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## Conference Report

### **Wider Still and Wider: Local Population Studies in England and Continental Europe\***

#### **Local Population Studies Society Spring Conference 2021**

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On 17 April 2021 almost 50 delegates from around the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe came together on Zoom to hear a range of papers presented by postgraduate researchers. This was our second on-line conference and, as our host Andy Hinde, editor of *Local Population Studies*, informed us, the society had used the difficult circumstances visited on us by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic to showcase the work of a number of students who might otherwise be unable to attend a Local Population Studies Society conference in person.

In the first session, chaired by Eilidh Garrett, we heard three papers which offered new interpretations of data from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first paper, entitled ‘From ICD-10 to a new nosological classification of causes of death in Transylvania (1850–1920)’, by Elena Crinela Holom and Nicoleta Hegedűs (Centre for Population Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania and Centre for Population Studies/George Baritiu Institute of History, Babeş-Bolyai University/Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca, Romania) examined causes of death recorded in parish registers included in the Historical Population Database of Transylvania when set against a new nosological classification system of causes of death. Scholars currently use the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10) as the global standard for the classification of health data, clinical documentation, and statistical aggregation.<sup>1</sup> This system has 21 main categories to describe causes of death. However, this comprehensive system often runs into difficulties when examining historical causes of death recorded in contemporaneous records. This is especially true when the cause of death may not be explicitly stated, and Holom and Hegedűs gave examples of

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\* <https://doi.org/10.35488/lps107.2021.4>.

1 A new standard ICD-11 will come into effect on 1 January 2022.

stated causes of death which require interpretation by researchers including: ‘She died in the morning in her mother’s arms’ or ‘Ripe fruits fall from the trees’.

Working with local registers recording over 37,000 deaths in 25 localities and ranged across various religious denominations, four languages and three alphabets, Holom and Hegedűs have devised a new ‘historical causes of death’ classification system which has just eight categories: (1) infectious diseases, (2) chronic and acute non-infectious diseases, (3) diseases originating in the perinatal period, (4) conditions related to pregnancy, childbirth and the childbed period, (5) diseases related to old age, (6) violent deaths, (7) symptoms, signs and abnormal findings, and (8) ill-defined and unknown causes of mortality. They suggest that this new ‘historical causes of death’ system could aid in the interpretation of historical data to provide information of interest to historical demographers and historians examining health and social conditions of the past.

The second paper of the first session, ‘Comparing three sources to address institutional distortions on London’s infant mortality rates, 1896–1911’, was presented by Sarah L. Rafferty (University of Cambridge). Rafferty examined the extent to which distortions in the data of the Registrar General’s *Returns* before 1911 can be corrected using other sources to provide a more accurate picture of infant mortality. Rafferty’s alternative sources included the 1911 Census (the so called ‘fertility census’ because of the inclusion of the question on the number of children born to a married couple) and the annual Medical Officer of Health reports. The key point to take away from her research was that it is essential to check and control for institutions when researching infant mortality in England and Wales before 1911.<sup>2</sup>

The final presentation of the first session: ‘The impact of migrational flows on the population structure of the northern Swedish inland, 1900–1950’, was given by Samuel Sundvall and featured some preliminary findings from research by himself, Glenn Sandström and Johan Junkka (Umeå University, Sweden). The research is focused on the county of Västerbotten and has used local parish registers to examine the migrations of over 300,000 individuals across parish boundaries. Previous research in this area has focused on migration in the 1960s and 1990s, but this research has identified the importance of historical migration at a time when Sweden was changing from an agrarian to an industrialising nation in the first half of the twentieth century. The research is still continuing but some preliminary findings suggest that immigration to urban areas, particularly among women, had begun in the first half of the century. Migration to urban areas contributed to both population increase and a shift in the age structure towards younger working adults. There was a marked net deficit in migration from rural and semi-industrial areas which was compensated for in two areas by relatively high fertility.

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2 The full version of Rafferty’s paper has been published as S.L. Rafferty, ‘Can indirect estimation methods and the Medical Officer of Health reports “correct” distorted infant mortality rates reported by the Registrar General? The case of London, 1896–1911’, *Local Population Studies* 106 (2021), pp. 57–81 (<https://doi.org/10.35488/lps106.2021.57>).

