

Reaction of NIDI to the Evaluation and Recommendations of the External Review Committee.

1. NIDI is grateful for the evaluation provided by the Committee in its report of March 2008 which is based on the Committee's activities and the site visit at NIDI on 17-18 January 2008. The Evaluation Report indeed reflects that the Committee "... holds NIDI in high esteem" (page 16). The institute as a whole is judged as "very good to excellent" as is the work of the SoDem department, while the quality, productivity and relevance of our activities are all ranked as "very good" (page 14). Other qualifications regarding e.g. the effectiveness of the leadership ("impressive", page 14) and its openness to bottom-up initiatives (page 6), the outreach to the general public (page 9), as well as the high level of cohesion within the institute and the strong solidarity between departments (page 6) were also very positive. NIDI fully shares the Committee's observation that the praise for the latter should go to the entire staff and that management would do well to preserve this culture. Indeed we feel that finding a "New Balance", the title which we gave to our self assessment, was a truly joined effort of the entire NIDI community and thus the praise of the Committee is equally shared by all.
2. In preparing its reaction to the evaluation the Directorate has extensively consulted the Management Team. In a special meeting the evaluation report was also discussed with the full staff; given the positive outcome of the evaluation this meeting was concluded with festive drinks and a joined buffet dinner. We further acknowledge the comments from our NIDI Works Council (OC) which were also gratefully taken into account.
3. To substantiate its positive evaluation the Committee gave a host of valuable comments and suggestions regarding our activities which were summarized in the recommendations section of the evaluation report. As requested in the evaluation protocol, our reaction focuses on these recommendations and is structured around three key topics: substantive issues, human resources and organizational issues. But we will start with a more general comment.
4. The Committee's evaluation is gladly accepted to be fully supportive of the scientific refocusing and repositioning of the institute that has taken place in recent years and which was fortunate to build on the very rich heritage of NIDI. Obviously the Committee shares our view that the scientific course of NIDI, as set out in our new strategy with its shared approach, interdisciplinary perspective, international orientation and balanced scope, is a good one and needs to be pursued in the coming years. We are fully committed to further implement this strategy taking the Committee's recommendations into account.
5. Substance/Contexts. The "lives in contexts" approach met with approval and will be continued. We agree that the "contexts" in and the (spatial) scale on which life courses are being studied need further specification; in our view the specification of "context" fully depends on the research question that needs to be answered. Nevertheless, households, the family and institutions at the country level are the most important contexts in our current research while regional and municipal level contexts receive less attention.

6. Substance/Multistate. The Committee stresses the importance of multistate demography (“..NIDI’s trump card..”, page 16) and recommends that multistate models should be applied to more research topics. We agree that this methodology is very important in demography and for NIDI. Within the PMH department multistate models are being applied to both population projections and health research and they will be applied to migration research. The availability of the MicMac model in May 2009 is expected to stimulate applications in other domains as well. In FP7 the MicMac model shall be applied in the field of long term care. In the field of international migration a proposal for NORFACE is being developed where multistate methods will be used to link the increase in the demand for care workers caused by population ageing with labour migration. Furthermore a proposal has been submitted to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment to extend the MicMac model to analyze and project transitions in the labour market. The appointment in 2008 of an econometrician with a background in migration modeling using longitudinal data will contribute to the development and application of multistate models. These initiatives will provide an opportunity to exploit the full potential of the methodology of multistate modeling and simulation in studies of “lives in contexts”.
7. Substance/Health. The Committee endorses our new focus on health issues and invites us to further clarify our comparative advantages in health research. Our niche in this domain is our combined expertise in life course analysis and multistate modelling. In the field of health resource flows tracking the life course approach will be applied in analyzing out-of-pocket health expenditures at the individual and household level. In the field of health outcomes multistate models will be used to assess the impact of interventions on the health status of the population and its consequences for health care. The appointment in 2008 of a quantitative economist specialised in population health and health surveys increases NIDI’s capacity to guard our niche.
8. Substance/Representativeness We agree with the Committee that the SoDem department relies heavily on (panel) surveys such as NKPS. Because of selectivity of non-response the Committee recommends to pay more attention to representativeness issues and to strengthen the empirical base through comparisons with registry/censusdata. Indeed register data can play an important role in assessing the representativeness of the initial survey sample and hence more use will be made of these data. Registry data are less relevant to study selectivity through panel depletion which may best be studied by comparing with the first wave data.
9. Substance/Empirical base. We agree that in addition to the study of non-response issues in surveys, register data are a very important data source for demographic analysis and can broaden the empirical base for our research. Better access and increasing possibilities to link data, which fortunately were realized in recent years, will further stimulate the use of register data in NIDI research. Both in historical, family and migration research register data are already analyzed. It should be kept in mind that register data do not necessarily fit all research questions; they are no panacea. Survey data will maintain an important source for NIDI research e.g. to study the mechanisms that drive demographic behaviour.

