

Editorial

Comparative Population Studies at Fifty: Views on the Past, Present, and Future*

Heike Trappe, Roland Rau, Katrin Schiefer, C. Katharina Spieß

Abstract: The 50th volume of *Comparative Population Studies* (CPoS) is a significant milestone in the journal's history, offering us the opportunity to reflect on its development into a key platform for population research, major achievements, and future aspirations. Besides a retrospective, we present a forward-looking perspective, outlining our vision for the journal's trajectory in an ever-changing scientific landscape. Furthermore, we offer insights from 50 years of CPoS, including the total number of submissions, the geographic origins of our authors, and an analysis of the journal's most downloaded articles. This editorial is the first in a series accompanying CPoS volume 50 in our anniversary year. Further editorials by former CPoS editors, publishers, and authors will follow, giving an overview of the editorial processes, guiding principles, and strategic considerations that have and will continue to shape the journal's identity and impact.

Keywords: ZfB · CPoS · OJS · Publishing policies · Open access

1 What to expect from this editorial

2025 marks an extraordinary year for *Comparative Population Studies* (CPoS): the journal's 50th anniversary. Over the past five decades, CPoS has been a major platform for population studies and demography. Back in 1975, the *Zeitschrift für Bevölkerungswissenschaft* (ZfB), CPoS' predecessor, was established as the scientific journal of the newly founded German Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB). Over the years, the ZfB became a well-established journal in the German-speaking research community. In order to make the journal accessible to a wider international audience, it was transformed into CPoS and became a peer-reviewed online open-access journal in 2010. Today, the journal attracts cutting-edge population research from around the globe.

* This article belongs to a series celebrating the journal's 50th anniversary.

Celebrating this 50-year journey, we reflect on the journal's major developments and achievements. And who could report better than the individuals that shaped it? To give a comprehensive overview of the past, present, and future of the journal, we will publish a series of editorials throughout volume 50 of CPoS. In these editorials, past editors, publishers, and authors will share their experiences and perspectives on the journal.

2 A journal of population studies and demography: then and now

The editorial accompanying the very first issue of ZfB back in 1975 set the tone for the journal's mission (*Maihofer* 1975: 3):

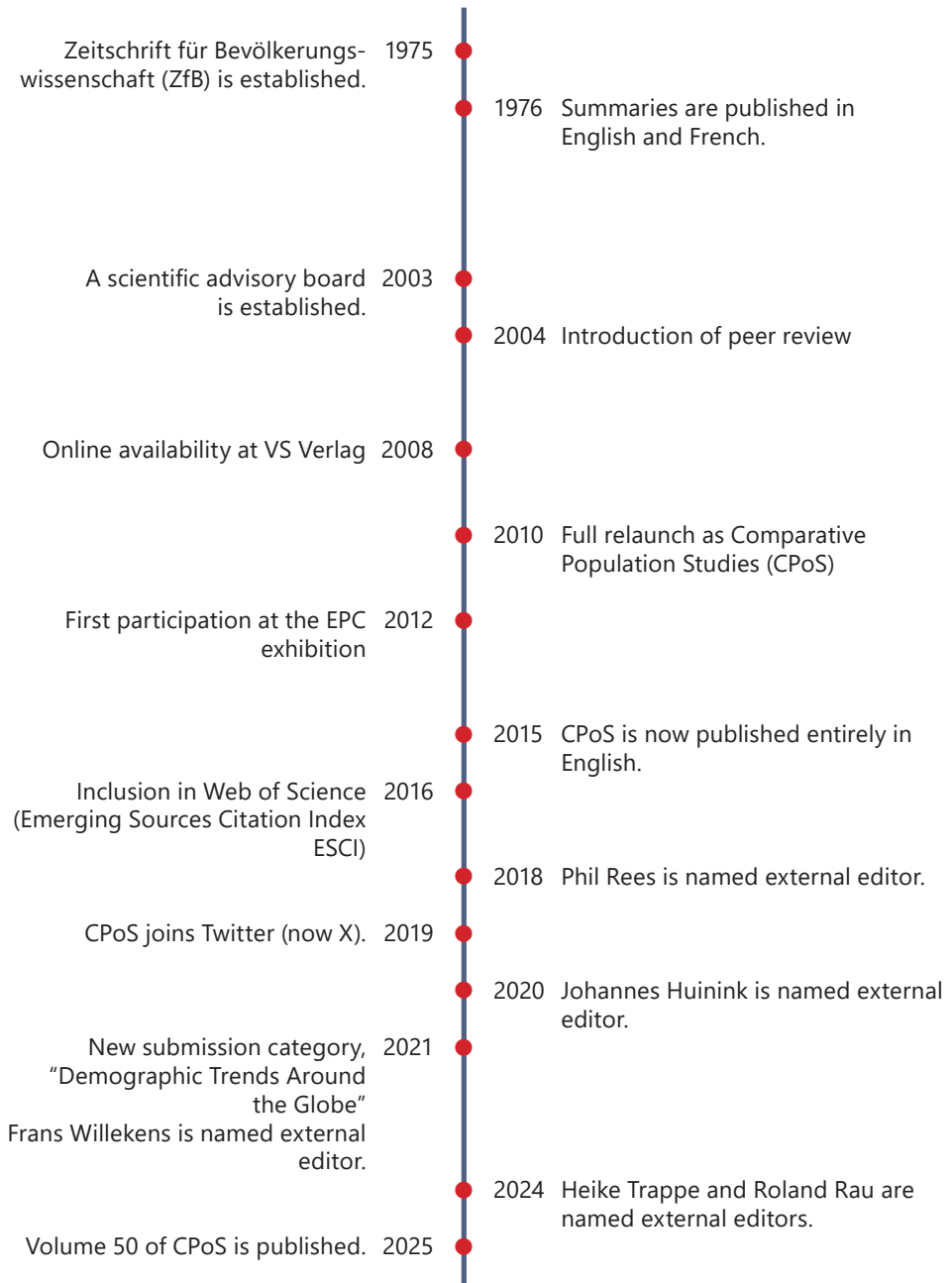
"This journal is intended to be a forum for the scientific debate of population issues, taking into account neighbouring disciplines as well as the experiences of population research and population policies of other countries."¹

