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Global ageing – challenges for society, public policy, and the economy

***Abstract.** The topic of ‘demography’ has been on the rise – so much so, that it seems impossible to stop. After all, the facts impressively speak for themselves: At the start of the 21st century, there were around 0.6 billion people aged 60 years and older; but by 2050, the World Health Organization (WHO) expects there will be more than two billion older people. This increase has wide-ranging social, socio-political, and economic consequences. This survey paper aims to analyse global ageing from a demographic perspective, focusing primarily on the consequences of shifting demographics toward older aged societies. The leading research question is: What are the social, socio-political, and economic consequences of global ageing? These demographic changes are important to the public, politicians, scientists, and businesses alike. Therefore, topical demographic research is not only desirable, but – from the perspective of many interest groups, companies, municipalities and associations – it is, in fact, essential.*

***Keywords:** population ageing, demography, age*

Introduction

Oliver Gassmann and Gerrit Reepmeyer stress highly dramatically: “The demographic time bomb is ticking: the society of most Western economies is get-

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ting older every day” [Gassmann, Reepmeyer 2011: 101]. At the turn of the last century, approximately 0.6 billion people were aged 60 years and older [Michaels 2003], yet according to current extrapolations, this number is expected to rise to nearly 1.2 billion by 2025. By the middle of the 21st century, the World Health Organization (WHO) forecasts that more than 2 billion people will be 60 and over [WHO 2010], a figure which Sarah Harper and George Leeson confirm: “Globally, by 2050 there will be some 2 billion adults aged over 60, and the total number of older people will outnumber the young” [Harper, Leeson 2008]. It is expected that every fifth person will be aged over 60 by 2050 [Unric 2015].

In Australia, Russia and in many Asian countries, these demographic transitions to an aged society will advance quickly. In Australia, for instance, the number of people aged 65 and over will nearly double by 2020 [ABC Net 1999]. The demographic shift in Japan is even more accelerated: “Japanese society has aged rapidly and has now become a ‘super-aged’ society” [Fukuda 2011: 79]. According to Nozomi Enomoto, Japan has “the most aged society in the world since the early 1990s” [Enomoto 2011: 175] and Peter Mertens et al. emphasize: “The number of newborns is still shrinking, and in 2006 Japan saw the first year of negative population growth” [Mertens et al. 2011: 354]. In Japan, the age segment of people over 50 made up around 50% of the entire population in 2010, and with regard to the over-65s, Chikako Usui stresses: “In 2009 older persons 65 years of age and older accounted for 23% of the total population in Japan” [Usui 2011: 326]. This age segment will grow to 35.6% by 2050. The average life expectancy of Japanese citizens is expected to increase to 87.5 years by 2015, and 5% of the Japanese population will be over 100 years old [Kohlbacher, Herstatt 2008; Wicher 2007; Conrad, Gerling 2005]. Today Japanese women boast an average lifespan of over 86.44 years – the longest life expectancy of all people on Earth [Usui 2011: 326; Meyer-Hentschel, Meyer-Hentschel 2009].

