Dear colleagues,

Welcome to this new PRC Newsletter! Although the end of 2014 is approaching, we are still in the middle of our academic year. After a short break we will start fresh in 2015, with current and new research and exciting and challenging education.

The new academic season has started and we are happy to announce the arrival of four new PhD researchers, one new postdoc and a new group of master’s students. We also said goodbye to several staff members, but we will always remember their valuable contribution to our scientific programme.

In this newsletter, Hinke Haisma shares information about the NICHE project, a project which aims to increase the training capacity for health research on improving access to health services as well as the quality of such services. She highlights the goals, success and challenges of this programme and shares her experiences with the project.

Next we share news about a workshop on systematic reviews, jointly organized by our department and Manipal University, India. Several of our researchers were involved in the workshop and it proved to be a great success.

Besides our research programme, we are also working hard to educate students in the field of population research in our Master’s in Population Studies programme. We are always looking to bring in new blood for our master’s programme, and more information about the programme can be found in this newsletter.

In the last few pages of the newsletter, you will find as usual details about our publications, presentations and other activities as well as short news items.

For more news, please visit our website http://www.rug.nl/research/ursi/prc/ or follow us on Facebook: Population Research Centre Groningen.

We wish you wonderful Christmas holidays and a happy, healthy and successful 2015!

Kind regards,
Also on behalf of Clara Mulder (Head of the PRC)
Sanne Visser
NICHE project “Expanding health research training capacity for improved access to and quality of health services”

Hinke Haisma

In 2010, a consortium comprising Ifakara Health Institute (IHI), Tanzania, the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, and the Population Research Centre of the University of Groningen obtained funding (€8 million in total) for a NICHE project whose aims are to increase the training capacity for health research on improving access to health services as well as the quality of such services. Funding was provided by the Dutch government and is under the administration of the Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic).

The ultimate aim of NICHE, an acronym for ‘Netherlands Initiative for Capacity development in Higher Education’, is to contribute to economic development and poverty reduction. Our NICHE project in Tanzania has four objectives: (1) to develop a Master’s in Public Health Research programme, including training in soft skills; (2) to improve skills for data analysis using existing data, most of which concerns the demographic surveillance system data; (3) to increase the capacity for research synthesis in order to inform policy; and (4) institutional development, including a performance management system.

The management team, which is responsible for the coordination of the project, comprises two representatives from each of the participating organisations. From Groningen are Erik Haarbrink, from the Department of Research & Valorisation, and me. As the project leader, I am responsible for the activities carried out by the University of Groningen. Other PRC colleagues in the project include Inge Hutter who is a member of the supervisory board of the project and also involved in training activities related to the translation of research into policy. Ajay Bailey is setting up a qualitative research course within the Master’s of Public Health Research programme that is being developed at Mandela University in Arusha, and training IHI staff to become trainers. Pieter Boele from Globalisation Studies Groningen is involved in academic writing courses and he mentors IHI staff members as well. Clara Mulder and Leo van Wissen are supervising individual IHI researchers on the use of the demographic surveillance system data.

An important part of the project is the synthesis of research on the implications of the epidemiologic transition for the community, health system, and policy in Tanzania. Three PhD students are currently engaged in different components of this research synthesis. One of them is Emmy Metta who is working on health seeking behaviour in the context of the epidemiologic transition. She will receive a PhD degree from the University of Groningen and is under the supervision of Ajay and myself. Two other PhD candidates are working on the epidemiology of non-communicable diseases and the epidemiologic transition from a health system perspective. Their PhD degree will be conferred by the VU Amsterdam. All three PhD students have published a joint paper (Metta et al., 2014a), and Emmy has published another paper (Metta et al., 2014b) with two more in the pipeline.

Translation of these research findings into policy actions is another important aim of the NICHE project, and during the course of the project a new thematic group on policy translation was set up within IHI. This group will be especially important in the final phase of the project when we develop a strategy for the use of research findings in policy development.

