Dear colleagues,

We are excited to share news of the new title of the PRC research programme ‘Population and Well-being in Context’ jointly drawn up by PRC members and presented by Clara Mulder during her inaugural lecture in November. The title of the research aptly captures and conveys well-being as the main concept connecting our different demographic studies situated in specific spatial, cultural, social and temporal settings. The text (in Dutch) of the inaugural speech ‘Families, huishouden en wonen’ (Families, Households and Residence) can be downloaded from www.rug.nl/staff/c.h.mulder/research.

We are also delighted that the MSc in Population Studies course has been evaluated very highly by its students. The 15 students who participated in the curriculum evaluation in August and September gave our Masters programme an average grade of 8.2. The Masters students in the current academic year again form a very international group with students from Australia, Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, the Netherlands, Spain, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. The PRC has also been successful at obtaining Nuffic scholarships; this year the University of Groningen received 13 NFP (Netherlands Fellowship Programme) scholarships, five of which were for the MSc in Population Studies. Also a large number of STUNED scholarships were granted to the Faculty.

In this, the 16th PRC Newsletter, Ajay Bailey gives an overview of the projects in his line of research entitled ‘Global Migration, Culture and Place’. Salut Muhedin, an alumnus of our PhD programme, reflects on his years at the PRC. Two PhD researchers write about their experiences during fieldwork: Christine Fenenga on the health insurance system in Ghana and Sanne Visser on food and food practices in northern Netherlands.

The University of Groningen launched its new website recently. Please have a look at our renewed website: www.rug.nl/research/ursi/prc/ (the previous URL www.rug.nl/prc will be redirected to the new one). For users of social media, the PRC also has a Facebook page (‘Population Research Centre Groningen’).

We wish you wonderful Christmas holidays and a happy, healthy and successful 2013!

Kind regards,
Anu Kõu (Editor)
Also on behalf of Clara Mulder (Head of the PRC)
Global Migration, Culture and Place

Ajay Bailey

Since 2008, I have been developing a line of research on global migration, culture and place which aims to: (1) explore the motives and consequences of migration; (2) combine perspectives of both sending and receiving countries; (3) gain insights into the role of culture and place in the lives of migrants; and (4) link migration with other processes such as ageing and health.

Below is a brief description of projects which fall under the umbrella of this research line.

The first project is on the migration and reception of Indian nurses in northern Netherlands. The focus is on the immigration – temporary or otherwise – of Indian migrants employed in the health sector in the northern part of the country. The project in northern Netherlands is the first of its kind to identify and study an emerging trend of importing skilled labour from modernizing and emerging economies such as India. With the focus on both the Indian and Dutch cultures and workers, the project will aid in creating a dialogue between the two groups, enabling them to deliver services better, and at the same time instil cultural sensitivity and awareness among skilled workers. This project is supported by a grant from the Gratama Stichting.

The second project is on ageing and well-being in migrant households in Dharwad, Karnataka, India. In India, the population aged 60 years and above was 88 million in 2009 and is expected to increase to 315 million by the year 2050. With the migration of adult children to bigger cities and other countries, the tasks of care giving are left to aged spouses or to hired non-kin caregivers. In this study using a mixed methodology approach we aim to discover how the elderly perceive the impact of their children's migration on their own health and well-being. We examine two groups of elderly people: those living with relatives and those living on their own. The range of methods include in-depth interviews with elderly couples/widows/widowers, qualitative GIS mapping, surveys and focus group discussions. This project is carried out in collaboration with the Population Research Centre in Dharwad and the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. It is supported by a grant from UNFPA-India.

The third project will start next year, and it examines the flow of norms, practices, identities and social capital between India and the Netherlands. In this study we aim to gain understand into how social remittances between India and the Netherlands are taken, brought back and transformed by Indian migrants. We will apply a multi-site, multi-method research approach linking migrants to their families in India. The methods to be used include survey analysis, in-depth interviews, participatory visual methods and case studies of NGOs. This project will provide new insights into transformations of norms, identities and practices, and the accumulation of migration-related social capital for development. This project is carried out in collaboration with the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. It is supported by a grant from NWO-WOTRO.