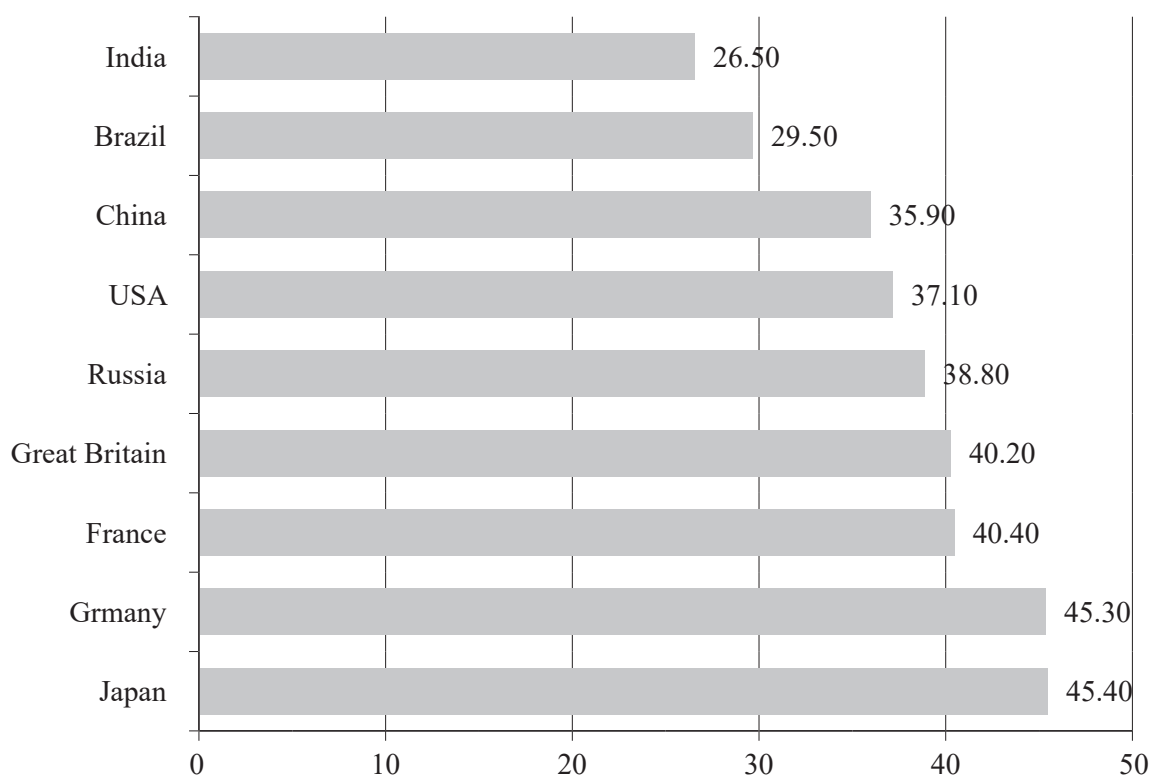
But in the future, China will have the largest market of seniors in the world. “The successful one-child policy of Chinese administrations, intended to limit the growth of China’s population, will have unintended consequences including the rapid aging of China” [Reinmoeller 2011: 133]. These strict family policies are responsible for a significant reduction in the number of children born in China, and the consequence is that by 2027 the proportion of individuals over age 65 will double from 7% to around 14% [Meyer-Hentschel, Meyer-Hentschel 2009].

It is expected that Europe will be the strongest affected by the ageing process in the future [Fretschner 2011; Börsch-Supan, Ludwig 2011; WU 2010; Birg 2005; Wodok 2004; Heigl, Mai 1998]. The proportion of elderly people in this region will rise from 20% in 1998 to 35% by 2050 [Fretschner 2011; Börsch-Supan, Ludwig 2011; WU 2010; Birg 2005; Wodok 2004; Heigl, Mai 1998]. Central Europe, in particular, and emerging markets in Eastern European developing countries will have a comparatively high proportion of seniors [Meyer-Hentschel

2008; Kohlbacher, Herstatt 2008; Walla et al. 2006; Boyer King 2004]. The developments in Bulgaria and Romania are particularly serious [Walla et al. 2006]. The more or less constant fertility rate in Eastern Europe during the Communist Era fell by almost half in the 1990s, which translates to fewer potential parents in the future. Bulgaria, for example, is expected to undergo extreme ageing of the population by 2050. Whereas the ageing process is more noticeable in countries in North-Western Europe (Germany, France, Belgium, UK, Switzerland) because of the baby boom generation, this is less intense in the Netherlands, Finland, and particularly Ireland. The population pyramid of Ireland 25 years ago resembled that of a developing country. While the number of children per woman has now fallen, it is still above the replacement rate so that by 2050, the younger generation is expected to be equal in proportion to today [Berlin-Institut für Bevölkerung 2008].