While the NICHE project has been and continues to be an interesting project to work on, it has not always been easy. Working with IHI in Tanzania is a great opportunity and I already knew of the organisation from my master’s studies in human nutrition in Wageningen. It has also been a good opportunity for me to collaborate more closely with the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, where I teach nutrition in their master’s ‘International Course on Health Development’ and ‘International Health’ and supervise master’s students working on their thesis. It has been quite a challenge to work in a NUFFIC-funded consortium. Although clear endpoints were set for the project, changes in IHI’s strategic plan meant that priorities at the host institute were modified in the course of the project – a situation which introduced new dynamics.
Changes in organisational structure and staff posed a further challenge to the implementation of the project. Personally, it has been a learning process working as a project leader in an international and interdisciplinary team of researchers from academic and NGO backgrounds. It has also given me the opportunity to work beyond the boundaries of my academic work. I was also a facilitator in a course teaching soft skills to scientists. My contribution was mostly on intercultural communication using Hofstede's synthetic cultures, and it has been really rewarding to see how this has trickled down to the researchers’ behaviour and it remains relevant in their daily work. And finally, I have enjoyed, and still enjoy supervising, together with Ajay Bailey, Emmy Metta in her PhD research.

http://www.globalhealthaction.net/index.php/gha/article/view/23439
http://www.malariajournal.com/content/pdf/1475-2875-13-249.pdf

Introductory workshop on systematic review and meta-analysis
[27th Oct-29th Oct, Groningen]

Under the aegis of the memorandum of understanding signed between the University of Groningen and Manipal University, India, to extend the collaboration between the two universities, the Population Research Centre of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen (Dr Shirish Darak and Dr Ajay Bailey), organized a workshop to sensitize researchers to approaches in systematic review and meta-analysis.

The three-day workshop was conducted at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, from 27 to 29 October 2014 and was facilitated by Prof. Sreekumaran Nair, Dr. TMA Pai Endowment Chair in Systematic Review and Evidence-Based Public Health, Manipal University. The workshop was attended by an enthusiastic group of researchers from different faculties of the University of Groningen. The 15 participants who attended the workshop were mostly PhD researchers and members of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences (from the departments of demography, planning, and cultural geography); University Medical Center Groningen (UMCG, from the Department of Epidemiology and Medical Statistics); and the Faculty of Arts.

The workshop was participatory in nature and participants not only learned about the method of conducting systematic review and its role in generating evidence for policies and programmes but also worked in groups to develop protocols for conducting a systematic review on the topic of their interest. This workshop with a multidisciplinary audience has certainly helped participants to appreciate the applicability of this method beyond clinical and epidemiological research into other research disciplines within the social sciences.

The workshop was funded by the Urban and Regional Studies Institute of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences and the International Relations Office (India initiative) of the University of Groningen.
Master Programme: Population Studies

Coordinator Fanny Janssen

For our Master Population Studies we are looking for motivated students, who would like to learn about and discuss demographic issues in a small-scale, international, multi-disciplinary and scientific setting!

Already for more than 10 years we educate and share our expertise with master students in the field of demography and population studies, with much enthusiasm and dedication and our programme has been evaluated very well. Last year’s students graded our programme on average with a 8.5 out of 10, and in addition our Master’s degree programme has been ranked second among all Master’s degree programmes in Geography and Planning and related subjects in the Netherlands.

The QANU (Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities) praised our well-defined and distinct profile, and the extent to which research permeates the curriculum.

The objective of our international one-year MSc programme in Population Studies is to train young professionals in the theories, methods and skills required to comprehend population dynamics. We regard the study of demographic behaviour of people, in terms of their life events, e.g. birth, marriage, divorce, health, migration, and death, essential to understanding population dynamics. The master programme therefore focuses on these demographic events, on how decision-making regarding these life events (e.g. its timing) is influenced by the historical, economic, societal, cultural, and medical context, and on how these demographic events have an impact on population-level trends.

Our students learn about:

› theories on individual decision-making behind demographic life events
› sources of demographic data, questionnaire construction and interviews
› methods and techniques to analyze demographic data: life table, population projections, survey analysis, in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and observation
› population policies and interventions and their link to research

The programme consists of a combination of analytical and social demography, and we teach both quantitative and qualitative research methods. We focus strongly on academic skills and our education is heavily research-driven. In our master programme we work closely together with the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute in The Hague, the Netherlands.

To get an impression of the Master Population Studies and the population issues covered please visit our Webclass Population Studies. Go to www.rug.nl/nestor and log in with username frw-Webclasspopstudies and password webpopst2014. More information can be found on our website: http://www.rug.nl/masters/population-studies/#int, including a short video on our master programme.