In addition to these projects, present and previous doctoral and Master’s students working on topics such as high-skilled migration (Anu Kõu and Jamie Cox), ageing in migrant households (to be appointed), gender identities of migrants (Ranvijay Singh) and rural to urban migration (Erka Çaro) also contribute to strengthening this research line.
Interview with an Alumnus: Salut Muhidin

It has been a while since I have talked about Groningen, a memorable place for me and my family during my PhD studies in 1998-2002. Thanks to the PRC News team, who invited me to share a few words about my post-Groningen experience. So, here is my story.

My journey to the University of Groningen was guided by information obtained from browsing on the Internet as well as email exchanges. At that time, Groningen and its university were not as well known in Indonesia, unlike today. I was looking for a university that offered a postgraduate programme in demography. Actually, I had a list of three universities, but I finally decided to go to Groningen after learning and that RuG’s demography programme was headed by Professor Frans Willekens, one of the leading scholars in multi-regional demography. His expertise in the multi-regional approach was highly relevant to my proposed research on Indonesian multi-regional projection. My decision was also supported by my supervisor at the University of Indonesia (Professor Aris Ananta) and by my mentor from Montreal University (Professor Jacques Ledent) who visited the University of Indonesia as a guest lecturer. Since then, all three of them have been inspiring mentors and good friends.

My time in Groningen was both a rewarding and challenging process for me. Rewarding, as I gained much experience academically and socially. I was lucky to have a lot of support from distinguished academics in Groningen and also in Indonesia. It has greatly enhanced my knowledge and understanding about demographics in general, and the multi-regional method in particular. Another rewarding aspect was the opportunity to make good friends. I recall the memorable and pleasant time I spent at the PRC with fondness, especially with my room-mate Sabu, from whom I learned how to reduce tension by looking at the ceiling or listening to Indian songs. It really worked! I will never forget the long conversations with other students and staff from the Faculty of Spatial Sciences (FRW), especially during our regular lunch time at Zernike canteen. Finding accommodation and traditional food was also part of our conversations, mainly among international students such as Ziwu, Melinda, Hideko, Mamun, Mauri, and Ganesh. At the same time, I found studying and staying in Groningen challenging as it was my first time being overseas for a long period. Being far away from family, my personal independence was definitely challenged. Fortunately, those challenges eventually got easier and in the end I adjusted and settled in.

Following the completion of my PhD in early May 2002, I began my research career at IIASA in Austria. I was involved in the project of probabilistic forecasting for South-east Asian countries. Not long after that, I went to North America to join a research project on urbanization and migration in West Africa funded by the Mellon Foundation. I spent three years at Brown University in Providence (USA) and Montreal University (Canada). The research involved investigating and conducting demographic analyses of the relationship between urbanization and fertility in Ghana and Burkina Faso. After the project was completed, I moved to Brisbane, Australia, to work at the University of Queensland in early 2006. I was involved not only in research activities but also in teaching, especially at the Department of Human Geography. My research focused on internal migration in Australia. My teaching experience led to an appointment at Macquarie University in Sydney in early 2011. Currently I am a lecturer and coordinator of demography modules at the Faculty of Business and Economics. At the same time, I am also involved in a project on international comparative analyses of internal migration. Early results of this study have contributed to the background research papers for the 2009 Human Development Reports, UNDP.

