OPENING ADDRESS

Frans Willekens

Chairman, Board of the Graduate School of Research in Demography

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you to the official opening of the Graduate School of Research in Demography.

The ceremony today marks an important step in a long, ongoing process directed towards the establishment in the Netherlands of adequate training in demography and an improved understanding of population issues. The population debate is intensifying and involves highly complex issues such as the decline of the family and traditional social support networks, international migration and the Third World population bomb or demographic trap. The public debate on population today addresses only the top of the iceberg. The real problems are ahead of us and will become acute in the 21st century, less than a decade from now. To tackle the problems, society needs highly qualified professionals and top scientists. The only way to get the professional and research capabilities that are needed is by selecting bright and highly motivated young men and women and by offering them a first-class education.

The opening of the Graduate School of Research in Demography today is the result of many years of reflection, preparation and action. It is the beginning of a new phase of the ongoing process of curriculum development to meet the challenges of tomorrow. To appreciate where we are today and what the next phase may look like, it may be helpful to highlight the history of the process. I would like to distinguish three periods. The first period is characterized by a growing awareness of the inadequacy of the demographic training in the Netherlands. The period covers roughly the 1970's. During the second period, which started in the early 1980's, actions are being taken to resolve the inadequacy. The third period started in May 1989 with the implementation of the Graduate School.
Opening Address

Pater William

Welcome, Board of the Graduate School of Research in December.

If this is your first time attending a research program, you may find it helpful to understand the structure of the research field before diving into the specific areas of study.

The research program is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the various disciplines within the field. This includes foundational knowledge, current research trends, and opportunities for collaboration with leading experts.

The program is divided into several modules, each focusing on a specific aspect of the research field. These modules are designed to provide a solid foundation for further study and research.

You will have the opportunity to participate in seminars, workshops, and discussions with faculty members and fellow students. These interactions will help you develop critical thinking skills and enhance your understanding of the research field.

In addition to the structured program, you will have access to a range of resources, including library materials, online databases, and research equipment.

The program is offered through the Graduate School of Research, which is committed to providing a supportive and collaborative environment for all students.

On behalf of the Graduate School, I would like to welcome you to our community of researchers and to encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities available to you.

Thank you for choosing to join us in this exciting journey of research.

William

Gerontology Program
Period 1 (1970's): Development of the awareness

The idea of a graduate programme dates back to the early 1970's. As early as 1974, the N.I.D.I. Board established an interuniversity task force to explore the organization of training in demography at universities (N.I.D.I. Annual Report, 1974, p. 12). The chairman of the task force, Hans Zwart, and its secretary, Gerard Frinking, are with us today. One of the immediate results of their activities was an extensive review of the training in demography offered by the Dutch universities; the review was updated annually in the N.I.D.I. annual reports from 1974 on. The task force briefly explored ways to organize a graduate training in demography. This activity is mentioned in the N.I.D.I. Report of 1975 (p. 12). The uncertainties that were associated with the reorganization of university education in the Netherlands severely affected the activities of the group. In 1976, N.I.D.I. concluded: "The need for an adequate training in demography is felt by everyone; the absence of legal guidelines discourages however an unambiguous position of all members of the group (with respect to the actions to be taken)" (p. 16). The need for an adequate training in demography was also expressed by the Royal Commission on Population in 1977 (Report 'Population and well-being in the Netherlands') and by the Interdepartmental Commission on Population Policy in 1979. One year later, in June 1980, N.I.D.I. presented a blueprint for the organization of demography training in the Netherlands. (Report: 'Onderwijs demografie: voorzieningen en taakverdeling'). Three types of training were distinguished:

- Type 1 for students at the master level who are specializing in fields other than demography, but that require some insight in population issues and demographic processes (minor);
- Type 2 for master students who wish to acquire more substantive knowledge of population processes (major);
- Type 3 for PhD students who envisage a research career in population studies.

For the Type 3 training, the N.I.D.I. Board had a graduate programme in mind, comparable to the ones in Brussels, Louvain-la-Neuve, Montreal, London and Princeton. Students who completed that training, would be as qualified as the graduates from any of these top demography programmes. Today, we celebrate that what was a vision in 1980, is a reality now. At this stage, I would like to mention the name of a person, who has been instrumental in developing the ideas and in their realization: Dirk van de Kaa. Professor van de Kaa had the vision that without a sound graduate
programme of demography, the Netherlands would always lag behind other countries in demographic expertise.

Period 2 (1980's): Action

In 1983, the Minister of Education and Science established a working group to prepare the transition of N.I.D.I. from an interuniversity institute sponsored by the universities to an institute sponsored directly by the government. The need for such a transition became apparent when in the early eighties the universities indicated their wish to abolish the interuniversity institutes (TVC). The working group, chaired by Mrs. Wolff-Albers, had a second mandate: to explore ways to strengthen the position of demography at the universities. The working group recommended a concentration of demography at the University of Amsterdam and proposed to merge the Department of Demography of Groningen University with that of Amsterdam. In September 1985, the N.I.D.I. Board reminded the Minister of the recommendation. At that very moment, deregulation had become fashionable. The response came not as a surprise: "the merger should not be accomplished by the instrument of government intervention." (letter of October 31, 1985). Two weeks later, on the 11th of November 1985, the Minister of Education and Science presented a draft proposal entitled "Planning Graduate Training Programmes" (Planvorming Postdoctorale Opleidingsactiviteiten), in which he proposed that the Universities of Amsterdam and Groningen and the N.I.D.I. organize a graduate programme in demography. In this proposal, the Minister, strangely enough, suggested to concentrate the programme at the University of Groningen, instead of Amsterdam.