Chart 1 presents a summary of the current median age of the population in selected countries.

Chart 1. Median age of the population in selected countries in 2012 (in years)



Source: Statista, 2012, without page.

Against this backdrop, this survey paper aims to analyse global ageing primarily from a demographic perspective. The focus is on those consequences of global ageing which are affected by demographic change.

1. Research question

The objective of this survey paper is to address the following research question: What are the social, socio-political and economic consequences of global ageing? To provide a clear frame of reference, the terms, object of investigation, and research methods used in the context of demography will be outlined first, followed by a presentation and comparative analysis of the social, socio-political and economic consequences of global ageing.

2. Terms, object of investigation and research methods

“Demography examines the causes and consequences of population change” [Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon 2012a]. It is based on an interrelation of population processes (births, deaths, migration), which is investigated and analysed using its own methods, instruments and theories. Demography uses an interdisciplinary lens to examine the social characteristics and historic development of human populations (population groups or peoples). The term *demography* (Ancient Greek: *demos* = people, *graphein* = write) is often used synonymously with population science, but more frequently describes the more quantitative processes of population sciences [Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon 2012a; Naporra 2011; Schoeni, Ofstedal 2010]. Suresh Paul Antony et al. describe the role of demography as follows: “Demographics, the most important variable, describe and provide statistics that study population in terms of size, structure and distribution” [Anthony et al. 2011: 344].

Categorising the population based on age, sex, marital status, number of children, health and geography is at the core of demographic analysis. All social and behavioural studies on individuals in society, such as their nationality, ethnic or religious group, profession, job, income and education, or composition of the households, are possible only after a categorisation based on age, sex, marital status, number of children, health and geography has already been performed [Mueller et al. 2010]. Hence it follows that population science “is a basic discipline, and its methods, theories and key findings are an essential tool for all sciences which look at how people cohabit – not just social and economic sciences, but also history, social medicine, epidemiology, human biology [Mueller et al. 2010: V]. In this context, Leeson stresses: “demographic methods have become more complex and moved into other disciplines such as mathematics, anthropology, and geography [...]” [Leeson 2011: 1].

Population data are often collected early in a nation’s history. In some countries, population numbers are continuously available from as early as the 18th century, e.g. Iceland (1703), Sweden (1749), Denmark and Norway (1769), and the U.S. (1790) [Imhof quoted in Mueller et al. 2000]. Countries need to obtain

accurate population data for purposes such as taxation, human resources, military service, and other public services [Mueller et al. 2000].

Population science is not only a necessary foundation for social and behavioural research, it also hones our awareness of less noticeable, but sustainable developments, which shape societies to the same extent as dramatic events such as technical innovations, political revolutions, market dynamics, and wars [Mueller et al. 2000].

Population science methods are applied not just to data collection (data sources and collection methods) but also to data analysis, as different countries at times varying significantly. Leeson stresses: “While early tools for the measurement of demographic components were perhaps quite crude, the emergence of demography as a key discipline in almost all areas of societal planning called for increasingly sophisticated methods for this measurement – be it cross-sectional compared with generational measurement; simple life tables or multi-state life tables; descriptive or probabilistic models” [Leeson 2011]. Demographic data can consist of primary data from a census or micro-census of the population, as well as registration and administration data, e.g. births and deaths. It can also be a synthesis of different data compiled from several sources, e.g. employment statistics or population balances. In addition to national data, international demographic data from the United Nations or the European Union are also used in demographic analysis [Schmid 2000]. Key research topics examined by demographers include mortality and fertility rates, morbidity patterns, the distribution of populations across geographic regions, and conventional and non-conventional family structures. Other investigations relate to the employment market, income, consumption, assets, social mobility, the real estate market, and membership in religious organizations [Mueller et al. 2000].

3. Consequences of population ageing

Population ageing “will have a severe impact on many parts of society” [Mertens et al. 2011: 353]. This chapter provides an overview of the social, socio-political and economic consequences of global ageing, but does not describe how these forces are correlated, and how trends affect one another.