And so that is what I have been doing after my stay in Groningen. The training I received has made me a demographer and in the course of my career, I have also built up experience and knowledge in the field of population mobility and migration. Moving a lot myself and experiencing many changes (e.g. friends, environment, and its circumstances) have made me appreciate the diversity of people and cultures. If you are heading to Australia, to Sydney in particular, please feel free to contact me (Salut.Muhidin@mq.edu.au). In the same way, I will let you know if I am going to visit Groningen. Actually, that will be very soon, as I am planning to attend the population geography conference this summer in June 2013. This biannual event will be organized by Professor Clara Mulder from PRC, Groningen. Tot ziens!
Towards a client-oriented health insurance system in Ghana

Towards a client-oriented health insurance system in Ghana is the title of the research programme which my two Ghanaian colleagues and I started on last year. Because the study includes three important stakeholder groups (clients, health-care providers and health insurer), each of us has been assigned to focus on one of the three perspectives. And that is why I was in Accra, the capital of Ghana, training four Ghanaian research assistants, each of them speaking at least 3 local languages. The linguistic diversity is one of the complications when doing fieldwork in Ghana. We worked closely with the Linguistics Department of the University of Ghana to prepare the topic guides carefully, and despite this preparation we still had to consult the local community mobilizers prior to each focus group discussion, to find out whether there were specific local terms our moderators should be aware of. I regret not being able to moderate the interviews myself, because engaging in the discussion with community members brings you much closer to the issues people deal with in their daily lives. But my role was that of observer, working out discussion diagrams for analysing the dynamics in the groups and discussing these findings with the moderator and note taker after each interview. In total we conducted 22 FGDs, 20 individual health histories and a number of informal interviews. We talked with young and old people living in rural and urban areas.

The data collected through recording and transcription were later validated in two stakeholder workshops. After working in separate groups, it was very interesting to bring clients, health-care providers and insurer together and share the respective findings. The dynamics between the stakeholder groups during this session was a study in itself. It revealed the level of openness in communication and the relationships between various groups. While many clients in the Western Region were reluctant to express their opinions, leaving the floor open for the more vocal health-care providers, this was not the case in the workshop in the Greater Accra Region, where clients initiated the dialogue in an open discussion with the insurer and health-care providers. One of the directors of the health insurer was very impressed and commented that we had been able to create a very safe environment in which everyone felt comfortable to participate in the discussion.

Based on the findings of the qualitative phase of our research, a household questionnaire and health-care provider questionnaire was defined and subsequently rolled out in early 2012.
Message from the Field: Sanne Visser

Oostwold, September 2012 – January 2013

A message from the field from within the Netherlands? Yes. I am only 40 kilometres away from Groningen, but still I am on fieldwork. And it feels like fieldwork.

For my PhD research I am conducting an ethnographic study on the countryside in the province of Groningen. The topic of my study is the social and cultural meaning of food and food practices and its role in the decision-making process in households in the north and east of Groningen. The initial plan was to carry out interviews with children and parents from families in small villages and to use this as data, but after talking to professionals in the field I found out that much is related to trust. To gain trust within the communities and engage families in my study, it would be very important to become a familiar face.

Then Hinke, my supervisor, popped the question: would it not be interesting to live in north-east Groningen for a while? It brought me back to a suggestion once put forward by Ajay, which is to live with a Ghanaian family to collect data for my Master’s thesis. At that time I felt I was not ready for such a step, but this time I felt I should take this opportunity and undertake a more ethnographic approach. It gave me two big advantages: I can observe the food culture from within the community and it saves me a lot of time on public transport (as I do not have a driver’s license or a car).

Since September I have lived in a house in Oostwold, a small village of 1,000 inhabitants. The landscape shows all the signs of the changing seasons and the farmers are busy harvesting their crops. Potatoes, beets and grain are the most prominent crops in this area. I enjoy the bike rides to neighbouring villages. I also appreciate taking in the surroundings as they change with the season, the fields turning into endless stretches of bare clay soil. This part of the province of Groningen is famous for its wide panoramic views and it is great to discover it for myself.

