lasting one year) in 2004 with the introduction of the Bachelor-Master structure in the Netherlands.

On 10th of June, we will celebrate our anniversary and .... look forward into the future. We will exchange experiences with several other Master programmes in Population Studies in Europe (see the map on page 4), and discuss how we could possibly share our knowledge more, within the European framework.

But now first .... time to party!!

Inge Hutter
Head of Department Demography / Population Research Centre

Marieke van der Pers (Editor)
Frans Willekens:
Founder of the International Masters

The introduction of the international Master of Science in Population Studies programme in September 1999 was a milestone. The programme reached out to students abroad, and, it was a logical step in a development that started in the 1970s. During that period, and largely due to the World Population Conferences in Belgrade in 1965 and Bucharest in 1974, there was a growing concern about population growth and the detrimental effects of population increase on development. Quantifying population growth in terms of fertility, mortality and migration was a difficult task because data were incomplete and often of questionable quality. When Hans Zwart came to Groningen in 1972 after a career as demographer and census officer in the Pacific, he introduced data collection methods and demographic techniques for the estimation of population characteristics and demographic parameters. Demographic Analysis by Pressat (published in 1972) and the UN Manual X on Indirect Techniques for Demographic Estimation (published in 1983) defined the core of analytical demography, one of the two pillars of the training programme. The second was social demography, with a strong influence from anthropology. The curriculum included extensive fieldwork and near the end of the study period most students left Groningen for this or to do an internship in a developing country. In that period students were not under extensive pressure to complete their education within a stipulated time frame. The education resulted in the university (“doctorandus”) degree Non-Western Demography. The RUG was the only university in the Netherlands that offered a degree programme in demography. In 1995, the qualification ‘Non-Western’ was dropped resulting in a degree in Demography.

In the second half of the 1980s, in the first period of general budget restrictions and a doctrine advocating economies of scale, educational programmes were abolished or merged. Demography, being a relatively small discipline with few students, located in university departments with growing teaching load, was under threat. At the RUG, it was Henk Voogd’s vision that saved demography. At that time, Henk was dean of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences. During the same period, several PhD programmes were established in the Netherlands, including a programme in Demography. The Netherlands Graduate School for Research in Demography (PDOD), started in 1989 and was a joint venture of the universities of Amsterdam, Tilburg, Utrecht and Groningen, and the NIDI. PDOD was a great success, but during a new period of budget cuts in the mid-1990s, the School was merged with the Netherlands Graduate School of Urban and Regional Research (NETHUR). Although it was agreed that PDOD would preserve its identity and financial independence, it was clear that it would be difficult to keep that promise.

During that period of turmoil, the demography group in Groningen opted for the internationalization strategy. In 1996 the Board of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences called a committee to propose ways to increase the interest in the demography degree programme. The call followed the very positive assessment of demographic research and training by two international review panels appointed to evaluate the performance of higher education and academic research in the Netherlands. The internationalization strategy had two components: (a) a PhD programme and (b) a two-year Research Master’s programme. The report MA and PhD programme in Demography (1996) described the programmes. In October 1996 the PhD programme started with four bright and promising young scholars: Melinda Mills (Canada), Sabu Padmadas (India), Zhiwu Liang (China) and Sergio Medina (Mexico). The introduction of the new Master programme took more time because it was (and is) part of the Central Register of Courses of Higher Education (CROHO) in the Netherlands. The international MSc Programme in Population Studies was included in the development plan of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences that was approved by the Faculty Board in 1997. In March 1998, the Dean of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, Piet Pellenbarg, informed the University authorities (Collegie van Bestuur) about the new programme and in September 1999 the first foreign students arrived: Hideko Matsuo (Japan), Ganesh Sargadharan (India) and A.A. Mamun (Bangladesh), to study with the Dutch students.

