

Second ISA Forum of Sociology, August 1-4, 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Research Committee on Sociology of Population, RC41, Session D:

Who's Afraid of Population Decline? Challenges, Responses and Consequences

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Demographic change has been on the research agenda of population scholars for several decades now. Whereas population growth was the main topic of inquiry after the Second World War and still is considered to be relevant for many countries of the so called 'south' population ageing and population decline have (re)entered the research agenda only after many countries of the 'north' have faced the second demographic transition. Among these two 'newcomer'-topics population ageing has become well established as an overwhelming number of publications show. Much less attention has been paid to questions of population decline despite its empirical frequency.

On a national level the Western world is going to face population decline in the short or medium term given current levels of fertility (with the exception of the United States, New Zealand, and Iceland) if immigration is not to compensate 'natural' population losses. Many developing countries are likely to follow that demographic pattern within a few decades. Countries with a 'natural' population decline in 2008 included Italy, Germany, 12 countries in Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation, and Japan. On a regional level the picture becomes even more diverse and raw distinctions such as 'north' and 'south' do not capture demographic developments any more. The same is true for the urban level. Nevertheless the cases are ubiquitous: about a quarter of the cities worldwide with more than 100.000 inhabitants are confronted with population decline and in three quarters of the post socialist cities in Europe with more than 200.000 inhabitants shrinking populations have been observed.

Existing research has focussed much more on explaining why population numbers decline and much less on possible consequences resulting from these phenomena. The aim of this session is to put population decline, and resulting challenges, responses, and possible consequences more in focus of the international research agenda.

Papers for this session should therefore address one or more of the following questions:

- Which patterns of (national, regional, urban) population decline can be observed?
- Which specific challenges result from declining population numbers?
(E.g.: to territorial cohesion.)
- How exactly pose declining populations challenges that are different from challenges resulting from growing populations?
- Which aspect of population decline is most problematic?
(E.g.: the expectation of decline, tempo, scope and volatility of the process itself or its result: smaller populations.)
- Which social fields are vulnerable to shrinking populations?
(E.g.: infrastructures of the welfare state such as child care, education and health units; public administration, business organisations, the family.)

- Which responses to declining populations can be observed?
- How can responses to declining population numbers be classified and explained?
- Which consequences result from population decline and specific response patterns (on a national, regional, urban, organizational, individual level)?
- Is it desirable and possible to develop a middle range theory of possible consequences of population decline?

Especially welcome are paper proposals based on comparative empirical research and theoretical contributions that systematically reflect the relationship of demographic changes and social institutions and infrastructures.

Abstract submission

Only abstracts submitted on-line can be incorporated in the sessions. Please use the ISA abstract submission website:

<http://www.isa-sociology.org/buenos-aires-2012/abstract-submission.htm>

Deadlines

- On-line abstract submission will be open from August 25 to December 15, 2011.
- Authors will be notified if their paper has been accepted or not in the programme (for presentation or as distributed paper) by January 31, 2012.
- All Forum participants (presenters, chairs, discussants, etc.) need to pay the early registration fee by April 10, 2012, in order to be included in the programme. If not registered, their names will not appear in the Programme or Abstracts Book.
- On-line registration will open August 25, 2011.