Watching demographers talk about demography

Impressions of the Österreichische Studienstiftung Seminar „Demography matters: the scientific discipline about human life from birth to death“, 28-30 September 2022, Campus Akademie

After the official opening by Alexia, Marc moved right into the topic “Demographic theories and approaches to understand population change”. To get in touch with the students they received five demographic riddles to solve in groups. We wanted to know how they would approach demographic questions.

Why don't you try this one?

In the German city of Bamberg, 280 litres of beer are drunk per person per year.

Take a look at other German regions where beer and beer-mixed drinks are consumed the most:
- Brandenburg: 120 litres
- Thuringia: 114 litres
- Saxony-Anhalt: 110 litres
- Saarland: 102 litres
- Upper Franconia: 93 litres

And then see these regions with the least consumption:
- Rheinhessen-Pfalz: 29 litres
- Hamburg: 35 litres
- Berlin: 48 litres
- Darmstadt: 49 litres
- Detmold: 51 litres

But 280 litres? Why do the people of Bamberg drink so much?

Answers will follow next week.
Claudia, Dilek and Sonja introduced the students to the world of data.

Sonja demonstrated the concept of using handgrip strength as a proxy indicator of general health status.

Although Sonja didn't seem very happy at one point :-) 

During the morning session of the second day even a film crew came along to document the importance of demographic studies.

The students continued to learn about education, migration, fertility, and economic perspectives of demography.
In the breaks students had the possibility to fill out cards, why they chose Demography as a seminar.

Some answers were vague:

“I liked the idea of combining people and maths.”

“I had the least knowledge about the main topics.”

Others were pretty clear:

“I study psychology and I guess demography is a base for specific population differences one should look at, e.g. people of color vs. white people in the U.S. and their mortality as proof of racism’s impact.”

“Demography helps to understand future population’s dynamics and make predictions which are a starting point to outline a more resilient and sustainable society.”

You may wonder what motivations did the WIC colleagues indicate to for choosing to become a demographer. With few exceptions, the main motivation was “luck and/or chance.”

Wolfgang wrapped the seminar up and talked about future challenges and why demography matters.

The discourse was not only between lecturers and students, our WIC colleagues also got into conservation and had a good time.
Anne:
I was pleasantly surprised by the eagerness of the students to find explanations for the sometimes easy or sometimes less easy questions that my colleagues and I asked them. They had already understood a lot of important demographic 'things'; the idea of measurement problems above all. I hope they will continue to be curious, engage in research, and remember what they learned in these few days about basic demographics throughout their lives (that's the point for the symphonic music to start!).

Marc:
The high energy and mental presence of the "Studienstifter" throughout the whole seminar was extremely impressive for me. However, most amazing were the brilliant and very intelligent questions of which some we did not ask ourselves before. Last but not least, they asked about interdisciplinary cooperations in the first session already - a question that I thought about for the first time only after several years of research. This made it clear to me that the next generation of scientists will have a better basis than ours when we started our careers. I am very optimistic that this new generation will make a great job and move our knowledge ahead significantly.

Paola:
The organization of the seminar took several months of coordination and brainstorming, but it was fun! It was also an opportunity to collect and present unusual material and interact with young people in an informal context. I am very happy with how it went and I would like to thank everyone for their commitment and contribution!

A Little insight into the seminar, in the following video
https://www.instagram.com/reel/CjpdXQgqgps/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=

And what did the instructors think?