



© Wissenschaftskolleg

Ulrich Karl Steiner, Ph.D.

Theoretical Biology

INSERM U1001, Centre de Recherche
Interdisciplinaire, Paris

Born in 1973 in Ulm
Studied Evolutionary Ecology at the Universities of Göttingen and Zürich

FELLOWSHIP
College for Life Sciences

PROJECT

Variability in Individual Fitness Components

Humans and other species often differ greatly in age at death and in lifetime reproduction. For example, the standard deviation of human age at death was ~40% of life expectancy (~35 years) in the early 1800s and ~20% in the late 1900s even with a much higher life expectancy (~70 years). This leads to the question why there is so much variability and where does it come from. Does it have a genetic component, is it driven by the fluctuations in the environment, or is it simply chance that determines the course of life? To date, we have no good expectation of variability in fitness components and patterns across species and populations and we are far from quantifying underlying causes of this variability. The large variation in fitness components that is found on all levels, from bacteria to humans, has substantial implications for evolutionary and ecological population dynamics. It confronts us with major challenges in accurately forecasting population dynamics, including forecasts under climate change scenarios and major shifts in the demographic structure human societies face in the near future. I will review existing patterns across the tree of life using neutral theories of life histories to reveal potential unifying or diverging features in observed variability in fitness components among individuals. I will use a neutral theory of life histories that estimates expected neutral variability in individual fitness components within age- and stage-structured populations, assuming a single genotype. If expectations of large neutral variability (non-genetic variability) hold, life courses are mostly be determined by chance and we need not worry; we only need to be lucky.

Recommended Reading

Steiner, U. K. and S. Tuljapurkar (2012). "A neutral theory for life histories and individual variability in fitness components." PNAS 109, 12: 4684-4689.

Tuljapurkar, S., U. K. Steiner, and S. H. Orzack (2009). "Dynamic heterogeneity in life-histories." Ecology Letters 12, 1: 93-106.

Steiner, Ulrich Karl (Chicago, Ill.,2017)

Drivers of diversification in individual life courses

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1680550578>

Steiner, Ulrich Karl (Berlin,2015)

Constraints on the evolution of phenotypic plasticity : limits and costs of phenotype and plasticity

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1680551248>

Steiner, Ulrich Karl (Chicago, Ill.,2014)

Generation time, net reproductive rate, and growth in stage-age-structured populations

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1680549960>

Steiner, Ulrich Karl (Orlando, Fla,2012)

Structured population models : introduction

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1687900930>

Steiner, Ulrich Karl (2012)

Neutral theory for life histories and individual variability in fitness components

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=755868854>

Steiner, Ulrich Karl (2012)

Why is the jack of all trades a master of none? Studying the evolution of inducible defenses in aquatic systems

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=755830849>

Steiner, Ulrich Karl (2012)

Trading stages : life expectancies in structured populations

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=755828313>

Steiner, Ulrich Karl (2010)

Dynamic heterogeneity and life histories

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=755826965>

Steiner, Ulrich Karl (2009)

The fitness costs of developmental canalization and plasticity

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=755868382>

Steiner, Ulrich Karl (2009)

Dynamic heterogeneity in life histories

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=75582623X>