10. Substance/Collaboration. The Committee is right to observe that intensified use of register data will imply closer collaboration with Statistics Netherlands (CBS). In this regard it may be mentioned that recently an agreement regarding remote access to CBS data was concluded allowing access from the premises of NIDI through a secure server. We hope that also remaining financial (data are not free of charge) and organizational (joint publication may be difficult to realize) thresholds to use CBS data will further be lowered. Unlike the Committee we do not envisage a consultancy role for NIDI with respect to the use of register data. This role may fit better with other (Academy) programmes and institutions like DANS or VKS.
11. Substance/Productivity. The Committee judges our productivity to be “very good”. The self assessment illustrates that our overall scientific output, including that in the highest ranked categories, has shown a healthy growth over the past years. It also shows that an increasing number of staff members participate in our scientific production. We agree that this productivity may further be improved especially for those staff members who lag behind; we note however that this certainly does not concern all midlevel staff as is implied by the Committee. Fortunately also some of our midlevel staff rank very high on productivity. To address imbalances in productivity we will continue to stimulate coaching of staff members who are less experienced in scientific writing by more experienced researchers and we will also promote team writing; a priority will indeed be to convert research reports into academic publications.
12. Human Resources/Recruiting. The Committee rightly notes imbalances in our staff where a small group of senior researchers is (over)burdened with many tasks. We agree that this group needs to be relieved and will implement the following policies. First we will recruit new staff at postdoc level that is experienced, can work relatively independently and may relieve senior staff, also from some of the PhD training and coaching activities as well as project acquisition. The recent appointment of an econometrician in the PMH department also follows up on the recommendation to attract staff that can help develop statistical tools and models. Another appointment is being prepared in the PMH department in the field of quantitative health economics. Two postdoc positions in quantitative social sciences have been opened in the SoDem department for new projects on the early stages of the life course. To further strengthen our relatively small group of experts in multistate demography two additional postdocs working at the interface of the PMH and SoDem departments will be requested from the Academy through its Strategy Fund. These postdocs should be well-versed in advanced methodology and able to assist senior staff with grant applications and daily supervision of PhD students, as suggested by the Committee. As a rule recruitment also takes place at the international level. The European Doctoral School in Demography (EDSD) will be increasingly important in this respect and will be further supported. Part of the support will be directed to students who express an interest in PhD research at NIDI on a subject that is central to the study of lives in contexts. In the same vein also a visiting scholar programme will be developed, in collaboration with our fellow Academy institute the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS). Finally also continued training of support staff must help to relieve the administrative burden on (senior) scientific staff notably with respect to financial

and project management; adequate administrative support for complex (EU) projects has been secured.

13. Human Resources/Employability. Our dedicated and motivated staff is our primary asset. To further develop expertise we will continue to implement our human resources policy that emphasizes employability. This implies that members of staff must develop their knowledge and skills where the institute provides proper facilities to do so. A focused professional training policy emphasizing innovative interdisciplinary perspectives and significant technical skills will be implemented including both mid-career and late career programmes. The training policy covers (1) participation in regular doctoral training programmes such as EDSD and ICS (Interuniversity Center for Social Science Theory and Methodology), (2) training workshops and short (summer) courses, (3) seminars, (4) the continuation of our “feedback forum”, (5) training on the job at NIDI or at a research partner’s institute, and (6) coaching. Training enhances employability, but also NIDI’s ability to carefully guard its niche and academic reputation.

Employability also implies mobility. Staff will be encouraged to (temporarily) change places with university researchers or be seconded to other research organizations e.g. to execute joint projects. Staff represented by OC shares the Committee’s and our view that mobility can be refreshing for both the individual researcher and the institute. We agree with the Committee that a culture of mobility should further be developed; mobility will be promoted but is not a goal in itself and care will be given that continuity is not jeopardized. Proper transfer of knowledge from more senior to more junior staff also promotes continuity and mentoring/coaching will be intensified.

14. Organization/Infrastructure. A solid research infrastructure helps to make NIDI a better workplace, also for international experts and visiting researchers. The important role of the supporting staff in this respect was recognized by the Committee. To make NIDI a more attractive workplace for international experts English will gradually become our in house working language. Currently our Strategy, Work Programme and Annual Report are already produced in English and in house meetings like the Brown Bag Seminar may be conducted in English. Necessary language training will be provided also to support staff and English language skills will be added to the job requirements for positions at NIDI. A truly major contribution to strengthening our scientific facilities would be the online access to academic journals and other publications; we hope that the Academy will be able to achieve this in the foreseeable future.
15. Organization/External relations. The Committee recommends that to increase our visibility as a centre of expertise and consultation we need to improve our public relations also to anticipate media coverage of research results. We are pleased with the Committee’s view that our outreach to the general public is impressive (page 9) and that DEMOS plays an important part in this. To further implement this recommendation we will seek the advise of the Public Relations office of the Academy and develop a public relations policy. In our view our website will play an important role in this policy. We are not convinced that a separate public relations officer would be the best way to improve public relations nor do we see a large need to relieve research staff in this respect; we prefer that researchers

themselves deal with the media; media training shall be considered. We will review the role of administrative staff and focus it more on supporting our external relations.

16. Organization/Internal communication. Good internal communication has always been a priority and we were glad to learn that the Committee commended our short lines of communication in a flat organization and our openness to bottom-up initiatives. We are not convinced that an internal online Newsletter is needed and prefer to pursue and improve existing media like our Intranet; this means of internal communication is open to every staff member and accessibility will be further improved when a new content management system will be implemented.
17. Organization/Output. We will follow up on the recommendation to make a database of our publications available on the web noting that the overview of our output which was presented to the Committee has already been posted on our website. The implementation of METIS (an output database system used by Dutch universities), currently in progress, will further improve access to our output.
18. Organization/Shared services. The Committee invites the Academy to stimulate further cooperation of our Support department with similar departments of other Academy institutes in our region. We are ready to participate in exploring these possibilities when requested by the Academy if this "shared services" approach is cost effective and the level of services within the institute is guaranteed.

The Hague, 29 June 2008