During the past 10 years the Groningen programme evolved but maintained the basic principle that guides teaching and research: demography is not about numbers but about human beings developing in changing, multidimensional and multilevel contexts. The emphasis on process and context, perfectly visualized by the Indian painter Arya in the PRC logo, remains a distinctive feature of the Groningen programme.
Interview with an alumnus
Hideko Matsuo, Demography 1999-2000

Groningen has always been a special place for me. After 6 years, it is still so. After taking the life history analysis course by Frans Willekens in 1998, I started as the first international Master student in 1999. After finishing the Master thesis, I immediately continued to do my doctoral research (2003: ‘Transition to motherhood in Japan in comparison with the Netherlands’).

Frans took good care of his students. He guided the research and ensured the production of a final dissertation. During this process, he patiently listened but also gave good advice at the right moment. He implemented his ‘process-context approach’. Frans’s vision of the world is embedded in the unique PRC research programme. It had core focused themes which were ‘innovative’, ‘policy-relevant’, ‘action-oriented’, and of course, ‘internationally-oriented’. This vision continues after 10 years where Inge Hutter took over.

Frans influenced my cognitive schema which is even present today. I see things in ‘process-context approach’, ‘look at the ceiling and explain things clearly’, and ‘do not look only at numbers but try to understand what is behind the figure’. It was a privilege to study and do research in PRC, amongst so many special colleagues.

I am happy to keep in contact with PRC even today. We see each other in some professional occasions, meetings and conferences.

Congratulations for the 10 year anniversary and good luck with continuing the PRC research programme.

Hideko Matsuo, Centre for Sociological Research, Faculty of Social Sciences, Catholic University Leuven, Belgium

Interview with a current student
Anasel Mackfallen, Population Studies 2009-2010

Groningen University, in particular the Faculty of Spatial Sciences and the Population Studies Centre, is a true learning environment where students feel they are here to focus on learning. The class size is small and students are highly motivated and cooperative. The Faculty staff are very accessible; all professors and lecturers speak English very well and facilitate a participatory learning environment, which erased any prior worries about the language barrier.

My academic career has been transformed and I feel confident to stand in front of people and tell them that I am a scholar, something I would not have considered before coming to Groningen to study the Master programme in Population Studies. Since becoming immersed in this learning environment, I have gained a tremendous amount of knowledge, and have actively participated in the courses. The practical content of the courses and the focus on different research techniques, both qualitative and quantitative, as well as analyzing the societal relevance of research projects have transformed me a lot. At the moment I feel that I could already comfortably design and conduct research projects and stand up in front of a class in my home country and apply what I have learned.

The programme motivated me in such away that I am planning to apply for a PhD position after completing the Master in Population Studies.

Mackfallen Anasel, Tutorial Assistance, Faculty of public Administration and management, Health services management, Mzumbe University, Tanzania
Where to study
Demography / Population Studies in Europe

- University of Helsinki
- Brussels University - Population and Development Sciences
- Cardiff University - Ageing, Health and Disease
- Charles University Prague - Master in Demography
- Groningen University - Msc Population Studies
- Hacettepe University - MA Social Demography, MA Technical Demography
- London University - MSc Demography and Health, MSc Reproductive & Sexual Health Research, MSc Public Health, MSc Health, Population and Society, MSc Population and Development, MSc Social Research Methods
- Louvain University - Population and Development Studies
- Lund University - Economic Demography
- Stockholm University - Multidisciplinary Master's Programme in Demography
- Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona - MSc Territorial Studies and Population, Master Regional and Population Studies
- University of Dundee - Applied Population and Welfare Geography
- University of Lisbon - MSc Demography
- University of Liverpool - MA Population Studies, MA (research Methodology) Population Studies
- Université Lyon - Master Sociologie, Spécialité Genre et démographie
- University of Montesquieu - MA économie appliquée spécialité analyse démographique, Analyse démographique
- University of Paris - Master profession Expert démographe, Master recherche Dynamique des populations, Master recherche Economie Quantitative Specialité, Master économie appliquée spécialité analyse démographique
- University of Rostock—Bsc and Msc Demography
- University of Southampton -Msc Demography
- Université de Versailles - Master Traitement des données quantitatives et Démographie
- University of York - MSc Health Sciences (Population Health)
- Vilnius University - BSc degree within sociology, economics, geography. No MSc yet.