3.1. Social consequences

Social sector

Changes in the demographic structure of a population have wide-ranging consequences, particularly for the social sector and social security system, e.g. health care and pension insurance [Fachinger, Schmähl 2004]. Given current demo-

graphic conditions (fewer births and higher life expectancy), more and more people are facing the potential of poverty in old age due to the strain on government and private social security systems, increasing personal responsibility for paying for health care, and fewer defined benefit pension plans [Eitner, Naegele 2012; Fachinger 2012; Bertermann et al. 2012: 128-133; Naegele, Schneiders 2012; Walter et al. 2012; Enste 2011; Walla et al. 2006]. Ronald Lee et al. emphasize: “In many countries, women are at higher risk because they tend to outlive men, spending a number of years as widows, and because pensions may go to their husbands, and to die with them, leaving their widows in poverty” [Lee et al. 2010: 6]. Legislation can respond to this changing demographic structure in several ways: increasing pension contributions for those employ persons subject to mandatory insurance, keeping pension contributions constant but increasing the amount paid by the state, reducing pension benefits, adding an additional capital-secured type of insurance or security, or introducing a combination of the above alternatives simultaneously. Each of the above options has advantages and disadvantages [Walla et al. 2006]. For instance, higher pension contributions also mean higher incidental labour costs, and a higher amount paid by the state would increase the deficit. Both have a negative effect on the economy and the labour market. When the cost of labour and interest rates rise, consumption, investments, and labour participation stagnate or shrink. By contrast, constant pension contributions lower the level of benefits for retirees, which jeopardizes the main objectives of the statutory pension scheme: avoiding poverty and ensuring that seniors have at least an adequate standard of living in retirement [Kloß 2011; Walla et al. 2006; Pimpertz 2004].

Health sector

Population ageing also affects the health sector because as individuals live longer, they often spend those added years with chronic illnesses and disabilities. On a population scale, this can strain the health care system. Lee et al. states: “As people grow older, the chances that they will experience health crises, physical disability, cognitive impairment, and death all increase” [Lee et al. 2010: 6]. But it is not (yet) clear how strongly demographic ageing will impact future health expenditures. “This is because the development of future expenses is more likely to be impacted less strongly by demographic change than by the interaction of other circumstances of the health system, such as advances in medical technology for diagnostics and treatment, advances in the quality of care, availability and availability-induced demand, the behaviour of those insured, the development of prices, pharmacological research and legislation” [Walla et al. 2006: 148].

François Höpflinger and Astrid Stuckelberger stress that the potential impact of population ageing on health expenditures must be neither played down nor dramatized. Analyses of health economics, for example, show that only a small

proportion of the increases in health care costs are directly related to population ageing [Höpflinger, Stuckelberger quoted in Walla et al. 2006]. For example, high health care expenses are regularly incurred just before a death, independent of a person's age. The costs of hospital stays also do not proportionately increase with age. Cost typically peaks for people between the ages of 65 and 80, then fall again significantly after age 80. It is likely that the oldest of the old incur lower health care costs because they are less likely to be hospitalized than younger people. Lower cost treatments, such as long-term care or medication, are prioritized over expensive procedures and operations for the elderly people [Seshamani and Gray quoted in Walla et al. 2006]. Withholding expensive health services from individuals based on age is not ethical. Instead, Clemens Tesch-Römer and Andreas Motel-Klingebiel suggest that medical practitioners “determine the effectiveness of medical measures and care in relation to the defined objectives [of the patient]” [Tesch-Römer, Motel-Klingebiel 2004: 569].

