Dear colleagues,

With the conclusion of the summer holidays, we look forward to a fresh drive to studies, teaching and challenging research at the PRC.

This year, four PhD students are scheduled to defend their thesis, new Master’s students will be trained and of course ongoing research will be continued.

An example of ongoing research is ‘Action Research’ conducted in Malawi. More information about this programme can be found in this newsletter.

Meanwhile, a new interfaculty research programme on healthy ageing has been launched. Read more about the background and main objectives of this programme in this issue of our newsletter.

Anthe van den Hende and Badri Kumar Karki graduated at the end of August; the remaining Master students of last year are still working hard to finalise their theses.

The first of September marked the 10th anniversary of our Master Population Studies. On that same day we welcomed a new cohort of 12 Population Studies students and 3 Research Master students. Once again, the group comprises students of various backgrounds and nationalities. We welcome students from Germany, Uganda, Tanzania, Nepal, Turkey and the Netherlands. We wish all of you a very fruitful and happy year here in Groningen!

For our researchers, the upcoming IUSSP conference in Marrakech means hard work ahead to have papers, presentations and posters ready for the public.

Enjoy the coming year!

Kind regards,

Marieke van der Pers (Editor)
Research Programme Healthy Ageing: Population and Society (HAPS)

Just before the summer holidays, the Board of the University of Groningen approved our proposal for the establishment of an interfaculty research programme entitled ‘Healthy Ageing: Population and Society’, in short HAPS. The research programme has been developed by Inge Hutter of the PRC (Faculty of Spatial Sciences), Ronald Stolk of the Department of Epidemiology (Faculty of Medical Sciences) and Rafael Wittek of the Department of Sociology (Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences). The research programme is funded by the Board of the University of Groningen and the three faculties involved, and will include research input from present and new researchers (3 post-doc and 6 PhD researchers will join the research team). HAPS fits into the overall research focus of the University of Groningen and the Groningen Akkoord which is an agreement of collaboration between the Municipality of Groningen and the University, the University Medical Centre Groningen (UMCG), and the Hanzehogeschool of Groningen.

The aim of HAPS is to develop the interdisciplinary/interfaculty expertise on the interplay of factors that affect successful ageing at the macro, meso and micro levels, with the objective of designing viable interventions. The research programme will draw up recommendations and collaborate with policy makers, interventionists and health workers. Similarly, the programme will act as a resource centre for these different stakeholders in the field of healthy ageing.

HAPS focuses especially on the socio-cultural context of healthy ageing. The longitudinal data set LifeLines, collected at UMCG, plays a central role. In LifeLines, health status data are collected from inhabitants of Northern Netherlands who are in different stages of their life course (children, adolescents, adults, elderly). The research programme’s focus is international as well and includes research on the process of healthy ageing in Europe and worldwide.

PRC’s input in HAPS will consist of research on (i) ageing populations and its consequences for the housing market, the use of health care facilities, or medicine use; (ii) relationships between generations; and (iii) cultural demographic aspects such as the meaning attached to ageing, being healthy and subjective well-being and consequences for health seeking behaviour.

HAPS is funded for a period of 6 years, during which the research programme will be developed further. A collaboration between HAPS and NIDI is envisaged.

Building action research capacity in the community-based Reproductive Health project in Mangochi, Malawi

In 2008, the PRC embarked on a collaboration with the College of Medicine (CoM) in Blantyre, Malawi, on capacity training in action research in a CoM project at the district hospital of Mangochi. Funding for the project is provided by Cordaid. The objective of the project is to strengthen the evidence base of the project and enhance action research capacity within the project that focuses on Safe Motherhood and access to health care services.

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, with one of the highest maternal mortality rates. In the rural areas, it is commonplace for pregnant women and women who are about to deliver to walk for 5 to 6 hours to reach a health service. The CoM’s reproductive health project started a couple of years ago, with funding from Cordaid. Central to the project is community participation – of village leaders, couples and TBAs – in the context of Safe Motherhood. Besides this, the project provides so-called bicycle ambulances, which transport patients to the health services. The project is coordinated by Mary Sibande, who works and lives in Mangochi. Researchers from the College of Medicine in Blantyre conduct research activities in the project.

PRC Groningen supports the project with capacity building activities in the field of action research, especially qualitative research. For example, Mary Sibande visited Groningen last year to participate in the workshop on qualitative research and to meet researchers of the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) as well as to discuss issues on action research. In January 2009, Inge Hutter and Jacques Zeelen of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences ran a workshop on qualitative action research in Mangochi. This workshop was attended by not only researchers but also health care providers, community representatives and NGOs. PRC also provides some research input in the baseline survey of the project, which is largely taken care of by our former Master’s student Jesman Chintsanya from the Population Department of Zomba University. At the moment, Master’s student Dyon Hoekstra is conducting fieldwork in Mangochi for his thesis. Together with Mary Sibande, he will be interviewing men on their involvement in Safe Motherhood practices. An exchange visit with the health action research projects of the PRC in India (PhD researcher Shirish Darak at NGO Prayas in Pune; PhD researcher Sujata Anishettar at NGO FPAI in Dharwad) is envisaged.
Interview with an alumnus

Mimoza Dushi, Population Studies 2004-2005

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

As a researcher with a scholarship from the Coimbra Group Programme I went to Groningen for the first time in 2003. It was a memorable stay for me. I was impressed by the facilities that the university offers for research and I appreciated the colleagues that made me feel free to express my ideas and the generous friends that I met. These were reasons why I decided to return to Groningen in 2004, this time as a Master’s student at the Population Research Centre.

What was your experience during your Master’s studies?