The second session saw two more young researchers presenting their work. Ivan Ivić (University of Zagreb, Croatia), considered ‘Births out of wedlock in Eastern Croatia, 1995–2015’. Ivan was able to show with the aid of series of maps that, despite its low levels of fertility, Croatia had very diverse levels of out-of-wedlock births over his 20 year study period, with rates ranging from around 5 to over 50 per cent of births outside marriage. He argued that while there were ‘complex and multi-layered’ reasons for the variation in rates, there were strong ethnic, cultural, and religious dimensions to the patterns. Areas where a considerable proportion of the residents were of Serbian origin tended to have higher rates of out-of-wedlock births. Ivan suggested that the Serbian population was less likely to undergo an ‘official’ marriage ceremony, although they may have undergone ceremonies rooted in their own culture and felt themselves to be married. This raised some interesting questions on the nature of marriage, and how different views on what constitutes a marriage may affect the measurement of out-of-wedlock fertility between countries, regions and communities and across a variety of time periods.

The second presentation in the session, ‘Height’s association with fertility outcomes: the case of the Dutch, birth years 1850–1900’, was given by Kristina Thompson (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam). Her topic was the association between height and fertility outcomes, and she considered this in the context of around 3,400 Dutch men born between 1850 and 1900 who had survived to the age of conscription, so that their heights were known. The men studied were drawn from the Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN), so details about each man’s life and family building history were also available. Thompson began her presentation with the somewhat surprising observation that, in the early nineteenth century, Dutchmen were, on average, the same height as Frenchmen, but over the next 100 years the Dutch grew to be the tallest nation in the world. She explained that she wished to investigate whether men’s height was associated with the likelihood that they would become fathers, the age at which they did so and the successful survival of their children. Thompson guided the audience through the range of statistical techniques she had used to consider these questions. She was able to demonstrate that short men were less likely to marry, height being a preferred characteristic on the marriage market. Overall, therefore, short men were less likely to become fathers, and those who did marry tended to do so rather later than taller men. There was, however, no relationship between a man’s height and the number of his children, nor their chances of survival. Unfortunately, one factor that was not available for analysis from the HSN was the height of the woman each man married. It was thus not possible to demonstrate whether tall men were more likely to marry tall women nor whether the wives’ heights had an effect on the couples’ fertility and the survival of their children, although previous studies had shown that maternal height did have a positive relationship on fertility and child health.

Both speakers gave engaging, well-illustrated presentations and their enthusiasm for their subjects shone through their talks and during the questions which followed. The subject matter of both talks was very much of interest to Local Population Studies Society members, and to hear it being discussed in less familiar contexts was both refreshing and stimulating.

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Of the two papers in the final session, the first, entitled 'The female labour force participation in the textile company towns of Catalonia in the early twentieth century' was presented by Lisard Palau Elcacho (University of Barcelona). This paper is published in this issue of *Local Population Studies*.

The second paper, 'The return of the King: political conflict and female labour force participation' was presented by Xanthi Tsoukli (University of Southern Denmark). War has the effect that women enter the workforce as they replace men who have left to fight. Economists are also interested in the effects that political/ideological conflict has on the status of women in society. The example chosen was Greece after the Second World War and its three-year civil war which was a struggle between the right-wing supporters of the monarchy and the communists. Prior to the war, Greece had a conservative monarchy which had tried to remain neutral. After Italian aggression in 1940, resistance was led by the communists and their exclusion from government at the end of the Second World War was a cause of the subsequent Greek Civil War. In 1946 a referendum was held regarding the restoration of the monarchy. The results, when analysed, showed that in areas opposed to the restoration (being less conservative), labour participation of women increased after the Civil War. Conservative areas tended to see the role of women as being confined to the household, whilst left-wing areas saw more opportunities, including on the front line, for women. After the Civil War, liberal areas became more liberal and conservative areas became more conservative: data on the construction of new churches in the latter areas are consistent with this hypothesis. These effects were persistent, as reflected by female labour force participation data until 1981, and the attitudes revealed in the European Values Study of 1999.