Care sector

In addition to medically-oriented health services, the long-term care sector will also be affected by population ageing: “As individuals age, they are at increasing risk of functional impairments and disability” [Lee et al. 2010: 18]. Manfred Geiger describes these circumstances as follows: “The population is ageing, and age increases the risk that people might be in need of care” [Geiger 2011: 250]. Wolfgang Walla et al. describe this circumstance even more strikingly: “More people aged 80 and more elderly people mean more and more people needing care” [Walla et al. 2006: 155]. Although seniors are remaining physically and mentally fit at later and later ages, the absolute number of people requiring care is rising. However, according to Alexander Künzel, the extent of care required to meet the needs of an ageing population can generally be influenced by individuals' lifestyles and behaviours and the preventative profile of their environments [Künzel 2011]. Sascha Romanowski and Wolfgang Paulus have identified a growing change in values toward greater interest in healthy lifestyles and behaviours, which can prevent or delay the onset of debilitating age-related diseases [Romanowski, Paulus 2011].

Most people in need of long-term care receive help from their relatives or from outpatient care services provided in their homes. Only a small minority of elders receive institutional long-term care, e.g., nursing homes, assisted living facilities [Romanowski, Paulus 2011], but changes in family size and composition will impact the availability of family members to provide care. For instance, more and more couples do not have children, families are getting smaller, parents and children often live far apart, more women work full-time, life plans are becoming more individualised, and the frequency of separations and divorces is increasing.

Thus, it is likely that relatives will provide less care for elders in the future. Family caregivers will be replaced by professional care workers who are significantly more expensive [Walla et al. 2006]. On one hand, the establishment and expansion of institutional structures ties up funds in the billions, yet on the other hand, it fails to provide impulses to set up an economically leaner supply structure for an ageing population. Therefore, Künzel stresses that the future costs of the care sector can only be negotiated in consistently network structures [Künzel 2011]. In order to be cost-efficient, the care sector will have to define a design concept based on cooperation and resource sharing across departmental borders. In particular, structures providing advice to care households, organising and coordinating support and offering help, will be needed [Künzel 2011]. According to Romanowski and Paulus, voluntary activities and technical innovations will increasingly play a role, including new information and communication systems and ‘intelligent assistants’ [Romanowski, Paulus 2011].

3.2. Socio-political consequences

“Demographic challenges do not imply disaster. But in order to ensure that we have a functional social system, we must analyse this development and adapt the different social areas” [Walla et al. 2006: 76]. The socio-political consequences of demographic change include shifting immigration and emigration patterns, changes to the household structure, education, families, social networks, religion, and transportation [Breit 2011; Walla et al. 2006; Kaufmann 2005; Tesch-Römer, Motel-Klingebiel 2004; Backes 2004; Plünnecke, Seyda 2004]. A detailed investigation of all socio-political impacts is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, the author has decided to focus on one example: education.

The education system will be affected by changes in demography. Basic improvements to the education system can ensure that the demand for highly qualified workers can be met by fewer young people (‘skills shortage’) [Breit 2011; Plünnecke, Seyda 2004]. “Only a highly educated society which continues to learn in the long term can maintain the current level of wealth” [Walla et al. 2006: 116]. Using Germany as an example, Heiko Breit describes three strategies which could be used to adapt the education system to the challenges of an ageing population: 1) expanding the education system (e.g., early childhood education, all-day schools, extracurricular mentoring and life-long learning), 2) accelerated professional development (including earlier school starts, shorter time at secondary schools, greater structure to university studies and greater similarity across schools), and 3) mobilisation of educational reserves (e.g. increasing the qualification and employment rate among women, targeted immigration policy, working at older ages, and qualification of wasted talents) [Breit 2011]. Such measures would prevent the education system from shrinking in spite of a smaller future genera-

tion of young people, and instead would help it hypertrophy. The proposed system also penetrates into new social arenas: families, nurseries, schools, universities, and businesses [Breit 2011; Walla et al. 2006].

Conceptual rethinking is required. According to Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, a forward-looking education policy is needed to ensure against the risk of financial impoverishment of individuals and society [Kaufmann 2005]. At the same time, education can improve the economic well-being of immigrants. “The difference between good or inadequate education influences demographic events such as the probability of childlessness or the choice of partner and finally birth rates” [Walla et al. 2006: 116].