Not only do I enjoy my surroundings, it is also a pleasure to get to know a lot of new people. Last month, through voluntary work at the children’s and youth centre in a neighbouring village and work for Humanitas (an organization which supports families who are in difficulty), I got to know neighbours, professionals, and children and some of their parents. By taking part in activities in the villages and speaking to people I slowly introduce myself to more people. The first goal is to let people open up to me and not only see me as a researcher. Sometimes I encounter distrust. As I was talking to some parents about my research I could not ignore the comments of two of the mums, ‘I will never take part in all that stupid research’. Although they would not have wanted me to hear it, it did make me realize that this is clearly one of the boundaries I have to break through in the coming months. Two children and their families are now part of the pilot study and some more families are showing interest in joining my study. The children started with taking pictures of situations which, to them, are related to food and food practices. I am very curious about how they perceive their world in relation to food.

Despite the fact that the residents of Oostwold share the same culture, I am learning a lot about being in the field. The data are sometimes overwhelming, as everything I see in the daily routine can be a part of my study, but by keeping a diary I hope that my findings and insights will constitute useful information and contribute towards the results in a later stage.

Now that some of the local media have learned of my research, it has also become clear how the media like to present a researcher. The photographer asked me to sit outside, in front of my house, with my laptop. Later I realized that this is not what I think defines me as a researcher: someone sitting behind a laptop close to her house. By being in Oostwold, I would like to discover the stories from inside out and to be outside as much as possible!
Visitors to the PRC

Dr Michael Wagner from the University of Cologne (Germany) was a guest at the PRC in July to co-author an article ‘Who moves to establish a co-residential partnership?’ with Clara Mulder.

Dr Sofiane Bouhdiba from Tunis visited the PRC on September 4. Her research at the African Study Centre deals with the socio-demographic dimensions of the Arab Spring.

Shirish Darak is staying at the PRC from October to December to work further on the analysis of the data for his PhD dissertation.

Courses

In October, Ajay Bailey and Louise Meijering organized the short course in Qualitative Research Design in Population Studies and Health. An external participant from Rwanda participated in this year’s course.

Education

One STUNED and two Nuffic fellowships have been awarded for the short course on Demographic Methods and Analysis. This year, we welcomed in total six external participants from Australia, Bhutan, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Nepal.

PRC News

Katrin Schwanitz has been accepted as an (external) PhD student, supervised by Clara Mulder. Katrin will be working at INED, Paris.

September, Daniël Herbers continues with his PhD research at PRC after having successfully completed the programme run by the European Doctoral School of Demography in Barcelona.

September to January 2013, Sanne Visser is conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Oostwold, for her PhD research on the social and cultural meaning of food and food practices in the north and east of Groningen.

October to February 2013, Vera Dimitrievska is engaged in PhD fieldwork in Skopje, Macedonia, to explore the topic of induced abortion, contraceptive behaviour and the cultural and social context in Macedonia. She will be affiliated to women's NGOs working in the field of reproductive health in Macedonia.

Hans Elshof is currently living in Visvliet, in the province of Groningen, to collect data for his PhD research on population decline and social cohesion in villages.

November 13, Clara Mulder delivered her inaugural lecture ‘Families, huishouden en wonen’ (Families, households and residence). The text (in Dutch) can be downloaded here. Enquire with Stiny Tiggelaar (s.e.tiggelaar@rug.nl) for a hard copy.

On December 1, the European Project IROHLA on Health Literacy of Older Adults started. Inge Hutter and Louise Meijering are participating in this project, and Liesbeth de Wit will start to work in the project Community Involvement in Health Literacy as a PhD researcher.

Recent publications


Van Hoven, B., and L.E. Douma (2012) ‘We Make Ourselves at Home Wherever We are’ – Older People’s Placemaking in Newton Hall. European Spatial Research and Policy, 19(1), 65-79. DOI: 10.2478/v10105-012-0006-7
External activities

June, Billie de Haas wrote a review of the PhD dissertation ‘Being old in times of AIDS. Aging, caring and relating in northwest Tanzania’ by Josien de Klerk. The review in the NVAS Newsletter can be accessed here.