In case of additional questions on the programme please contact the master coordinator Fanny Janssen (f.janssen@rug.nl).
Recent publications


Workshops

The first workshop on the ORA Plus project ‘PartnerLife: Partner relationships, residential relocations and housing in the life course’ took place in Groningen, 16-17 October. PartnerLife is conducted by an international team led by Clara Mulder (PRC), Michael Wagner (University of Cologne) and Hill Kulu (University of Liverpool).

On November 3rd Inge Hutter, Liesbeth de Wit, Myriam Hemsteede and Christine Fenenga organized a workshop for PRC-researchers that use a Participatory Action Approach (PAA) to their research. The aim of the day was to map how different researchers use the PAA and to make a first step towards a common understanding and future perspectives of the PAA used within the PRC.
Presentations

Elshof, H. *The influence of population decline on social capital and social cohesion*. Conference of Regional Studies Association (RSA), Izmir, 15-18 June.


Haisma, H.H. *Toward a multi-dimensional measure of child growth*. Introduction to Nutrition & Health in Developing countries for the education programme Nutrition and Health at Wageningen University (invited lecture), 9th of October.


Janssen, F. *Seminar Including the smoking epidemic in mortality projections*, Actuarial Department University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam (the Netherlands) (invited speaker), 7th of November 2014.

Janssen, F. *New approaches for modelling population level drug use with demographic and geographic techniques* (invited speaker educational session), *EURODURG 2014* (drug utilization research), Groningen (the Netherlands), August 2014.

Janssen, F. *Effect van epidemiologische ontwikkelingen op de levensverwachting* (invited speaker). Actuarial seminar of RGA – International Reinsurance Company Ltd, Amsterdam (the Netherlands), June 2014

Kibele, E. *Twee unieke voorbeelden van demografisch gezondheidsonderzoek op basis van CBS microdata*. CBS microdatagebruikersmiddag, The Hague, 6 November

Yousefzadeh, S. *Proposing a multidimensional, multilevel approach to define child growth*. United Nations University/Maastricht Graduate School of Governance International conference on Innovation & Governance in Development, Maastricht, 26th of November.


Education

Fanny Janssen was voted Lecturer of the Year in the Faculty of Spatial Sciences. The jury was impressed by her enthusiastic style of teaching, her patience and great didactic skills.

10 students from different countries and different disciplines started the Master Population Studies in September.

From September onwards we hosted two external and international participants for the short course Qualitative Research Design in Population Studies and Health.

In November three international mid-career professionals started the short course in Demographic Methods and Analysis.

From September 2014 onwards two students (one from the Netherlands, one from Spain) started the double degree Master in Social Demography which combines the Master of Research in Sociology & Demography (UPF) and our Master in Population Studies.

In January or February 2015 the PRC and NIDI will provide the second edition of the Dutch short course in “Demografische maten, methoden en bevolkingsprognose”. See [http://www.rug.nl/research/ursi/prc/education/korte-cursus](http://www.rug.nl/research/ursi/prc/education/korte-cursus).

External activities

May - Fanny Janssen was interviewed by the university magazine “Universiteitskrant” of the University of Groningen about obtaining the prestigious VIDI research grant. See [http://www.ukrant.nl/nieuws/zeven-vidis-voor-rug-onderzoekers](http://www.ukrant.nl/nieuws/zeven-vidis-voor-rug-onderzoekers).

May - Fanny Janssen was interviewed by Elsevier on her VIDI research “Smoking, alcohol and obesity - ingredients for improved and robust mortality projections”.

May - Hinke Haisma was examiner at DrPH viva of Kenda Cunningham at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine for her thesis on "Maternal empowerment, childcare practices, and child nutrition in rural Nepal”.

June - Hinke Haisma was consultant for the Ifakara Health Institute, Tanzania (NICHE project), during a workshop on the development of a new research synthesis and policy translation.