Engaged full-time in such a pleasant study environment, listening to lectures from different professors, spending a lot of time in the marvelous libraries, being in a class with EU and non-EU students, and visiting a lot of beautiful and historical places are some of the experiences during my time in Groningen which made this adventure unforgettable for me.

What did you do after your Master’s?

After I finished the Master’s programme, I went back to my country and continued working at the University of Prishtina as a teaching assistant in social science courses. I also started my PhD study in the field of demography. My research project focused on fertility and reproductive behavior among Kosovan women. The analysis was based on quantitative research conducted among 1,000 women still active in the reproductive process. Women must feel independent (economically and individually) to be active in decision making for family planning. Nevertheless, the recent level of emancipation women have achieved in Kosovar society has not gained sufficient momentum to change perceptions surrounding fertility in a big way.

I finished my research this year and defended my PhD thesis in March 2009. I am still a teaching assistant, but I am on track to become an assistant professor. I also hold a second position, as a Coordinator for Academic Development, in the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences.

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

The knowledge acquired in Groningen was beneficial not only during my PhD research but also currently useful for my lectures. The literature and printed slides and notes from different lectures given at the PRC remain a valuable resource for me.

Message from the Field

Erka Caro in Kamza, Albania (March—August 2009)

PhD researcher Erka Caro is conducting her fieldwork in Kamza, Albania. Part of her research on the life of migrants involves interviews with youth and women. To have more interaction and to establish a connection with the community she decided to live in the study area herself. Here we present an extract from her field diary which gives an impression of some issues that may confront researchers while conducting fieldwork.

With my move to Kamza things have changed a lot. I have a better understanding of people’s reaction, my own behaviour, and small details that otherwise would have escaped my notice. In spite of enjoying the fieldwork, at times it very difficult to understand the mentality of the people and their reactions.

These last two days have been spent visiting women at home. Every Wednesday is ‘coffee day’ at the social centre and women gather together for coffee and a chat. For the time being, I spend time getting acquainted with them. Yesterday I understood that I should not use the word ‘interview’ as it causes them to panic and change their attitude towards me. Some women said that if their son and husband knew that they were taking part in an interview, they would kill the women. This revelation surprised me because nothing like that was ever mentioned during my feasibility study. I have decided to wait a while, let them get used to me, and then approach them for a conversation.

I like this way of participating in the community. It is very personal and yields a lot of interesting information that would be difficult to solicitate even in an in-depth interview.

But not only beautiful and exciting things have taken place. There are a lot of sad stories and many life events taking place here. A couple of weeks ago a terrible thing happened. A cute 14-year-old girl was raped by five men. Now at the time of writing I am fine, but there have been days that I thought of quitting (my research/fieldwork) after hearing this story. It has been a very shocking event. Notwithstanding the fact that she was raped and brutally abused, what exacerbated the incident were the people around, their gossip, and the effect on the family. Now a psychologist visits her twice a week and I really hope things will get better. Actually, the ramifications of this incident have been most time and thought consuming during this period.

Photos: Erka Caro, 2009
**Visitors to the PRC**

- External PhD researcher, **Corina Huisman** (NIDI), joined the PRC for a few weeks to work on her PhD thesis 'A micro-simulation model of spatial demographic behaviour of firms'.
- Fanny Janssen and Inge Hutter gave a lunch seminar about demography and epidemiology: *Where do we meet?* for SHARE (Graduate School for Health Research) - UMCG - Groningen.
- Fanny Janssen was a panelmember at the 'Knowledgecafe of the University' discussing about Emerging Diseases. 5 March 2009, [http://www.rug.nl/kennisdebat/kenniscafe/virus/index](http://www.rug.nl/kennisdebat/kenniscafe/virus/index)
- 3 September, Leo van Wissen met with DG ministry of WWI about the formulation of national population policies on regional population decline in the Netherlands: Actieplan Krimp.
- 6 June, Leo van Wissen held a presentation at IDEA final conference, Krakow.
- June, Leo van Wissen held a presentation for the the 'Congres Nationaal Platform Bevolkingskrimp'.

**Recent publications**


**Short courses**

- In the beginning of this year, Fanny Janssen and Leo van Wissen provided the course 'Demography and Demometry' within the educational program for actuarial analyst of the Actuarial Institute (AI), the Netherlands.
- In May, Ajay Bailey visited INED in Paris as part of the teaching program for the European Doctoral School of Demography (EDSD) to teach the application of qualitative research.
- In May, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey organized the CC6 course on qualitative methods for NETHUR in Groningen for the second time.
- Together with Pieter Hooijmeijer, Leo van Wissen organized the NETHUR CC2 course 'research design'.

**External activities**

- Beata Nowok attended The Summer School ‘Projection methods for ethnicity and immigration status’ organised as a part of Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences 2, a European Science Foundation research networking programme, 2–9 July 2009, University of Leeds, UK.
- Beata Nowok presented ‘Reconciliation of various migration measures: insights from microsimulation of origin-destination specific flows’ at the 2009 PAA Annual Meeting, 30 April-2 May 2009, Detroit, USA.
- Marieke van der Pers is part of the organising committee of the Dutch Demography Day, held on 22 October 2009. For more information see: [www.nvademografie.nl](http://www.nvademografie.nl)
- From September 1, Leo van Wissen will be vice dean of the faculty for the next three years.
- With effect from September 1, Inge Hutter is back at the PRC after her sabbatical during which she worked on a book on qualitative research methods, together with Monique Hennink and Ajay Bailey.
- From September 1, Anthe van der Hende began her PhD at the PRC. The title of her research is 'Regional mortality forecasting using extensions of the Lee-Carter model'. Her promotors are Leo van Wissen and Fanny Janssen. At the moment Anthe is enrolled at the European Doctoral School of Demography (EDSD), which will be hosted this year by Lund University, Sweden.