3.3. Economic consequences

Until now, human history and the modern economy have been influenced primarily by younger people [Fretschner et al. 2011]. As a result, no nation is certain about how future demographic shifts will impact the global and national economies [Herrmann 2012; Nyce, Schieber 2005]. One possibility is that the extensive economic growth seen in the 20th and 21st centuries might lose momentum [Fretschner et al. 2011], but this is only one conjecture. What we can be certain of is that demand structures and patterns of consumption will change significantly as the population ages [Fachinger 2012]. This may trigger insecurity within the economy, yet will also create significant new opportunities [Bloom et al. 2011; Neundorfer 2008; Kohlbacher, Herstatt 2008; IHK 2008; Maas, Erbslöh 2007; PwC 2006; Lienhard 2006].

Demographic changes will have both micro- and macroeconomic consequences [Heinze et al. 2000]. Microeconomics applies the hypothesis of rationality to decision-making problems and coordination processes within a country’s economy, which become necessary because of the work split of the production process. Researchers who study microeconomics examine individual features of economic processes, i.e. the economic subjects (individuals, businesses, households, governments), and the individual goods and services that are exchanged [Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon 2012c]. “The objective of microeconomics is not to explain the behaviours of ‘typical’ actors in decision-making situations. Instead, it is interested in the interplay between individual behaviours on the markets and in organisations, and in the consequences resulting from these actions at the system level (e.g. supply and demand on the markets for different goods, market prices)” [Braun 2000: 300-301]. The rationality hypothesis posits that every decision-maker is a rational actor and will use all available resources to maximize gains and minimize losses when engaging in a transaction.

The following four factors are particularly relevant to the microeconomic implications of changing demographic structures: 1) consumption, 2) production,

3) labour market/employment, and 4) the wealth of older people. Consumption is primarily affected by changes in the price elasticity of demand, changes in the consumer structure, and changes in savings behaviour in old age. By contrast, production focuses on demographically-induced changes in work productivity and age-specific production functions. In terms of the labour market/employment, demographic-related changes include demand for work and the jobs available for different age groups. Finally, the wealth of older people is affected by the interplay of supply and demand and the labour market – combined with the factors specified above [Fehm 1971].

On the other hand, macroeconomics more or less neglects individuals' behavioural decisions and instead examines a country's economy by combining similar economic subjects into sectors, such as households and companies. In macroeconomics, economic activities are aggregated by sectors, and consumption, goods, and price levels are analysed using macroeconomic statistical modelling. Generally, economists use balanced approaches that are based on microeconomic foundations [Gabler *Wirtschaftslexikon* 2012b; Herrmann 2012; Lee et al. 2010; Braun 2000; Nyce, Schieber 2005].

The following five factors are particularly relevant to the macroeconomic implications of population ageing: 1) changes in the age structure, 2) growth of certain sectors, 3) income distribution, 4) theoretical financial aspects, and 5) regional demographic changes. Changes to the age structure of a population always results in macroeconomic changes if ageing individuals alter their consumer behaviours, work productivity, and employment choices. In relation to work, growth factors aim to quantify the economic changes that result from demographic shifts (e.g., changes in the number and proportion of elderly workers, age-specific availability of jobs, unemployment rates of elderly workers), and to qualitatively assess how these changes affect individuals (e.g. the willingness of elderly workers to work in different sectors).

When examining the distribution of income within an economy, the question of whether population ageing leads to less equal distribution of income is important. An individual's or household's financial security, e.g. the availability of funds, pension level, determines access to and quality of age-related care.

Population ageing also influence mobility and production patterns (e.g. elderly workers might be less willing to move for work than younger ages, less of a responsive to higher wages and other incentives), which in turn can have an effect on interregional migration. This can play a particularly important role in growth industries/sectors because these are often focused on specific regions [Fehm 1971].

