Dear colleagues,

Although the days are getting shorter, people at PRC are moving forward with vibrant energy and endless creativity. In the summer months some ambitious PRC members have put a great deal of energy into a very successful ICPG conference at our home base in Groningen. Many national and international fellows attended the conference and we received a lot of positive feedback. We also composed a new mission statement for the PRC Research programme (also presented in this Newsletter).

Furthermore, The Education Review Committee – QANU which was commissioned by the NVAO – reviewed our Master in Population Studies (2008-2009 to 2012-2013). The preliminary results were very positive and accreditation for the next five years is very likely. Also, the Demographics courses at bachelor’s level have higher student numbers than ever. It is heartening to note that many students are interested in demography and related topics.

We also received the bad news that NIDI, our partner institute in the Netherlands, has been subjected to large budget cuts. Prospects for NIDI look brighter than we first thought, however, as the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the University of Groningen have joined forces to help secure the future of NIDI. This implies we hope to continue working with NIDI in an even closer collaboration than before.

In this Newsletter the new mission Statement of the PRC is presented. Also Hinke Haisma writes about the start of her VIDI research in Granada, where she organized a workshop for members of all the fields involved in her interdisciplinary research. Next, we are pleased to present a new initiative by two PRC alumni: Demotrends, a blog/platform on Demography Issues. We also share news from Macedonia, where Vera Dimitrievska conducted her fieldwork.

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

We wish you wonderful Christmas holidays and a happy, healthy and successful 2014!

Kind regards,

Also on behalf of Clara Mulder (Head of the PRC)

Sanne Visser
New Mission Statement PRC

PRC Research Programme: Population and well-being in context

Last year Clara Mulder, head of our department, presented the new title for the PRC research programme: population and well-being in context. Although the title has already provided a direction for the PRC research programme, we have now undergirded the programme with a new mission statement. Together with all current staff at PRC, we brainstormed to formulate a new mission statement which encapsulates a comprehensive outline of our work at PRC.

The following is our new mission statement:

The PRC mission relates to research and training in population studies and demography.

Our research is organized in the PRC research programme ‘Population and well-being in context,’ which forms part of the research programme of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences ‘towards Well-being, Innovation and Spatial Transformation (tWIST).’

Our research is committed to:

**Quality:**
- Providing scientifically sound answers to research questions that matter
- Using relevant theories and developing new theories
- Making well-informed choices about suitable data and methods, and developing new methods if necessary; being open to both quantitative and qualitative methods
- Publishing in peer-reviewed, high-standard, international scientific publication outlets
- Improving our research skills; being critical to ourselves (and others); giving and seeking feedback

**Relevance:**
- Making scientific progress in the disciplines of demography and population studies
- Answering socially relevant questions

**Sharing:**
- Presenting our research to the international scientific community
- Engaging in and organizing debates and discussions
- Collaborating with colleagues, inviting them for research stays and visiting them
- Sharing our findings with stakeholders, research participants and society at large

Our training is organized in the Master in Population Studies and in the bachelor’s programmes and the Graduate School of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences. We are committed to:
- Linking our teaching to (our) research; creating an international research environment for students and stimulating a scientific attitude among them
- Providing basic knowledge of demography to bachelor’s students, explaining the relevance of population issues for society and conveying our enthusiasm for population issues.
- Equipping master’s students with advanced knowledge of theories and methods and the required academic skills to become independent researchers in the field of Population Studies
- Training a new generation of PhD candidates to be highly qualified scientific researchers of population-related issues

The mission statement of PRC can also be found on http://www.rug.nl/research/ursi/prc/
VIDI–Research: A Multidimensional Approach to Child Growth

Hinke Haisma

In June 2012 I received a VIDI grant for my research on “Normative indicators of child health and nutrition – one size fits all”. I organized a kick-off workshop for this research as a pre-conference workshop to the International Conference of Nutrition in Granada, Spain, which took place on 16-20 September 2013. The workshop itself was on 14 and 15 September, and I invited 15 people from different disciplines, including political scientists, philosophers, cultural demographers, nutritionists, anthropologists and medical doctors.

