

New Challenges in Population Development Processes



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The Conference on Spatial Challenges of Future Demographic Re-structuring was held in Mannheim, Germany on 8.–9.8.2008. The conference was jointly organized by the University of Mannheim and the International Geographical Union, Commission on Population and Vulnerability. The Commission chair, Allan Findlay, from Dundee, UK, pointed out in his Welcome speech that people are not born vulnerable. He mentioned climate change and vulnerability, and also that people are made vulnerable. The positive side is that people have chances.

Bernhard Müller, from Dresden, Germany, was worried that the safety net of fertility rates has left in Europe. There is a growing burden for the economically active population. There is the need for inter-generational co-operation and synergies since many elderly are ageing in place. Population ageing is leading to a silver economy which creates new employment opportunities. He was also mentioning a changing paradigm from growth to shrinkage. Demographic change is not a shock but a long process. It becomes a shock if it is not taken into consideration.

Jianfa Shen, from Hong Kong, talked about population growth and migration in China. Their urban population more than tripled from 171 million to 577 million in the period of 1978–2006. The population also is ageing in China. The share of 65+ year olds was 7.7 per cent in 2005, and according to forecasts the share will be 11.2 per cent of the total population in 2020. In absolute numbers, it will be 164 million people aged 65+. The ageing trend is continuing and the share of the elderly will be 22 per cent of the total population in 2050, meaning 320 million people in total. According to Shen, very severe population ageing will be occurring in the near future. This is leading to a situation where migration becomes increasingly important.

Yefang Huang, from Hong Kong, presented causes and patterns of migration of Hong Kong's residents to the mainland China. Hong Kong had a population of 6.86 million in 2006 with a GDP per capita ranked

10th in the world. Hong Kong is a world city and its citizens are free to move in and out of the territory. The daily quota is 150 immigrants per day to Hong Kong. People are nowadays also moving from Hong Kong to mainland China where the majority of migrants are males and educated people. 78 per cent are professionals and manufacturing is an important economic branch in employment. One attraction for them to mainland China is higher salaries.

Hans-Joachim Bürkner, from Erkner, Germany, raised the concept of multi-local households which is an outcome of group-based migration strategies. Circular pattern of migration promote multi-locations. A variety of social, cultural and economic processes leave their imprints on the household. The household can be seen as an indicator of social change, but are often treated as a homogenous entity.

Annett Steinführer, from Leipzig, Germany, emphasized that migration is a key driver of historical urbanization and neighbourhood change. She also mentioned multi-local households, i.e. where working and living are located in different places. Households are the entity in which there is the decision of moving or not. Of course, there are single-person household too, and the decision process is then easier to conduct. One phenomenon she mentioned is flat-sharers which can be voluntary or involuntary. The purpose is to share costs and dining together. These are often young professionals and students.



The Mannheim University. Picture: Elli Heikkilä.