Editorial
Dear colleagues,

Here is the 12th Newsletter, published in “turbulent times” of the PRC. Since September there is a lot going on at the PRC. New Master students have arrived and various research projects have begun or are coming to an end. Four Master students presented their dissertation and received their Masters degree, four PhD students defended successfully. We wish them all the best with their future studies, research and work!

Just before the summer, Leo van Wissen informed us that he would become the next NIDI Director, as of 1st November. We are very happy for Leo, and very proud, he is the second NIDI Director from PRC Groningen! Leo will stay at PRC for one day a week, and we anticipate even more collaboration in the fields of population decline, migration and healthy ageing. The next PRC Newsletter will bring you more information about Leo’s successor at PRC. In this issue Leo takes a look back at his six years at PRC. Also, alumnus student Mark ter Veer (who has been supervised by Leo recently) talks about his time at PRC. Welcome also to Cathelijne de Busser who has started as post-doc researcher to conduct research on intra-European binational marriages, a project which Leo has been partly involved in also, in terms of the research design and funding process.

It’s the end of November, almost the end of the year 2010: we wish you a very happy Christmas and a good and healthy start of the New Year in 2011!

If you want to know more about the PRC, please visit our website www.rug.nl/prc.

Kind regards,
Inge Hutter (head of the department)
Marieke van der Pers (Editor)
Leo van Wissen: Six years at PRC

November 1st will be a big change for me. Starting then, I will be the new Director of the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) in The Hague. I am very much looking forward to my new role. Not that I want to leave the PRC at Groningen, but the new position is simply something I would like to do very much.

When talking about Groningen in migration terms, there are strong ‘pull’ factors, which are stronger than the ‘keep’ factors. What exactly are these? First, we are a very good team. PRC is much more than a group of independent researchers, all doing their own thing. Second, we take our responsibilities towards students very seriously. Each year, we care about our new cohort of Master students, and guide them through the courses towards their Diploma. We get to know them all, and in many cases we keep in contact after their graduation. The third major characteristic of the PRC is in the way we do research. Our department houses both strong quantitative and qualitative specialists. Admittedly, we poke fun at each other’s methods, but it is from a background of mutual respect. Both types of approaches are useful, depending upon the types of research questions and setting being explored.

This PRC spirit pays off. After Frans Willekens left Groningen to become the previous director of NIDI (as you can see, I’m literally following in his footsteps) PRC was very small. I joined the Demography staff, by then existing of only Inge Hutter and Karen Haandrikman, and we had two Master students. As of 1st January 2010, we have grown to nine staff members, more than ten PhD’s and (annually) at least ten Master students. We play important roles in research themes such as healthy aging and population decline. Moreover…..well, maybe I should stop here otherwise this personal note becomes too much of a promotion piece for PRC!

There is a Chinese saying that states when you want to learn something start teaching it. So I learned many things during my time at PRC, and as a demographer I became more ‘rounded’. I still envy those people who become specialist in their own field, but I am afraid I am one of those people who for whatever reason jumps from one topic to the next. Perhaps because there are so many things to explore in our discipline.

So, why is this guy leaving then? First: I am not leaving. I am only somewhere else most of the time. I will keep a one-day-a-week appointment with PRC. That will not literally be one day a week, but a serious commitment to the future of PRC and to the collaboration between NIDI and PRC. Most importantly, the new job at NIDI is something I really look forward to, even more than my present job at the FRW. And admittedly, there is one important geographical factor: Den Haag is much closer to Haarlem than Groningen. I am not going to miss the long train rides, the delays, the missed connections in Amersfoort, the horrible bus connections in Groningen, and the ever starting rain when I got on my bike from the station to Zernike.

No one is indispensable. I am sure that PRC will continue to thrive in the future. I am sure that my successor will bring a new impetus to PRC, in his or her own way. Population dynamics in the work force can be a good thing.

But after all, this is no farewell talk. It is, in the techno-speak of the life course conceptualization, a transition in the process of the job career, but with PRC remaining an important element in the context including lots of ‘significant others’ from PRC in close contact.

In any case, you are all most welcome at NIDI, for a visit, a short stay, or for collaboration with NIDI researchers. Hope to welcome you some day in The Hague.

Very best regards, Leo
People in Transition

In September this year, Cathelijne de Busser started as a postdoc researcher at the PRC, researching intra-European binational marriages. Earlier, in 2009, she obtained her PhD from the University of Amsterdam (AMIDST, now AISSR) conducting research into the relationship between religion and politico-territorial identities in Europe.

In my current research, I will step away from my former religious perspective on the building of Europe and focus on a different type of expression of European integration: intra-European binational marriages. Love is, after all, one of the most tangible expressions of acceptance of ‘the other’. That is, the creation of a social, political, cultural and supranational space is only finished if people are also willing to accept each other as their spouses. According to this theory, intermarriage is the litmus test of European integration.

The research starts by examining trends since 1980 in the proportions of binational marriages between European citizens. The main focus will be on determining the role of opportunity, such as the creation of the single market in 1993, and preferences, such as affinity between citizens of specific nationalities and cultures. The project also pays attention to sociological aspects of intra-European binational marriages, by means of a survey and interviews: to what extent are binational marriages accompanied by different national and European identities, as well as different lifestyles and worldviews?

The research is funded by NWO as part of a European Collaborative Research Project (ECRP), with Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland as participating countries. This international cooperation is a great opportunity to exchange knowledge with foreign researchers. In addition, the combination of a quantitative and qualitative approach enables me to further improve my methodological skills. Yet the main strength of this research is its interdisciplinary nature, on the edge of demography, sociology and human geography.