The aim of the workshop was to reflect on what is considered ‘healthy child growth’ and what other dimensions of growth than the currently used medical indicators – weight for age and height for age – could be considered. The workshop was very enriching and inspiring, but what I would most like to share with you is my experience of interdisciplinary work that stayed with me after the workshop at the conference, and which challenged my thinking for some time after.

With my background as a nutritionist from Wageningen University, holding a PhD in Medical Sciences, and now an associate professor of Population and Child Health in the Social Sciences, I thought I knew what interdisciplinary work was about. I was mistaken.

To elaborate, I need to explain something about my current research. The research is on how current growth monitoring practices only focus on the physical dimension of growth, that is, length and weight. When parents take their baby/child to a well-baby clinic, be it in the Netherlands, in Tanzania, India or Brazil, the weight and height of their child are measured, and this is plotted on a curve which is said to represent optimal growth for a child of a specific age. On the basis of how the growth of their child relates to the growth curve, the child is said to grow well or not so well. Other dimensions of growth, such as social, cultural, cognitive, mental or an evolutionary perspective, are not included. As a consequence, non-nutritional dimensions that interact with the nutritional indicators are excluded in the concept of a child’s growth. And the advice that is given to parents does not take into account the broader context in which the child lives. My research aims to contribute to the existing growth monitoring practices by including multiple dimensions.

This research clearly needs an interdisciplinary approach. I found my inspiration in the work of Amartya Sen, who won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1998, with his capability approach to social choice that was then used to generate a new index for assessing the development of a population: the multidimensional poverty index. This index was subsequently adopted by the United Nations, and is now being used for comparisons between countries.

I envisage a similar exercise for child growth, and I will use the same approach as Sen used for economic growth. By using a multidimensional approach to child growth, a more holistic growth monitoring tool can be developed. Some change in thinking about child growth is, however, required. Or as one participant to the workshop said, “The idea is really interesting, but also so radical!”

My background as a nutritionist led me to expect that at a conference of the International Union for Nutrition Sciences I would find similar minded people. But that appeared not to be the case at all. For the workshop I had invited people whom I knew would be able to stretch their minds and be open to ideas from other disciplines. The workshop itself was a wonderful experience, and my mind had never been stretched to such an extent! But then, at the nutrition conference after the workshop, I felt no connection whatsoever with the nutrition society, and I wondered what was wrong with me, or with them.

Only back home, after a chat with a nutritionist colleague who had moved to occupational epidemiology, and had made a similar discipline shift, I came to understand that in the process of my moving from nutrition to medical to social sciences I had lost the connection with where I come from: nutrition sciences. This was a very important insight, as I want my research to have an impact exactly there, in the nutrition sciences, as it is from there that growth monitoring practices are currently being implemented. I concluded that I needed to step back and look at the process that took me from one science to the other. Only then will I be able (I hope) to explain what working from social sciences can bring to nutrition.
I think this is illustrates how important it is to stay connected with each of the disciplines when you undertake interdisciplinary work. Each discipline has its own language: studying multiple dimensions of child growth to a nutritionist means including other measures of growth, for example body composition or biological markers. To a social scientist, these are still measures from the same (physical) dimension. What we are trying to do in our research is include dimensions from other disciplines. When I tried to explain this to one of the nutritionists who had attended the workshop, and who called herself a hard-core nutritionist, she did not quite see how this could confuse me so much. If you take the sky as an example, and someone asks you to define what “sky” is, and you answer by including the trees and the buildings that you see on the side when you look up, then people don’t know what you are talking about ...

And still this is exactly what we are trying to achieve with our research: when we define child growth, we want health professionals to take a broad look, and include what their observations about reveal about the way a child’s growth is being assessed.