About 6 months later, on July 7, 1986, the Universities of Amsterdam and Groningen and the N.I.D.I. presented a 45-page document proposing the establishment of a graduate (PhD) programme in demography. The document was submitted for funding to the Minister of Education and Science. The main objective of the proposal was to develop demographic research capabilities. Initially, a two-year training programme was envisaged with an emphasis on analytical demography and special attention to the sociological, economic and psychological perspectives on demographic behaviour, to historical demography, to medical demography, to the role of population in urban and regional planning, and to population policy. In preparing the document, the authors studied the content and organization of not less than seven different graduate programmes in demography in other countries. The authors are to be congratulated because they laid the basis for the programme that is currently in existence. The authors are Henk de Gans and Anton Kuijsten from the University of Amsterdam, Bert
van Norren and Harry van Vianen from the University of Groningen and Dirk van de Kaa and Frans van Poppel from N.I.D.I. Hans Zwart was an advisor to the authors.

July 1, 1987, one full year after the three institutions presented their document, is another milestone in the brief history of the graduate programme. The Minister of Education and Science agreed to subsidize the programme and the Universities agreed to fund an adequate number of students. In the meantime, the Universities of Utrecht and Brabant joined the co-operative agreement established by the three founding institutions. A total of 36 students has been agreed upon by the Universities in the meeting at the Ministry of Education and Science in Zoetermeer on July 1, 1987. The interpretation of the promises made by the University representatives at that meeting has been a subject of discussion and a reason for a delay in the signing of the co-operative agreement. I am happy to report today that all partners, that is the Universities of Amsterdam, Groningen, Utrecht and Brabant, and N.I.D.I., have signed the co-operative agreement. Another reason to celebrate!

Period 3 (from 1989): Implementation

The current programme differs from the original proposal of 1986 in several ways, mainly because of the new regulations that apply to all graduate programmes (Tweede Fase) in the Netherlands. The participants in Graduate School are not graduate students as in most other countries but staff members (AIO, Assistent-In-Training). They receive an employment contract from the University for four years in which they must complete training and dissertation. Because of the time constraint, the training component has been reduced to about 8 months. As a consequence, specialized courses such as historical demography and medical demography are not offered. The training programme is limited to its main emphasis; namely, analytical demography. But the program goes beyond the traditional analytical demography. A major feature of the Dutch program is its emphasis on demographic behaviour and human development. Demographic behaviour is viewed within the framework of the human life course and is presented as being embedded in a continuously changing context with cultural, economic, social and political dimensions. The emphasis is on behavioural changes during the life course and on life course changes from one generation to another. Anton Kuijstjen will elaborate on this subject in his presentation.

The organizers of the program are proud to have highly qualified and motivated clients, the AIO's (Assistents-In-Training). You, AIO's, are the prospective top scien-
In recent years, the research community has made significant progress in the development of efficient algorithms for solving large-scale optimization problems. This progress has been driven by advances in computational techniques, as well as the increasing availability of powerful computing resources. However, despite these advancements, there are still many challenging problems that remain unsolved.

To address these challenges, a new initiative, called the "Algorithmic Challenge," has been launched. The goal of this initiative is to foster innovation and collaboration among researchers to develop novel algorithms that can solve previously intractable problems. The challenge will be structured around a series of open-ended problems, each with a specific set of constraints and objectives.

Participants in the challenge will be given access to a suite of benchmark problem instances, as well as state-of-the-art software tools and resources. The problems will be scored based on a combination of efficiency, novelty, and practical relevance.

The Algorithmic Challenge is open to researchers from all academic disciplines and industries. It is anticipated that this initiative will not only accelerate the development of new algorithms but also foster international cooperation and knowledge exchange. The results of the challenge are expected to have significant implications for fields ranging from machine learning to operations research. 

To participate in the Algorithmic Challenge, interested researchers are encouraged to register on the challenge website and submit proposals outlining their proposed contributions. The deadline for submissions is [insert date]. The selected participants will be notified by [insert date].
tists that we need to work out solutions to the population problem that will confront us in the 21st century. In this room, you are still in the minority, but you are the reason that we are here today. I hope that, when we meet ten years from now, you will be much more numerous. I also hope that you will have organized an active alumni association, not only because reunions are fun but because you are proud to have been part of the Dutch interuniversity Graduate School of Research in Demography. Thank you!

President of the University of Amsterdam

I was asked by the organizers of this meeting to address you in English, with the warning that only about five percent of the audience, perhaps even less, is really of foreign background. The reason for this, I suspect, is that these days I have a lot to do with openings of things that are hardly to be translated into English. Here, in the Netherlands, we are very eager to hearing constructions which are untranslatable. Already Prof. Willkomm had some difficulties with it. I've not come across a right translation of AIO's. The very thing I've supposed to open this afternoon is really untranslatable. So there is still a long way to go before we are really a part of international higher education in Europe and in the world. I'm opening what is called an AIO-network. Well, network, that's translatable (network) but AIO, as I mentioned, isn't really, and it should give us some thought that we are busy with policy developments which are very potential instead of very international. This remark isn't addressed at you, but at our Government, so to speak.

Just this morning I signed the contract of cooperation, and I did so at the last time in a series of colleagues of the other participating Universities. So I'm now quite prepared to inaugurate today what I will call the Postdoctoral Programme in Demography.

Let me tell you that I accepted the invitation to do so on a selective basis. There are really encouraging now in The Netherlands a lot of such networks of postdoctoral programmes and it's impossible even for me, to speak times off. But I have to confess that I have a very sentimental attachment to demography. I'm not a professional demographer at all. In fact I'm a sociologist, but I studied sociology at a freshness at Leiden University, at a time when in the first year of that curriculum, everything was