

PART I

GEOGRAPHIES OF AGEING AND WELLBEING

**Guest editors: Bettina van Hoven, Aleid E. Brouwer,
Louise Meijering**

FOREWORD

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, AGEING AND SOCIETAL CHALLENGES IN EUROPE

All advanced economies are becoming older, and Healthy Ageing has been listed as one of priority themes of the smart growth dimension of Europe 2020 (European Commission, 2010a), the European Union's development strategy. More recently, healthy ageing has been promoted as a flagship research priority for many countries, including UK, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland. Clearly, ageing is on the international policy agenda.

Societal ageing has two major drivers, namely ageing due to health-care improvements afforded by the large cohort of baby-boomers, and also ageing due to the slowdown in the subsequent replacement ratios. In some sense the former driver is a good news story as it derives from improvements in the health-related quality of life. In contrast, the latter driver of ageing is a rather more complex story, and the positive and negative distributional impacts of this latter driver fall differently on different social groups. In particular, these intergenerational effects imply that the working life expectancy of future generations will increase, while the pension returns are likely to fall. In OECD countries, the current retirement group is the wealthiest social cohort in history, having benefited from both the post-World War II economic boom of the 20th century and the mortgage repayment effects of the 1970s inflation. In contrast, the current younger age groups face many years of low growth, low pension accumulation effects, and low housing equity gain, the effects of which have been exacerbated by the 2008 global financial crisis. Older age groups appear to be in more favourable circumstances than younger age groups. In addition, these demographic distributional shifts have no spatial implications *per se*. As such, these observations raise the question as to why we should be in any way concerned today about the

phenomenon of ageing in Europe and in particular why geographers should be concerned.

The reason why we should be concerned, and geographers in particular, is due to another closely-related modern demographic phenomenon which has very profound geographical implications, namely that of migration. One of the key features of modern globalisation is that people are becoming increasingly geographically mobile, not only internationally, but also more noticeably, inter-regionally (DGRégio, 2008). Nowadays, people are increasingly accustomed to moving for work, and also to moving multiple times during their working lives, and the advent of the European Single Market has accelerated these trends. However, given the nature of modern globalisation, in advanced economies, in terms of long term local development potential, the most important group of migrants are the highly-skilled cohorts. Increasingly, young highly-educated university graduates are moving in larger numbers to particular places (Goll, 2010), or rather to particular types of places; places which are dominated by knowledge-intensive activities and occupations and high amenity environments. These high amenity environments are most typically high income urban areas, and as this happens, the areas from which they move away naturally age in profile. For the young migrant these trends pose no serious challenges, but for the regions which they leave the remaining population profile ages rapidly. Moreover, to the extent that the out-migrants are also the highly-skilled and highly-educated, the areas from which they originate experience an adverse combination of an increasingly ageing population, a declining population, a population whose wealth and incomes are declining, and ultimately problems of dereliction and social decline. These adverse trends pose very serious challenges for the remaining ageing communities. Such difficult local experiences, however, are in very marked contrast to the experiences of the places into which these young migrants move. The more fortunate destination locations into which these younger highly-educated groups move exhibit an increasingly highly-skilled and educated population, a growing population, and an increasingly youthful population relative to the regions of origin. Although these places also experience processes of ageing, they do so at a much slower rate and in a manner which is much less problematic.

Meanwhile there are other localities that are ageing, but which do not represent major challenges for society in the ways that those described above do. These are the ageing and wealthy regions. They are primarily high natural-amenity environments towards which retired and wealthy people move for lifestyle and leisure reasons; people who are able to cash in on years of equity gains described above. Increasingly in Europe, many of these localities are in the southern European countries, which are characterised by inflows of northern European migrants with two residences, who move between countries according to the season.

Recent European Commission labour market research (ESPON, 2010) demonstrates that the most significant demographic marker defining the differing fortunes of localities is the distinction between localities facing population inflows and

population growth, as against localities facing population outflows and population decline. This is not to say, however, that areas facing population inflows experience no demographic challenges. Rather, many of the demographic challenges in these types of places are largely hidden, and the most serious ones operate within the buoyant core cities. For example, prosperous urban localities tend to face increasing land prices, housing costs, and congestion problems. At the same time, the outsourcing and off-shoring associated with globalisation has affected most severely the employment opportunities of the middle-skills, middle-incomes and middle-age groups, who are increasingly forced to compete with lower skills cohorts in order to survive. This depresses the wages of both groups while leaving the higher skills groups unaffected. The only way that both of these lower skills groups are able to respond to increased local costs of living is to move to lower quality housing, the result of which is that many of our prosperous cities are becoming increasingly spatially segregated. Buoyant cities are increasingly typified by neighbourhoods of 'haves' and neighbourhoods of 'have-nots', which coexist but do not interact. Part of the urban emphasis (DGRegio, 2009) of European regional policy is aimed at promoting the *inclusive growth* agenda of Europe 2020 (DGRegio, 2010a) so as to reduce these segregation effects (DGRegio, 2010b).

In general, as people become more mobile, and as mobility is increasingly associated with skills, the result is that places become increasingly different (European Commission, 2010b). The long term provision of public services such as health and education therefore becomes ever more complex, and differing needs in different places are manifested by increasingly diverging population profiles. For five decades the widespread existence of social safety nets in industrial countries has helped to cushion many of the worst effects of economic restructuring. The modern era of globalisation, however, implies that there will be more profound community provision and engagement challenges in the coming decades than in previous decades, as national and regional authorities have less and less influence over the destinies of their own local constituencies and communities. While education and health-care investments are essential elements in helping us achieve our community and societal potential, it is not only the levels of these investments which matter, but also the locations in which they are provided. As places become more different to each other due to these complex demographic and social trends, the nature of the issues associated with the provision of these public goods and services will become ever more complex. These challenges are probably most marked in the case of rural regions which are sparsely populated, declining, and ageing, and also in the increasingly segregated and marginalised urban regions. All of these challenges are very much *place-based*, and geographers are right to be concerned about such matters.

Philip McCANN*

* Philip McCANN, University of Groningen, the Netherlands.

REFERENCES

- DGRegio (2008), *Regions 2020: Demographic Challenges for European Regions*, Background Document to Commission Staff Working Document, SEC (2008) 2868, Final *Regions 2020: An Assessment of Future Challenges for EU Regions*, Brussels: European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional Policy, November, SEC (2008) 2868.
- DGRegio (2009), *Promoting Sustainable Urban Development in Europe: Achievements and Opportunities*, Brussels: European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional Policy, April.
- DGRegio (2010a), *Panorama Inforegio 35*, 'Towards Greater Social Inclusion: Regional Policy's Contribution', Brussels: European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional Policy, Autumn.
- DGRegio (2010b), *Panorama Inforegio 34*, 'Regional Policy, an Integrated Approach', Brussels: European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional Policy, Summer.
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2010a), *Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative Innovation Union*, COM (2010) 546.
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2010b), *Investing in Europe: Fifth Cohesion Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion*, Brussels.
- ESPO (2010), *DEMIFER – Demographic and Migratory Flows Affecting European Regions and Cities*, Applied Research 2013/1/3, *Final Report*, ESPO 2013 Programme, Luxembourg.
- GOLL, M. (2010), 'Ageing in the European Union: Where Exactly?', *Eurostat Statistics in Focus*, 26, Luxembourg: European Commission.