If you would like to share experiences with Hinke Haisma or respond to her story, please write to h.h.haisma@rug.nl

Demotrends

Maarten Bijlsma, Liili Abuladze, Ben Wilson and Jason Hilton

Do you enjoy reading about news in the world of demography? Do you want to be in touch with other people who are interested population research? Or do you perhaps feel the urge to write about a demographic topic, but want more freedom than what a scientific paper can offer? If the answer is yes, then perhaps the demotrends blog is for you!

Demotrends is a blog founded and edited by young researchers in the field of demography, including PRC alumni Liili Abuladze and Maarten Bijlsma. Liili is currently a PhD researcher at the Estonian Institute for Population Studies, while Maarten is a PhD researcher at the Pharmacoepidemiology unit at the University of Groningen. The other two editors and regular contributors, Ben Wilson and Jason Hilton, are from the UK (PhD researchers at the London School of Economics and the University of Southampton respectively).

So far, we have been active for one year and have written on health, the UK Census, birth rates, Lexis diagrams, population composition, statistical techniques, abortion and migration. Much of the demotrends content relates to demography, but we have a very broad view of what can be included. We hope to be a gateway to knowledge and make demographic research more visible among the scientific, as well as the non-scientific, community. We believe that most social development relates to ‘populations’ in some sense.

We aim to connect researchers across topics, institutions and countries. We are keen to hear from anyone who would like to get involved. You may like to write a one-off post (related to your general research interests), or a research spotlight (which allows you to publicize and discuss your current research). You may even be interested in becoming a regular contributor, and you do not need to be an established (or published) researcher yet. By expanding our group of editors and contributors, we will increase both our geographic reach and the scope of demographic topics that we cover, making demotrends even more interesting. Even if you do not wish to write a post, you may be interested in getting in touch and sharing information on news, conferences, jobs, teaching and learning, other blogs, or anything else that is topical. We are also looking for a volunteer to help us manage the website and social media activities. We think this would be an excellent opportunity to build a network of demography contacts.

Contact us at demotrendsblog@gmail.com or visit our website at www.demotrends.wordpress.com. You may also be interested in following demotrends’ news feed in Twitter or Facebook.
Message from the Field
Vera Dimitrievska, September - November 2013

Last September, PhD researcher Vera Dimitrievska conducted her fieldwork in Macedonia. The topic of her research project is ‘Reinventing professionalism in the post-socialist transition era: Experiences and perceptions of health care professionals in Macedonia regarding contraception and abortion’.

This was the second phase of research for my PhD project in Macedonia. The first phase was an orientation phase as part of the participatory action research approach, working with the community to open a space for discussion and interaction. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the perceptions, motives and experiences of health care providers and their clients in dealing with contraceptives and family planning.

Within my 2 months of the fieldwork I have learnt a lot from the both sides – doctors and women who are using health services for contraceptives. My previous experience with various state and non-governmental organizations in the health field in Macedonia made it easy for me to reach the health facilities and establish contact with health professionals. Most of the interviews were organized and planned from my personal contacts and using a snowballing strategy.

When I told health professionals that my topic focuses on perceptions of contraception and abortion, the first reaction was, ‘Can I see or can you send me your questionnaire so I can circle the answers?’ During the introduction I explained that it is a qualitative study, which means I want to hear their attitudes and experiences regarding contraception and family planning. I used a voice recorder during the interviews and focus group discussions. At the beginning, some of the interviewees were surprised that I was using voice recorder, but I explained that it is just to save time in taking notes and that everything recorded is confidential.

I now have a better understanding of professionals’ knowledge and women’s reactions about abortion and contraception use. Although I am originally from Macedonia, I learnt new things regarding the culture of other ethnicities and their reactions to my research. In the last two weeks of my fieldwork I had intensive in-depth interviews with professionals in the eastern part of Macedonia. Some of the professionals in this region were not so happy to be recorded during the interviews because they have never before participated in qualitative research.

I also like the outreach work and it yields much information that cannot being seen or solicited during the interviews. I learnt that some women still have rigid attitudes toward contraceptive pills that can cause illness, and that some do not want to have something artificial in their body. Moreover, during observation, I noticed that the women from the rural areas who came to see the health professional were accompanied, for example, by their husband, mother-in-law or friend. The data is still fresh and there are lots of stories that have to be analysed in the next period.

