Webinar Celebrating 50 Years of PopGRG
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REFLECTIONS ON FIFTY YEARS OF POPULATION GEOGRAPHY RESEARCH

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Topics:
- ❑ Social Geography of Cities
- ❑ Improving Access to Census Data
- ❑ Design of Small Areas
- ❑ The Growth of Geodemographics
- ❑ Internal Migration Patterns and Processes
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Social Geography of Cities

❑ In my Masters and Doctoral theses, I employed several methodologies: **factor analysis, socio-economic indicators, classifications and indexes of segregation/integration**.

❑ Social geography as practised by POPGEOG in the UK has used all of these, refining them in lots of ways

❑ Use of "**factorial ecology**" has fallen away though factor analysis is still widely used as a tool to "see the wood for the trees".

❑ "Socio-economic indicators" have become indexes of **multiple deprivation**, very important informing governments about the needs of different communities

❑ Classification of communities has become an industry, **geo-demographics**, used every day in marketing.

❑ There has been extensive POPGEOG research on ethnic **segregation/integration at small area scale.** ONS are consulting on doing research with the 2021 Census results. In my response, I emphasized the value of doing his in active collaboration with the academic community, citing the 4 volume series on **Ethnicity in the 1991 Census**, produced as a joint OPCS/academic collaboration.

Improving Access to Census Data

- Census data are crucial in profiling cities and their communities. During my doctoral studies I made a request to an eminent University of Chicago demographer for access data from the Census magnetic tapes he held. This request was met with a curt "**no, these are my data**". I was determined to do something about this situation, if the opportunity arose in future.

- It arose when I was appointed Co-Ordinator of the **ESRC Census Programme** between 1992 and 2002. I worked with the UK's Official Statistics agencies to improve access for academic, government and commercial researchers through the ESRC Census programme. The principle was established that the people's data would be free at the point of use to all interested people in the UK.

- My successor as ESRC Census Programme co-Ordinator, **David Martin** (Southampton) extended this agreement to any interested person in the World. The Official Statistics agencies also agreed to fund the production.

Design of Small Areas

- Before the 2001 Census, Census data were published for **Enumeration Districts**, designed for the convenience of census administration collection rather than for good analysis. Digitizing the ED boundaries was an expensive task that ONS were reluctant to do, although GRO Scotland had a programme to do this.

- **David Martin** (University of Southampton) solved this problem by spending a research sabbatical at ONS developing zone design software for Output Areas based on unit postcodes that were similar in population size, socio-economically homogeneous and designed for automatic digitization.

- The design software was based on the Automatic Zoning Program (AZP) written by my former colleague **Stan Openshaw**. The Martin software was re-used by ONS to create **Lower and Middle Super Output Areas**.

- This work shows the value of **building on previous inventions** and of **co-production with official agencies**.

The Growth of Geodemographics

- The availability of free at the point of use small area census data and associated digital boundaries led to an **explosion of new firms entering the Geo-demographics industry** on publication of the results of the 2001 Census, creating numerous jobs for skilled geography graduates. To differentiate their classifications they added administrative, business and survey data updated after the census.

- Meanwhile, in the academic community, **Dan Vickers** and I, in collaboration with ONS, developed a "pure census" geo-demographic classification for the whole UK based on 2001 Census.

- Collaboration with ONS went very well until the last step of finding suitable names for each OA cluster. The National Statistician and Director of ONS **Len Cook** objected to the names and insisted that only alphanumeric labels (e.g. A, B, C etc and A1, A2, A3 etc).

- Fortunately, **Dan** had created a web site which provided access to his doctoral thesis where the names could be found. We had also published the names in several journal papers.

Internal Migration Patterns and Processes

- Throughout the 50 years of POPGEOG, members have been interested in the study of internal migration, a field largely ignored by demographers in favour of international migration.

- Two edited books brought together POPGEOG work on internal migration:
    - In 1992 **Tony Champion** and **Tony Fielding** edited a collection of contributions on *Migrations Processes and Patterns*.
    - In 2015, **Darren Smith, Nissa Finney, Keith Halfacre and Nigel Walford** edited a follow up book on *Internal Migration: Geographical Perspectives and Processes* which reflected on progress in the two intervening decades.

- The work continues in two recent special issues of journals:
    - In 2019-2020, I edited a special issue of Comparative Population Studies with **Nikola Sander** on *The Role of Internal Migration as a Driver of Regional Population Change in Europe*.
    - In 2021, Ian Shuttleworth and Tony Champion edited a Population, Space and Place collection on *Declining Internal Migration? Patterns, Causes and Prospects.*