Various macroeconomic crisis scenarios show that a reduction in the number of consumers can lead to lower overall demand for consumer goods, which in turn has negative effects on employment. In Germany, the Enquete Commission

‘Demographic Change’ expressed doubts as early as 2002 that there is a one-dimensional relationship between the number of consumers expressing demand for consumer goods and the overall demand for consumer goods [Deutscher Bundestag quoted in Heinze et al. 2011]. The Commission asserts that the overall demand for consumer goods is influenced not by the number of individuals in a population, but by the number and structure of households. Caroline Eitner et al. also confirm this: “The implied directness of the relationship – fewer consumers = less consumption [...] – must, however, be rejected insofar as the private demand for consumer goods is strongly affected by the number of households and by the household structure” [Eitner et al. 2011: 311]. This mainly applies to sectors such as energy and other services that are consumed at the household level, all of which are affected by population ageing.

Furthermore, the demand for consumer goods must be examined not just in relation to absolute level, but also to structure. This is affected by age, period, and cohort effects as much as by different consumers in different phases of life, such as the growing demand for social services and other health-related goods by those older in age [Heinze et al. 2011]. Eitner et al. emphasize: “Changes within phases of life, and therefore impacts on consumption patterns and demands of older people, have a close linkage to economic growth” [Eitner et al. 2011: 311]. Nevertheless, Uwe Fachinger finds that “statements regarding the further positive development of the economic power of ‘age’ must be viewed with great scepticism” [Fachinger 2012: 615].

4. Discussion

The interdisciplinary science and research area ‘demography’ is receiving more and more attention. Viewing societal ageing as an opportunity is still a relatively new perspective, but it is increasingly gaining ground over ‘doomsday’ demographic crisis scenarios [Cirkel 2011; Fretschner et al. 2011; Eitner et al. 2011; Bloom et al. 2011; Hanser 2006; Wolfe 1997]. This change in perspective is also driven by studies carried out by the author [Meiners 2014; Meiners, da Silva Santana 2014; Fall et al. 2011]. The results of this survey paper show that demographic research is essential to understanding social, socio-political, and economic trends – not only from the viewpoint of elderly people, but also the perspectives of various other groups such as companies, associations, and municipalities.

Even though in recent years the ageing of the population has become increasingly recognised as important to the fields of science, economics and politics, it is not yet receiving sufficient attention. Gassmann and Reepmeyer also confirm this observation: “Despite this development, many companies still have not launched appropriate initiatives that intentionally include this fairly new and fast-growing

market segment of people over 50 years of age into product planning and development activities” [Gassmann, Reepmeyer 2011: 102]. Acceptance could increase significantly if scientists, politicians and industry showed greater commitment [Fretschner et al. 2011; Gerling et al. 2004]. However, a greater focus on the ‘economic factor’ of age could also harbour risks. If older people are only viewed according to the traditional profitability criteria of formal economics, a fixation on the financially privileged older individuals (who have greater purchasing power) could lead to more social inequality. Furthermore, additional social capital (i.e. in addition to existing economic capital) would accumulate where it already exists, with the result that more and more older people would be excluded [Heinze et al. 2004].

A stronger focus on the positive economic factors of ageing societies could re-establish respect for older adults. This is because in societies focused around economics, capital and purchasing power still constitute key integration factors – despite all one-sidedness and ambivalences. Discussing the economic power of an ageing society helps older people to find an identity and strengthens their role as consumers, while drawing attention to their resources and potential for action [Heinze et al. 2004]. Coupled with this, lower pension income, higher cost of government-sponsored and private security systems, disjointed CVs/life biographies, and greater private responsibility for health care in future years could result in greater levels of poverty among seniors [Eitner, Naegele 2012; Bertermann et al. 2012; Naegele, Schneiders 2012; Walter et al. 2012; Enste 2011; Walla et al. 2006]. According to Fachinger we must assume that the distribution of income available “[...] will become less equal and create a greater number of private households of elderly people living in material poverty” [Fachinger 2012: 613]. According to Britta Bertermann et al., old-age poverty is a complex problem and is expressed in under-supply in different areas of life: “The supply of economic resources gains particular importance because it significantly impacts on the scope for action available in other areas of life” [Bertermann et al. 2012: 128].

