

**Provisional Abstract of a paper to be presented at the European Population Conference 2006 to be held at the University of Liverpool, 21-24 June 2006**

Title of paper: **Where do assumptions come from?: Investigating the substantive basis for population projections in Europe**

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Topic Area 9: Data and methods (if possible in specific session on 'MicMac')

*Provisional abstract*

Assumptions drive projections. The arithmetic of making cohort-component population projections has essentially been unchanged since Edwin Cannan proposed it in 1895. However, the way in which demographic forecasters make their assumptions concerning future trends in fertility, mortality and migration is always potentially changing. This paper addresses two main issues: current practice and recommendations for a new definition of best practice methods. The paper first reviews the current practice of statistical agencies in Europe (EU-25) for defining the fertility, mortality and migration assumptions in population projections. The paper will then focus on assessing the interdisciplinary state of the art and discussing possible new strategies for expert argument based assumption development. Using some of the recent insights in the discipline of cognitive science about the nature of expert views and their grounding in explicit theories versus tacit assumptions, the paper will propose new strategies for defining assumptions. An important aspect of this will be to study the arguments behind the assumptions of alternative scenarios and focusing on the causal mechanisms that would bring them to bear. The section will include a discussion of the uncertainty around such assumptions.