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Interview with an alumnus


What made you decide to do the Master Population Studies/Demography in Groningen?

After a difficult start in another faculty in Groningen, I attended some lectures with former classmates who were studying geography. I decided to switch to the field of spatial planning, where it turned out that I not only enjoyed the planning, but particularly the elements which make up what planning is all about: people. The courses in the minor demography paved the way to the master population studies.

Can you tell us something about your experiences in that year?

The pace of the whole program was fairly high. Although that might seem a restraint for some people, for me it turned out for the best. The assignments and courses provided me a with good challenge. I mostly enjoyed the group: the many hours that we spent in classrooms, the meetings in the canteen and the events outside the ‘normal’ program were terrific!

What does your career look like after obtaining your masters?

Even before I finished my Master I received a job offer from the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency in The Hague, where I started working last year. Since then I worked with an international project team on a scenario study for the whole of Europe (called DEMIFER) and I help with creating the regional population and household projections for the Netherlands. For this, the knowledge I acquired in Groningen (mainly the courses on demographic methods and analysis) have continued to be useful every day. I still come across other things from Groningen: two former fellow students who are now colleagues.

During your master thesis, Leo van Wissen was your supervisor, can you tell us something about how you worked together?

During my Masters, I worked with Leo both as a student and student assistant. In both situations, I liked the openness and honesty that filled Leo’s room. Leo always had a moment to discuss matters concerning my thesis and he always managed to keep my work and studying right on track.

Currently Mark works at the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency working on regional population and household projections for the Netherlands.

PostDoc Cathelijne de Busser

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Visitors to the PRC

- In July and August, Annelies Vermuë worked as a research assistant on a project on ‘ageing in an urban environment’, by Louise Meijering and Bettina van Hoven. Annelies did in-depth interviews and walks with residents of ‘De Weelders’, a home for elderly people in Vinkhuizen, Groningen.

- Mary Sibande from the College of Medicine in Blantyre in Malawi is visiting the PRC for the third time, for two months. Mary is working in a community based project in Reproductive Health with focus on safe motherhood in Mangochi district. Our department is collaborating in this project. Mary will work on a couple of articles and best practice papers; to discuss further research plans with master students; to develop her skills in qualitative research and to prepare an additional proposal for the coming years for Cordaid.

- PhD candidate Celia Fernández-Carro from the Centre d’Estudis Demogràfics (Barcelona, Spain) visits the PRC for three months to work with Leo van Wissen on ageing population dynamics, focusing on the living context of elderly households.

Recent publications


Short courses

- March, Ajay Bailey taught 'Introduction to Qualitative Methods' at the EDSD in Lund, Sweden.

- April 13, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey with the members of Riqsha provided a studiedag for the Hanzehogeschool on qualitative methods.

- Meredith has written a ‘Healthy Ageing’ course for semester 1a. The course includes modules relating to demography and theories of ageing, diversity and the construct of ageing, society and community and participation and self-determination.

- August 3, as part of RAPHID, Ajay Bailey and Shirish Darak organised a ‘Training workshop on understanding qualitative research and qualitative data analysis’ at Prayas in Pune, India.

External activities

- March 3-5, Ajay Bailey presented the paper ‘Performances of Migrant Masculinity: Livelihood, Sexuality and Power in Goa, India’ at the International Seminar on Contextualizing Geographical Approaches to Studying Gender in Asia, held at University of Delhi, India.

- March 2010, Fanny Janssen gave a one day lecture within the course International Health and Policy Evaluation organized by Department of Public Health Erasmus MC, Den Haag.

- June, Master student Alette Spriensma presented a paper with Fanny Janssen on the third Human Mortality Database symposium in Paris. The paper entitled: ‘The contribution of smoking-related mortality to regional mortality differences in the Netherlands.’

- July 15-16, Ajay Bailey presented a paper at the workshop on ‘The Nexus of Migration and Masculinity in the Asian Context’, Organised by Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore.


- August 6-10, Louise Meijering participated in the ESF Conference on Home, Migration and The City in Linköping, Sweden. She presented a paper entitled: ‘Holland is my home, Home-making of older Antillean immigrants in the Netherlands.’

PRC News

- Karen Haandrikman, Margaret Angucia, Beata Nowok and Mieke Reseur successfully defended their dissertation.

- Erka Caro, Anu Kou, Alessandra Carioli and Anthe van den Hende presented their work at the EPC, 1-4 september in Vienna.

- We welcome Hans Elshof, PhD researchers Bettie Oosterhoff, Anthe van den Hende, Cristine Fenenga and post doc researcher Cathelijne de Busser.

- Leo van Wissen and Karen Haandrikman got a post-doc proposal funded by the European Science Foundation, on marriage behaviour. The project is a collaboration with, among others, Brussels (Prof Helga de Valk).

- Hinke Haisma and Inge Hutter achieved the NICHE (NUFFIC) project on health research capacity building at the Ifakara Health Institute (IHI) in Tanzania.

- The PRC achieved, in collaboration with Pharm Access, a NWO-WOTRO Integrated Programme Towards a client centred health insurance system in Ghana.’ Cristine Fenenga will conduct her PhD research within this project, starting in November this year.

- December 16, Biswamitra Sahu will defend her PhD thesis.

- More information about our activities: www.rug.nl/prc