

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Case Study

University: The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 27 Sociology & Anthropology

Title of case study: Reconceptualizing ageing for better policy and business opportunities

(1) Summary of the impact

Interdisciplinary research by demographer Stuart Gietel-Basten and his collaborators has evidenced the case for an alternative, holistic way of grasping the social, economic, and political challenges of population ageing to replace the single-dimensional demographic measures in place for more than a century and still widely used by policymakers, employers, and care organizations in devising strategies. The research has had a range of impacts on diverse beneficiaries in and outside Hong Kong. Specifically, it has influenced global policy debate on data collection and assessment methods related to ageing at United Nations forums and Austria's wide-reaching federal economic chamber (WKÖ); directly contributed to new strategic thinking on ageing among Asian equity staff at global financial institution [Anonymized for publication] and through dissemination by Gietel-Basten to investors; enhanced the work of NGOs and business stakeholders; and widened public understanding of alternative thinking on ageing and indicators through a popularly written book (*Why Demography Matters*) and media dissemination.

(2) Underpinning research

Population ageing is one of the 21st century's great global social and economic challenges. Starting from 2015, Gietel-Basten and overseas co-researchers Sergei Scherbov (IIASA) and Warren Sanderson (Stony Brook) have conducted a series of international analyses of demographic data on ageing in different policy contexts. They explored why established population ageing measures and concepts, such as the standard transition to "old age" at 65, defined more than a century ago, are not fit for purpose today. They also proposed new approaches that considered the revolution in health and longevity in advanced economies. Based on the assumption that chronological age is a poor indicator of health, well-being, and ageing generally, especially when compared across time and space, and that proximity to death is a far greater predictor of healthcare spending, Scherbov and Sanderson first proposed that a "prospective" approach to measuring ageing would be more effective than keeping chronological age constant. These evidence-based approaches, published in *Nature* (2005) and *Science* (2010), represented new methodologies to take into account dynamic changes in life expectancy to better compare differences both over time and between countries. Gietel-Basten expanded on such work by applying this concept to an analysis of welfare and social systems in different parts of the world, including Asia and emerging markets. By linking demographic data on ageing to different policy systems in a novel way, he showed that original ageing measurements were fundamentally linked to the development of such systems in Europe and Oceania [R1, R2, R3]. As such, the application of these same measurements in different contexts, either (a) countries where such health and welfare systems are not in place, and (b) to countries still undergoing mortality transition, is highly problematic.

In addition to extending the geographic scope of the "prospective" ageing approach beyond OECD countries, Gietel-Basten expanded it from a demographic issue to include the roles of institutions and changing population characteristics [R3-4], emphasizing the value of the new measures in formulating policy in non-OECD countries, including Asia and emerging markets. In terms of population characteristics, for example, while populations may be getting older, they are also getting more educated, wealthier, and healthier. This allows societies to better adapt and meet the needs of the institutions placed under stress by ageing, such as production, health and welfare systems. As such, it is only by viewing ageing as a holistic challenge, rather than a demographic issue, that policymakers and other stakeholders can deliver an adequate response.

In 2017, the influential Austrian Economic Chamber (*Wirtschaftskammer Österreich* or WKÖ), commissioned Gietel-Basten [R5] to write an article for its peer-reviewed journal, *Wirtschaftspolitische Blätter*, which used original analysis of demographic data to demonstrate the irrationality of applying the same concept of ageing to all institutional contexts and all time periods. The paper concluded that governments, businesses, and other stakeholders in Austria, the OECD, and beyond (a) utilize alternative measures of population ageing; and (b) approach ageing as a holistic challenge involving institutions and changing populations rather than simply using the number of people beyond a given age. Gietel-Basten joined HKUST as a Visiting Associate Professor in January 2017, and became a full Associate Professor in September 2017 and full Professor in July 2019.

(3) References to the research

[R1] Gietel-Basten, S.A., Mau, V., Sanderson, W. et al. (2019) Ageing in Russia: a Regional Appraisal. *Journal of Population Ageing*: 1-18. DOI:10.1007/s12062-019-9238-x.

[R2] Gietel-Basten, S.A. and Scherbov, S. (2019) Better Way to Measure Ageing in Oceania That Takes Life Expectancy into Account. *Australasian Journal of Ageing* EarlyView.