Since demographic change combined with the expected reductions in benefits from age-based security programs can increase the risk of poverty in old-age, it must be determined whether and to what extent age or life-phase-specific products and services should be available to older adults, particularly to lower-income individuals that are financed using public funds [Fretschner 2011]. There must also be more focus on how to assess future elders’ potential as consumers. A more detailed analysis of elderly people’s needs is required in light of these socio-structural shifts, in addition to information deficits/access barriers relating to technological developments. In addition, the question of which sectors actually show a need for age- or life-phase-specific products and services, and which sectors could benefit from products and services across age groups, has not yet been answered [Eitner, Naegele 2012].

Conclusion

“The topic of ‘demography’ has been on the rise – so much so that it seems impossible to stop” [Bieber 2011: 10]. Robert F. Schoeni and Mary Beth Ofstedal describe this as follows: “For years, researchers and policymakers have attempted to focus attention on population aging by discussing the likely implications to individuals, governments, and society of the baby boom generation reaching old age. No longer can researchers and policymakers say that these are issues that will arise far into the future [...]” [Schoeni, Ofstedal 2010: 14]. After all, the facts are unique and impressive, e.g., the WHO’s forecast for 2050 of more than 2 billion older people worldwide [WHO 2010]. This in turn has wide-ranging social, socio-political and economic consequences. Population ageing has become an important topic of equal interest to the public, politics, the economy, and scientists [Bieber 2011; Mason, Lee 2011; Weber 2010]. Robert Clark et al. emphasize that, population ageing “[...] will have profound effects on the economics and everyday life, on family arrangements, on how we spend our time, social security programs, and national health systems” [Clark et al. 2004: 12-13]. Demographers are now trying to research the causes and consequences of changes to the population structure using an interdisciplinary lens [Gabler Wirtschaftslexikon 2012a]. Therefore, topical demographic research is not only desirable but – from the perspective of many interest groups such as companies, municipalities and associations – it is, in fact, essential [Krause 2007; Walla et al. 2006; Waddell 2005]. Florian Kohlbacher and Chang Chieh Hang also confirm the need for topical research: “The above discussion indicates strong needs for further research, both academic and company-based” [Kohlbacher, Hang 2011: 75]. Antony et al. consolidate this statement by emphasizing that the findings obtained so far “[...] need to be validated with rigorous research” [Antony et al. 2011: 346].

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Globale Alterung – Herausforderungen für Gesellschaft, Politik und Wirtschaft

Zusammenfassung. Die Thematik "Demografie" ist auf dem Vormarsch – und dies so stark, dass ein Aufhalten unmöglich erscheint. So waren zur letzten Jahrtausendwende schon zirka 0,6 Milliarden Menschen 60 Jahre alt oder älter, und im Jahr 2050 werden es laut Weltgesundheitsorganisation (WHO) mehr als 2 Milliarden Menschen sein. Die Auswirkungen der demografischen Entwicklung haben weitreichende soziale, gesellschaftspolitische und wirtschaftliche Konsequenzen. Dieses Forschungspapier zielt darauf ab, die globale Alterung aus der demografischen Perspektive zu analysieren. Die forschungsleitende Frage ist: Was sind die sozialen, gesellschaftspolitischen und wirtschaftlichen Auswirkungen der globalen Entwicklung. Denn die demografischen Veränderungen sind wichtig sowohl für die breite Öffentlichkeit wie auch für die Politiker, Wissenschaftler und Unternehmen. Daher ist derlei demografische Forschung nicht nur wünschenswert, sondern aus der Perspektive vieler Interessengruppen elementar wichtig.

Schlüsselwörter: Alterung der Bevölkerung, Demografie, Alter