June 3-9, Myriam Hemsteede completed a short course ‘Action Research for Socio-Ecological Change’ organized by ARALIG, in Portugal.

June 4-5, Anu Kõu attended the Global Hearing on Refugees and Migration, organised by The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration, in The Hague. She took part in the sub-plenary working group ‘The impact of future demographic changes related to labour migration and refugees.’

June 13-16, the European Population Conference was held in Stockholm. Many PRC researchers presented their work. Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey organized a side meeting on Qualitative Research in Population Studies. This meeting was held under the auspices of the IUSSP panel on Qualitative Research in Population Studies.

June 25-27, Eva Kibele participated in the workshop Explaining Health Inequalities: The Role of Space and Time at University of Bielefeld, Germany. Her presentation was entitled ‘Regional mortality differences in Germany: spatial patterns, temporal trends, and contextual determinants.’

September 3-5, Ori Rubin participated in Forge Summer School in York, UK, under the theme of ‘Time, Travel and Everyday Life’.

September 10-11, Louise Meijering and Linden Douma attended the Emerging New Researchers in the Geographies of Health & Impairment (ENRGHI) conference in London, where they presented their papers on the experiences of stroke patients and on the role of culture in experiences of subjective well-being of older adults, respectively.

September 20, Myriam Hemsteede presented a poster on community-based safe motherhood programme in Mangochi (Malawi) at SHAREnet conference ‘Can communities make a change?’ in The Hague.

September 27 - October 2, Bettie Oosterhoff and Hinke Haisma visited the 16th Conference of the International Society for Research on Human Milk and Lactation in Trieste, Italy. Bettie presented a poster on ‘Recommendations on exclusive breastfeeding and the voice of women’ and Hinke’s poster was entitled ‘Recommendations to breastfeed exclusively until six months, help or burden?’

In the October issue of the Dutch funeral magazine ‘Uitvaart’ Fanny Janssen discussed the marked increase in mortality in the Netherlands in the first half of 2012. The full text (in Dutch) can be accessed here.

October 8-10, Ajay Bailey was invited as an expert on qualitative research methods for the curriculum development workshop for the Ifakara Health Institute’s Master’s programme in Public Health, held at Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania.

October 10-11, Myriam Hemsteede took part in a workshop on participatory workshops with Robert Chambers, at ISS in The Hague.

October 16, Fanny Janssen commented in De Volkskrant on the recently published article ‘Human mortality improvement in evolutionary context’ by Burger et al. The full text (in Dutch) can be accessed here.

November 1, Ajay Bailey presented his line of research ‘Global Migration, Culture and Place’ at the ‘Science meets Policy and Policy meets Science’ workshop held at the Dutch Ministry of Internal Affairs and Kingdom Relations, in The Hague.

November 20, 5th Dutch Demography Day took place in Utrecht. Most of the PRC researchers presented papers and/or chaired a session. The students of MSc in Population Studies also attended the event. Nina Concova, a former Master’s student, won the NIDI Master’s thesis award for her thesis ‘Depopulation and ageing in rural Bulgaria: A case study of the village of Bania.’

November 29, Anu Kõu participated in the Annual Assembly of the Dutch Association for Migration Research in Leiden.

Ajay Bailey and Inge Hutter have received three grants:

- NWO-ESRC-ICSSR network subsidy for three years on the topic ‘Ageing in a Globalising World.’
- Erasmus Mundus action 2 programme Svagata. University of Ghent is the applicant, and Ajay and Inge are part of the consortium.
- NWO-WOTRO grant under the theme of ‘Migration, Development and Conflict’ for the proposal ‘The Migrant Suitcase: examining the flow of norms, practices, identities and social capital between India and the Netherlands.’

Announcements

The call for papers for the International Conference on Population Geographies is now open. The conference will be held on June 25-28, in Groningen. For more information, please visit http://www.rug.nl/frw/onderzoek/icpg2013/.