This core aim remains central to CPoS today – albeit applied to contemporary publishing standards and aspirations. Today, CPoS is positioned as an interdisciplinary journal of population studies and demography with a strong focus on comparative research from around the globe. Comparative research is understood in a broad sense, encompassing diverse comparative approaches across – for instance – countries or regions, across the life course and across social groups. Topics may include (but are not limited to) family and fertility, ageing and mortality, health and wellbeing, migration and mobility, and population structure and its dynamics.

In 2010, ZfB was formally renamed CPoS, though this transition had started much earlier (see Fig. 1). Opening up the journal to a wider international audience had also been an aim in the journal's early days. Already in 1976, ZfB provided English and French summaries of its German-language research articles. However, the primary focus remained on German population studies and research at the BiB itself. Significant structural changes began in 2003 with the establishment of a scientific advisory board, paving the way for the introduction of peer review in 2004. By 2008, the journal was accessible online (via VS Verlag). However, the greatest changes came with the relaunch of the journal in 2010 into a fully online and open access OJS² journal. These developments did not stop with the relaunch – rather, the relaunch marked the start of a series of further advances. The journal also moved to being entirely English-language during these transition years. In 2016, CPoS became part of the Web of Science Core Collection by entering the Emerging Sources Citation

¹ Translated by CPoS; the German original reads: „Diese Zeitschrift soll ein Forum für die wissenschaftliche Diskussion von Bevölkerungsfragen werden, wobei auch benachbarte Disziplinen sowie die bevölkerungswissenschaftlichen und bevölkerungspolitischen Erfahrungen anderer Länder berücksichtigt werden.“

² OJS stands for Open Journal Systems, an open source publishing platform for the management of peer-review journals.