[R3] Gietel-Basten, S. (2019) *The 'Population Problem' in Pacific Asia*. Oxford University Press: Oxford. [One of the first texts to explore low fertility in Pacific Asia in depth and the first book in the prestigious *International Policy Exchange* series to focus on demographic change.

[R4] Dorling, D. and Gietel-Basten, S.A. (2018) *Why Demography Matters*. Cambridge: Polity Press. [One of the first 'popular' books on demography; draws on research in R1,2,3 & 5]

[R5] Gietel-Basten, S.A. (2018) 'Reconceptualising Ageing for Comparative Analysis'. *Wirtschaftspolitische Blätter* 65(1): 65-75.

(4) Details of the impact

The "prospective" measures elaborated by Gietel-Basten have been recognized and disseminated by international and national organizations working on the ageing challenge at the highest levels, indicating his research has had significant and wide-reaching *impact on policy debate and public policy*; and societal *impact on public understanding*, through extensive media engagement. The major beneficiaries are international and national policymakers – the latter across a number of European and East Asian countries; professionals working with NGOs, the finance sector and the media; and ultimately the elderly and general public.

Influencing global policy debate through an alternative approach to measuring ageing

United Nations (UN): In the UN's latest "World Population Ageing" (UNPD 2017) report [S1, page 8], the "prospective" concept was included for the first time as an alternative way to measure population ageing. In February 2019, in recognition of his contribution to the field, Gietel-Basten was invited to present a keynote address to more than 200 international stakeholders and policymakers from governments, inter-governmental agencies (for example, UN, WHO) at the UN Expert Group Meeting on Measuring Population Ageing: Bridging Research and Policy [S2]. Such meetings are used to come to a consensus about critical global issues and speakers are selected in order to ensure national-level policymaking is informed by cutting-edge research.

Austrian Chamber of Commerce: The article commissioned by WKÖ [R5] led directly to the WKÖ calling for a new statistical approach to accurately capture the challenges of ageing and derive future strategies. This is evidenced in the 2018 editorial [S3] by Anna Maria Hochhauser, WKÖ General Secretary, which drew on Gietel-Basten's article before concluding: "The shifts in the age structure and associated challenges for health, pensions and care systems, but also enormous improvements in life expectancy and state of health, necessitate an overhaul of the current measures and measuring methods of ageing" (translation from German). The WKÖ is the parent organization of the country's nine state chambers and 110 trade associations, representing a total of more than half a million Austrian businesses of all sizes. It is also a key player in all policy matters related to workers and employers in Austria. *Wirtschaftspolitische Blätter* is distributed to all Austrian ministries, ministers and cabinets, political parties, Austrian universities and research centres, the Chamber of

Labour/Agriculture and trade unions, the nine state chambers and the national bank. In addition, the *WKOanalyse* (WKO 2018) [S4] policy brief, distributed to the above agencies, made recommendations and observations based on Gietel-Basten's research, including the difficulty with comparative statements based on established measures, and the need for conventional demographic indicators to be reconsidered to capture the true scope of ageing and on which to devise policies.

Informing policy planning on ageing for commercial, NGO and government sectors

Gietel-Basten's research on ageing also led directly to an on-going collaboration (since 2017) with [Name anonymized for publication] and its *Asian Equity Team*, based in Hong Kong. In February 2019, for example, he addressed 40 leading institutional investors and public sector stakeholders at the bank's significant Macroeconomic Breakfast Briefing, as well as more than 200 delegates at the bank's China Conference held in Shenzhen in May 2019. Both these events were opportunities for the bank to present high-profile clients with the latest, state-of-the-art thinking on the contemporary financial landscape. [Text removed for publication] [S5]

In addition, in September 2019, Gietel-Basten introduced new concepts of measuring ageing to 60-80 industry professionals at the *Hong Kong Retirement Industry Conference*. As the testimonial by Rachel Moy, Vice President of co-host JP Morgan Asset Management, notes, feedback to "*his alternative approach to understanding and conceptualising ageing, was extremely positive. Stuart's presentation has certainly provided insightful perspectives and ideas around the global and regional ageing situation – a topic that is very much relevant for the retirement and pension industry.*" [S6]