This fieldwork has shown me how the health professionals dealing with contraceptive and abortion practices are trying their best to familiarize women with contraception and birth control. Macedonia is still lagging behind European countries to reach a low level of abortion but efforts are being made by both health professionals and the clients themselves to rectify the situation.

Announcement

On the 21st of January NVD, HAPS and NIDI will jointly organize a conference ”Health & living environment”.

This study afternoon on living environment and health aims to link research and practice. Study of the impact of the environment on health provides a more comprehensive perspective of health determinants. This can give us new insights how to improve health further. More information on www.nvdemografie.nl
Recent publications


**Presentations**

**Ori Rubin**: "The determinants of mode choice for family visits - evidence from Dutch panel data". World Conference on Transport Research (WCTR) in Rio de Janeiro, 15-18 July.

**Cristine Fenenga**: ‘A Participatory Action Approach for Client-Centered Health Insurance’ Poster, IUSSP conference Busan (South Korea), August

**Christine Fenenga**: Presentation at Ghana National Health Insurance 10th Anniversary celebration. Accra, 4-6 November

**Anu Kou**: Presented research in a panel on 'Knowledge migrants: criteria, procedures and effectiveness of policy'. Migration Policy conference, 6 June, Ministry of Security and Justice, The Hague.

**Anu Kou**: 'For the sake of the family and future': the linked lives of highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and United Kingdom' ICPG, Groningen, 25-28 July

**Anu Kou**: Overview research, Migration and Ethnic Diversity PhD Network, University of Amsterdam, 18th October

**Education**

Two STUNED and two UNFPA fellowships have been awarded for the short course in Demographic Methods and Analysis. This year we welcomed in total five external participants, two from Indonesia, two from North Korea, and one from Zambia.

As of this academic year, we offer a two-year international double degree Master programme in Social Demography jointly with the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF)(Barcelona, Spain).

Our Master Population Studies - together with Geo-Information Science (Wageningen) - has been marked best Master among all Geography and Planning related Master studies that are provided in the Netherlands. The ranking is an annual publication of the 'Centrum Hoger Onderwijs Informatie' and reflects a critical comparison of studies, partly based on students' evaluations over the years 2011 and 2012.

**Visitors**

July 2013, Magdalena Muszyńska, Warsaw School of Economics, Institute of Statistics and Demography, Poland visited us for a week to work with Fanny Janssen on a paper entitled “The role of smoking in regional mortality variation in Poland”.

**External activities**

September: Fanny Janssen appeared in the Volkskrant and NRC Next with a reaction on the report by De Beer (NIDI) on the expected life span of babies currently born in the Netherlands.

We successfully completed a research project on “Selective migration and health in the Netherlands” for and with the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) as part of a larger project on "Population decline and health in the Netherlands" financed by the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.

**PRC News**

As a part of her Rosalind Franklin Fellowship track, Hinke Haisma’s promotion to Associate Professor in Population and Child Health (with IUS promovendi) was approved by the examining committee

**Shirish Darak** successfully defended his thesis on 21st of November

**Shirish Darak** has been appointed assistant professor

**Leo van Wissen** has been elected as member of the Academia Europaea, a non-governmental association acting as an Academy.

**Marieke van der Pers** left PRC and works now at Fier Fryslân, an organization providing assistance to children, young people and adults who are, or have been, confronted by violence in the context of relationships. Fier is the centre of expertise in the area of: Domestic violence Child abuse Honour-related violence Human trafficking / lover-boy issues (Early childhood) traumas. Marieke will finish her dissertation in the coming few months and she still regularly visits the department. We wish her good luck in finishing her thesis and we hope she will keep in close contact with PRC and shares her experiences with us.

**Carla Huisman** joined the PRC as a PhD researcher.

**Maties Reus Pons** joined the PRC as a PhD researcher.