

## Editorial

# From ZfB to CPoS: A Dynamic Development in a Challenging Environment\*

**Norbert F. Schneider**

**Abstract:** This editorial, written by Norbert F. Schneider, who served as Director of the Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB) and publisher of *Comparative Population Studies* (CPoS) from 2009 to 2021, outlines the journal's transformation during his tenure. Reflecting on the challenges the predecessor *Zeitschrift für Bevölkerungswissenschaft* (ZfB) faced, the strategic decisions made to reimagine the journal are discussed. Key milestones include the rebranding to CPoS, the transition to open access, the shift to an entirely English-language publication, and the adoption of a rolling publication model. Despite challenges, the journal has grown significantly, with increased international recognition and a solid ranking. On its 50th anniversary, the journal's established position in the academic community of population research and demography is highlighted, emphasizing its commitment to high-quality publications and an efficient editorial process.

**Keywords:** CPoS · ZfB · Academic publishing · Open access · Population research

## 1 Reimagining the future of ZfB: Overcoming challenges and paving the way for CPoS

When I took over responsibility for *Zeitschrift für Bevölkerungswissenschaft* (ZfB) in 2009, the journal faced several challenges. For some time, the German-language ZfB had been published irregularly, with a number of articles lacking the scientific depth it once had, and it had become more difficult to attract contributions from authors outside the Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB). Despite these challenges, the potential for growth was clear, though the future of the journal needed to be reimagined. The transition in 2006 from Boldt Verlag to Springer VS had not yet brought the desired improvements in terms of the journal's visibility and appeal.

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

Several factors contributed to the situation at the time. Some were internal, while others were external. I would like to highlight two key external factors. In Germany, there was a limited number of scientists focusing on demographic topics that aligned with the scope of ZfB at that time, and there was little indication that this would change in the near future. Another significant change was the evolving landscape of academic publishing, especially among younger researchers who increasingly sought to publish in international English-language journals. The Journal Impact Factor (JIF) by Thomson Reuters (today Clarivate) became a key metric, making it difficult for German-language journals to remain competitive.

It soon became clear that, after 34 years, a new direction for ZfB was necessary. The question arose whether it was time to embark on a completely new path and to reimagine the journal. The decision was made quickly, and a comprehensive relaunch was initiated in 2009, accompanied by a number of important strategic decisions.

First, we decided to part ways with publishing houses. While the shift away from print journals was not as evident in 2009 as it is today, I had long been disappointed by the practice of publishing publicly funded research through profit-oriented publishers, who often charged high fees, limiting access to scientific knowledge. I was pleased to see the journal move toward an open-access publishing platform, a decision that would later be followed by many other publications, not only in Germany.

To ensure the journal's future viability and competitiveness, it was clear that a more international approach was necessary. This led to a rebranding as *Comparative Population Studies* (CPOS) and a gradual shift to English-language contributions. In hindsight, it may seem ambitious that we published bilingual issues at first, with all articles published in both German and English. This was an immense effort. It was soon clear, however, that this was an interim phase and CPOS transitioned to an English-only publication.

## **2 Key developments: Expanding scope, structural changes, and new publishing strategies**

Other important developments included the expansion of the journal's thematic scope to appeal to a broader range of authors and readers, and the creation of a rotating scientific advisory board, featuring renowned colleagues to give strategic advice and to help attract more international contributions. These were crucial steps towards enhancing the journal's scientific independence and free it from the mistaken image of an in-house publication.

One major goal during the initial transition was to make up for the publishing backlog. Special issues organized and managed by external guest editors were a key strategic decision back then. This strategy proved highly effective, with most of the issues published during this period. During the transition phase, submissions from outside the BiB only gradually began to increase and special issues were able to attract new authors.

For several years, CPoS followed the traditional issue-based structure, with four issues per year, each containing around four articles, aiming for quarterly publication. This structure allowed to catch up on the publishing backlog, an achievement that required a great deal of effort from all involved and was an exceptional accomplishment. However, as the limitations of this rather inflexible publishing model became apparent, it was clear that we needed to move to an annual rolling publication model, which became another important development milestone. This change allowed for a faster publication of articles, reduced the editorial workload, and avoided the peaks of pressure typically associated with quarterly deadlines. With this change, the era of print editions of CPoS came to an end. Today, the journal is only printed in small quantities for libraries and collaborating institutions.

Another significant change was the transition to an online publishing platform. This was another area where CPoS played a pioneering role in Germany. It became one of the first journals to be run on OJS (Open Journal Systems), an open-source software that was still in development at the time, and we made a meaningful contribution to the development of this platform in Germany. This transition also marked the decision to stabilize the editorial team within the BiB, moving away from the previous rotation model.

These changes further enhanced CPoS' appeal, and both the number of downloads and submissions steadily increased. Additional support through externally organized special issues continued to be crucial to the journal's growth.

Despite the achievements described the dynamic publishing market that is flooded with e-journals has and will continue to challenge CPoS. It is not easy for an open access journal to stand out in this environment with many predatory journals on the market.

### **3 CPoS today – achievements, growth, and future prospects**

A major new development occurred in 2018 with the introduction of an external editor, appointed for a fixed term. This change brought further new impulses and energy to the journal and contributed to its quality, transparency and scientific independence.

Looking back over the past 16 years, the relaunch and internationalisation of CPoS can be seen as highly successful. The journal is now widely recognized as a respected academic publication. While the goal of elevating CPoS to an A-journal is still a work in progress, the journal has made significant strides. It is already indexed in prominent rankings including the *Emerging Sources Citation Index* (ESCI). In 2023, CPoS ranked 42nd in the *Scimago Journal & Country Rank* among 132 demographic journals worldwide and 4th among those published in Germany. This is a strong ranking, reflecting the journal's growing influence and reach.

On the 50th anniversary, it can be proudly stated that CPoS is a well-established publication with an excellent editorial support for authors and a highly efficient review process. The average time from submission to publication is below 12 months, which is an outstanding achievement.

Looking ahead, I hope for a further increase in high-quality submissions and continued growth in the journal's reputation. One thing is clear: CPOS deserves continued success.

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