Fig. 1: A timeline of major developments from 1975-2025

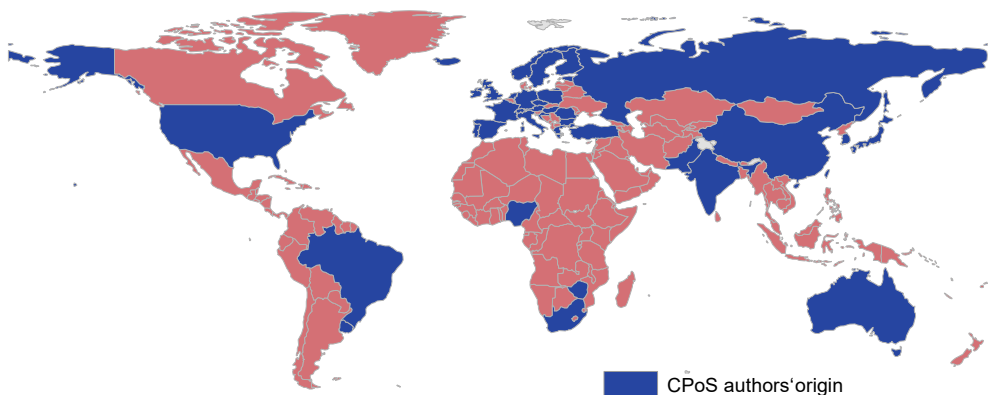
Index (ESCI), affirming the journal's successful transition, scientific quality, and global impact. Further steps included the appointment of external editors complementing the team at the BiB in order to ensure scientific independence, transparency, and

quality. Furthermore, a new descriptive paper category, *Demographic Trends Around the Globe*, was successfully introduced, aligning with the initial idea and mission to explore population structures and changes and their respective challenges in other parts of the world. These developments exemplify the journal's commitment to continuous progress and innovation.

3 CPOs: facts and figures

The following sections present facts and figures on CPOs drawn from the past years. Figure 2 illustrates CPOs' global reach from 2010-2024. The map shows our authors' home institutions, indicating that the journal has become a truly international platform attracting population researchers from around the globe. That said, we hope to achieve even greater geographical coverage in the future with further high-quality submissions.

Fig. 2: Where our authors come from



Note on Figure 2: CPOs' authors from 2010 to 2024 come from Australia, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Scotland, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Türkiye, Uruguay, the USA, and Zimbabwe. This data refers to the affiliation of the first authors of published manuscripts.

Since its relaunch in 2010, CPOs has received 605 submissions, of which 272 articles have been published. The journal's three most downloaded articles exemplify its interdisciplinarity and broad range of contributions. First, an 2015 article by *Hannes Weber* asks whether immigration can prevent population decline in Germany. Second, a methodological paper by *Volker Ludwig* and *Josef Brüderl* from 2021 focusses on the challenges when estimating impact functions with panel data. Third, in 2012, *Oliver Arránz Becker* and *Anja Steinbach* analyse the relations of grandparents and grandchildren. Over the years, each of these three articles has

been downloaded over 6,000 times – indicating their relevance and contribution to the field.

Social media has also become a crucial tool for connecting with population researchers around the globe and major institutions in the field. Posts on X regularly update the community on new publications and calls for papers.

4 Views and insights from the current editors, Heike Trappe and Roland Rau

Reflecting on our first year as editors of CPOs, we discussed what had been the biggest surprise and we both agreed that it was diversity. This diversity manifests in two key ways: global outreach and thematic breadth. First, CPOs truly has become an international journal. After decades with a focus on German-speaking authors and topics, submissions and published articles now come from around the globe. Submissions from Latin America or Asia, for example, are no longer the exception. Second, submissions span the three core areas of traditional demography: fertility, mortality, and migration – often interwoven, of course, with related topics such as population ageing or union trajectories. Methodological papers are submitted more rarely, but this is also not the intended focus of the journal.

5 What's next?

Looking to the future, we see an opportunity to further enhance the journal's contributions through innovative data visualisation. Demographic analyses often examine phenomena across ages, periods, and cohorts. Each of these data points may be based on thousands of observations. Mere description in words and tables can often miss important aspects of the underlying dynamics. This is why we will emphasize data visualisation more strongly in future volumes of CPOs. We believe that effective data visualisation can offer readers deeper insights by presenting complex dynamics in an intuitive and visually compelling manner. Data visualisation is becoming increasingly important for understanding complex relationships across all demographic sub-fields – and we believe CPOs should also advance in this direction.

6 Closing remarks

Over the past 50 years, CPOs (and its predecessor, ZfB) has transformed continuously to meet the challenges of its times, indicating the journal's ability to adapt to evolving research and publishing trends and standards. We at the BiB are proud of the journal's development and achievements. Looking ahead, we are excited to continue fostering innovative research, engaging with global demographic population trends and dynamics, and exploring new avenues such as data visualisation.

Ultimately, it is you – the readers and authors – who bring our journal to life. We thank you for your continued support and look forward to shaping the next 50 years of *Comparative Population Studies* together, through exciting special issues, innovative data visualisation, and research on emerging demographic trends from around the globe.

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