Sept - Fanny Janssen was interviewed live by Radio 2 (Gijs 2.0) about the consequences of the likely increase in the world population to 12 billion inhabitants. See [http://gijs.kro.nl/seizoenen/2014/afleveringen/19-09-2014/fragmenten/enorme_bevolkingsgroei_met_vernuft_wel_op_te_vangen](http://gijs.kro.nl/seizoenen/2014/afleveringen/19-09-2014/fragmenten/enorme_bevolkingsgroei_met_vernuft_wel_op_te_vangen).
Sept - **Fanny Janssen** was interviewed for the website of the University of Groningen ([http://www.rug.nl/news-and-events/people-perspectives/tales-of-talent/fanny-janssen](http://www.rug.nl/news-and-events/people-perspectives/tales-of-talent/fanny-janssen)) and the international newsletter of the University of Groningen Worldwide ([www.rug.nl/worldwide](http://www.rug.nl/worldwide)).


Oct - **Fanny Janssen** appeared in a video on her VIDI research on Unifocus, the University of Groningen’s online video magazine. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=1u9epPlWyVo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=1u9epPlWyVo).

Oct - **Miryam Hemsteede** was one of the supervisors at a course on Facilitating Multi Stakeholder processes, at the Centre for Development Innovation at Wageningen University and Research.

**Visitors**

**Thomas J. Cooke** (University of Connecticut) is a visiting professor to PRC on a Fulbright scholarship from August 2014 till January 2015. He works with Clara Mulder on a paper on migration of divorced parents.

**PRC News**

The Head of the PRC, **Prof Clara Mulder** has been appointed as Director of the Graduate School Spatial Sciences, for a period of 3 years from September 2014. The Graduate School of our Faculty has more than 100 PhD researchers.

As of September 1, **Fanny Janssen** has a secondment for 0.2 fte at the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute, The Hague, the Netherlands.

**Stiny Tiggelaar**, our long-time office manager and admissions officer, has left the PRC due to the university-wide reorganisation of support staff. She is now based in the Academy Building of the University of Groningen and coordinates the admissions procedure for international students. Stiny has been with the PRC from the very beginning and we all miss her cheerful personality. Since November 1st the department is supported by our office managers **Mirjam Wempe** and **Eliza van der Ploeg**.

Postdoctoral researcher Michael Thomas has started working with Clara Mulder on the ORA Plus project 'PartnerLife: Partner relationships, residential relocations and housing in the life course.'

Sergi Trias Llimós and Nikoletta Vidra have begun their PhD research within Fanny Janssen’s VIDI project 'Smoking, alcohol and obesity - ingredients for improved and robust mortality projections’ since 1 September.

Nikhil Pazhothundathil Narayanan Nair joined our department as a PhD researcher in September. His research is on the aspects of ‘home-making’, place attachment and belongingness of older adults in institutional care settings in India and the Netherlands. His supervisors are Prof. Inge Hutter, Dr Ajay Bailey and Dr Lekha Subaiya.

In October we said goodbye to Mirjam Klaassens who was a post-doc at our department. She has been involved in research and has taught the topic ‘Healthy Ageing’. We thank her for her contribution to the PRC and wish her the very best in her career.

At the end of October we launched the new website of the network Healthy Ageing, Population and Society: [http://www.rug.nl/research/healthy-ageing/population-society/](http://www.rug.nl/research/healthy-ageing/population-society/).

In November we bid farewell to Shirish Darak. He received his MSc and PhD degrees from the PRC, and has worked here as an assistant professor for the past 14 months. We thank him for his contribution to the PRC and wish him well in his future undertakings.

Katharina Wolf joined the PRC in November. She is doing a combined PhD at the PRC and at the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock. Her research is on migrant fertility and she is supervised by Clara Mulder and Michaela Kreyenfeld.

On 3 November, Ekaterina Ogurtsova defended her dissertation titled ‘Estimating transition rates for multistate models from panel data and repeated cross-sections’. Her promotors were Prof. Frans Willekens and Dr Jutta Gampe.

**Announcements**

The 7th Dutch Demography Day took take place on the 10th of December in Utrecht.

In July 2015 **Eva Kibele** will co-organize the Summer School on Healthy Ageing in Groningen. The main goal of the Healthy Ageing Summer School is that students get insights into healthy ageing obtained by different disciplines (including social sciences, demography, biomedical sciences, and public health), ranging from cell to society. More information can be found on [http://www.rug.nl/research/gradschool-medicalsciences/summerschools/healthyageing/](http://www.rug.nl/research/gradschool-medicalsciences/summerschools/healthyageing/).