International Collaboration in Population Geography

- **Conferences**
- Throughout its fifty years, POPGEOG has organised meetings with international partners.
  - At first, these were bilateral: *British-French, Dutch-British, Anglo-Swedish*
  - Then they grew into a series of biennial conferences under the umbrella of the *International Conference on Population Geographies*, initiated by POPGEOG member Paul Boyle. These hugely enjoyable conferences have been held in the *UK, the USA, Sweden, The Netherlands, Australia, and Hong Kong*.
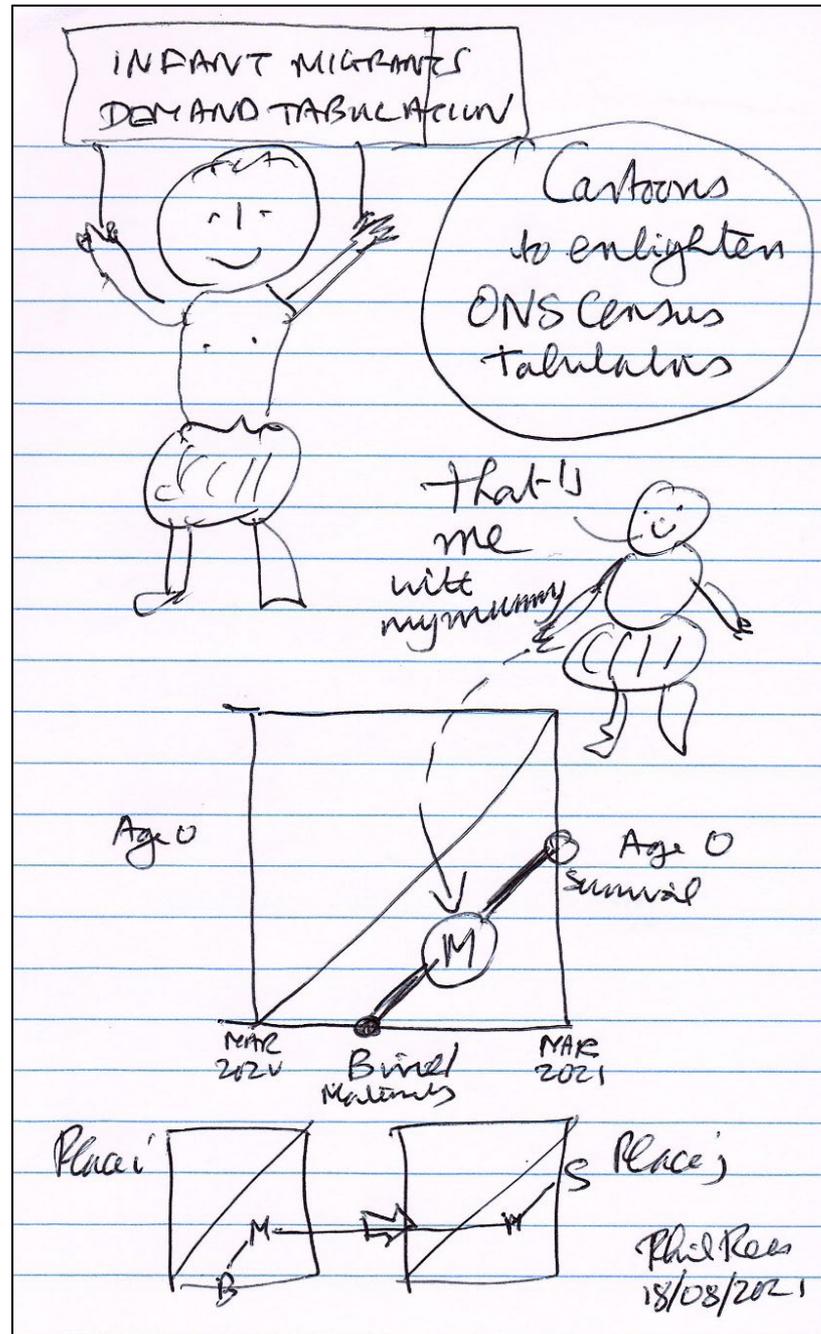- **Research Projects**
- POPGEOG members **John Stillwell** and I have been privileged to work with Professor **Martin Bell**, University of Queensland and colleagues in a series of projects.
- These aimed to develop **indices of internal migration** comparable across countries. The work was designed to change the status of internal migration as the **"Cinderella"** of demographic components to **"Belle of the Ball"**.
- The theoretical framework was set out in a 2002 *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* paper. Indices of **migration intensity, migration distance, migration impact and migration age** comparable across countries were generated in the 2009-2018 decade.
- Techniques and software were developed to **overcome the impact of the Modifiable Areal Unit Problem (MAUP)**, which makes it impossible to compare countries which use different numbers and sizes of sub-national units.
- A total of 24 journal papers and one book have been produced to date.

Analysis and Forecasting of Population Change

- This field is dominated by demographers. However, population geographers have added valuable innovations:
  - Methods for **accounting** for all demographic flows, including **international and internal migration** explicitly in subnational and national projections.
  - Matching forecasting models to the **type of migration data** input (event migrations or transition migrants).
  - Including **infants who migrate** in migration tables and forecasting models. In consultations on census outputs since 1991 I have pointed to the admission of this small but significant flow. On occasion I have had to convince the relevant OPCS/ONS statistician that they really exist. The migration tables by age mostly miss them out. In the current consultation on 2021 outputs, I have resorted to sending in a cartoon to make the point.

Don't Forget Infant Migrants

Why research impact is vital

- Demonstrating research impact is now part of the UK **Research Excellence Framework**

- We need to show that we provide benefit to **society, the economy and the environment** through our research

- We are competing against an increasing emphasis on STEM subjects and **at risk** of failing to win research funds

- There has been a huge growth in relevant research during the 2020-2021-2022 … 2025 Covid-19 Pandemic

- Population geographers have an important contribution to make. Too many Covid-19 infection, illness and mortality rates are based on **out of date population estimates**.

- An example: **Paul Norman** and I are working with the Department of Health and Social Care, **Health Inequalities Unit** (formerly part of Public Health England) to estimate up to date ethnic populations by local authority, using our ETHPOP projections, ONS Mid-year Population Estimates and Annual Population Survey data to do this.