In 2019, Gietel-Basten began an on-going collaboration with the *International Longevity Centre – UK* (ILC-UK), "the UK's specialist think tank on the impact of longevity on society, and what happens next". In testimony, its chief executive, Baroness Sally Greengross, states: "*Stuart presents a radically different way of measuring ageing which, in turn, reconceptualises the entire concept of how longevity and society interact with each other. We find that these new measures represent a perspective which is much more closely aligned with our goals of adapting society now so we can all enjoy the benefits of longevity. The new measures proposed can be integrated into our presentation of population ageing in our reports. These reports yield a very high societal impact, as they are fed into various local and national government agencies as well as the broader ILC Global Alliance*" [S7]. He also drew upon his research in a commissioned contribution to the *European Commission's "Science, Research and Innovation Performance of the EU 2018: Strengthening the Foundations for Europe's Future"* report, which forms the cornerstone of the EC's policy [S8].

In addition, Gietel-Basten has worked with the *United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)* as a consultant to assist the Fund and other countries to develop new ageing strategies. In 2019, this included [Text removed for publication] [S9].

Enhancing public and stakeholder understanding on alternative ways to measure ageing

Gietel-Basten is active in engaging the private and third sectors with his research on ageing, not least through publishing one of the first popular books on the topic [R3]. As part of his collaborative relationship with the ILC-UK, the think tank invited Gietel-Basten to present the findings of both the book and his broader research agenda on ageing at their flagship "Partner Lecture" series, held at the *Institute and Faculty of Actuaries in London*, in June 2019. As noted in the CEO's testimony: "*The lecture was attended by over 100 people from industry, the voluntary sector and government organisations. At the event, there was huge enthusiasm for the work which Stuart has undertaken*" [S7]. Aideen Young, Evidence Manager for the UK charity, *Centre for Better Ageing*, subsequently wrote a blog post (28 June 2019) with a named reference to Gietel-Basten's "fascinating talk", concluding: "Age is relative; understanding this will help us reject ageist stereotypes and make the most of our extra years" [S10].

In addition, Gietel-Basten has published 17 newspaper articles on tackling the ageing challenge since arriving at HKUST. Some of these articles have appeared in the *UK's Daily Telegraph*, the *China Daily* (claimed print circulation: 900,000) [S11], and *South China Morning Post* (claimed circulation: 100,000), among others. Referring to his articles, an editor of the *China*

Daily wrote: “His work has shown me that the overly pessimistic representations of low fertility and ageing can be tempered somewhat; and that good policies can indeed offer us a way out of this demographic morass. This also reemphasised my belief that our readers would find the pieces of significant value... I know that our readers appreciate his contributions both as a scholar in the field, but also as an academic who is committed to making his (publicly-funded) research accessible to as broad an audience as possible. No doubt some of the related government departments and academics who are on my circulation list would find his work useful reference material” [S11].

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

[S1] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). *World Population Ageing: Highlights*. (ST/ESA/SER.A/397). United Nations: New York.

[S2] Gietel-Basten (2019). “New measures of ageing and policy implications”, keynote address, UN EGM on Measuring Population Ageing: Bridging Research and Policy Bangkok, February 2019.

[S3] Hochhauser, Anna Maria (2018). Editorial: Zukunft des Wohlfahrtsstaates. *Wirtschaftspolitische Blätter* 65(1): 1-2.

[S4] WKO (2018). Zukunft des Wohlfahrtsstaates. *WKOanalyse* 16 April 2018.

[S5] [Name anonymized for publication] (2019). Impact statement. [On file]

[S6] Testimonial: Rachel Moy, J.P. Morgan Asset Management Hong Kong Institutional Business. (2019). [On file]

[S7] Testimonial: Baroness Sally Greengross, Chief Executive, ILC-UK. [On file]

[S8] Gietel-Basten, S. (2018). “‘Unfavourable’ demographic change in Europe” in “Science, Research and Innovation Performance of the EU 2018”. EC: Brussels.

[S9] Letter: [Name anonymized for publication]

[On file]

[S10] Centre for Better Ageing (2019). Blog post “Let’s all have a go at reimagining ageing”.

[S11] Testimonial: Albert Lin, Op-Ed Editor, China Daily (Hong Kong edition).