

AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE  
ON THE ROLE OF POPULATION ASSOCIATIONS

THE LATIN AMERICAN REGION

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## A. MAIN POPULATION ASSOCIATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

According to a survey conduct by PROLAP/CICRED in 1991, the major number of research institutions, researchers, and research projects in population are concentrated in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. The three together accounts for about 50% of the researchers of the region. The fourth place is occupied by Cuba.

The major associations in the region are two. In order of seniority they are ABEP (Brazilian Association, created in 1977, and SOMEDE (the Mexican Association, created in 1982 with about 150 members). There are an unknown number of other national institutions. One of them is AEPA (Argentine Association, created in 1991, which today has about 120 members).

The three associations aim at promoting the discussion and critical analysis on population issues among people concerned with research and teaching in population within the academia as well as in administrative and planning institutions, in the private as well as in the public sector. They do it by organizing roundtables, workshops, seminars, conferences. The three publish bulletins addressed to keep permanent communication among their members by diffusing news on academic events, reviews of research activities, call for papers, scholarships, etc. ABEP also publishes the Journal *Revista Brasileira de Estudios de Población*.

The three have organized working groups to stimulate the exchange of experiences and research among people doing research on specific topics through the analysis and discussion of major research results. SOMEDE had 19 such groups in 1991 (Population, family and environment; Labor market, socio-economic and population changes; Historical demography, Anthropological demography, etc.). AEPA has currently four such groups called "scientific committees" on: Production of information, Historical demography; Territorial mobility; and Reproductive health.

B. CURRENT RESEARCH EMPHASES. NUMBER OF SCHOLARS AND  
LOCATION

There is neither valid information on current research topics nor on the number of researchers in the region. The 1991 PROLAP survey failed to gather this information because of methodological problems and because of the high level of non-response. In the case of Argentina the major emphasis is on: Migration and spatial distribution of the population; Population and labor market; Historical demography; and Reproductive health. The relative low emphasis on formal demography probably obeys to the predominance of the sociological rather than the demographic origin of most researchers.

PROLAP's survey counted about 190 research centers in 17 countries and close to 1.000 researchers. In Argentina the number of researchers recorded amounted to about 120. These figures are supposed to undercount the real ones. In Argentina, only 23 out of the 61 institutions surveyed did answer. A little over half of them were private centers; most of the rest were located at the university and the remaining ones in the government realm.

In many countries of the region population research is not strong because the topic lost importance among the priorities of the governments, partly because of the scarcity of resources and/or low interest in the advancement of the social sciences, and because of the continuous loss of status of Latin America as a recipient of international resources. In view of this situation a number of needs have been singled out by countries of the region. Some of them are:

- The need for each country to organize its demographic community
- The need to strengthen institutions and communication channels
- The need to train demographers to generate research projects
- The need to conduct greater number of national and international academic events to promote the exchange of experiences

In Argentina funds for research on population -either public or private, national or international- are scarce not only because

of budget restrictions at the national level, but also because funding institutions consider Argentina a country with no acute population problems, or which has achieved a level of development which makes external aid unnecessary. The loss of support from the private agencies which used to fund population research -Ford Foundation, IDRC, Inter-American Foundation- make the government supply appear to be the major one via the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research. Who has recently come to increase its support in Argentina?

#### C. NETWORKING AND COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES AMONG DEMOGRAPHERS

The region has an institutional network designed to establish links between centers of population research. Its name is PROLAP -Latin American Population Program. It was created within the sphere of action of another Latin-American network of research centers in the social sciences called CLACSO -Latin-American Social Sciences Council- which, as the Social Science Research Council in USA, has a number of working groups. PROLAP has about 50 member centers in 14 countries of the region.

The agenda of PROLAP for 1994-96 includes the following aims: to strengthen population research institutions in the region, mainly the less developed; to further training and the creation of national research groups; to further the flow of information on population, and to strengthen interaction links with the international academic community.

PROLAP is organized around three areas: Communication and documentation; Teaching; and Research. The first of the areas publishes a Bulletin called PROLAP Bulletin, issued three times a year.

As regards research PROLAP has recently (1994) created working groups to stimulate the exchange between researchers of the region with the active participation of experts from other regions. The first three groups are:  
Territorial population mobility

Aging  
Reproductive health

As regards teaching, PROLAP is currently sponsoring a regional competition for writing three textbooks in General Demography, in Demographic Analysis, and in Population and Development. The competition has just closed on March 31.

#### D. MAIN CURRENT POPULATION POLICY ISSUES

According to the Regional Action Plan issued by the Latin American and Caribbean Consensus on Population and Development, held in Mexico in 1993, before the Cairo Conference, the position of the countries of the region on population and development issued are:

1. The need to harmonize population dynamics, environment, and social and economic development.
2. To improve the status of women and to achieve equity between genders.
3. To improve the reproductive health of the population, and to ensure people's right to decide in a free and informed way the number and spacing of their children.
4. To reach at a territorial distribution of the population functional to the productive transformation of the economy, with greater social and spatial equity and environmental sustainability.
5. To harmonize the trends of the international migration with the aims of development taking into account the respect for the human rights of migrants.
6. To take into account the labor needs of young people and those of old people with insufficient income.

According to the Argentine Population Report prepared for the Cairo Conference, population is not a central topic for Argentine society, perhaps because of its low density and moderate level of growth. It is neither a major topic within the sphere of the state.

Only few issues appear important with regard to population policies. This is notoriously true for the spatial distribution of

the population, and for internal migrations. Both stem from the perception of an excessive regional concentration of the population, the overgrowing of the major urban agglomerate and the scarcity of population in other regions of the country.

International migrations are another issue which appears among the public concerns. In this case it is centered on two aspects: immigration, mainly from neighboring countries, and outmigration of specific segments of the population (i.e., professionals and technicians). The first aspect is seen in relation to problems of national security, also as a cause for local unemployment and the increase of demands upon health and housing services. The second aspect is seen as one of the consequences of the economic crisis and the decrease of salary conditions among highly qualified people.

To say it shortly, Argentina does not have a national population program but it has rather implemented limited size sectorial actions like a program to improve mother-child health and family planning, or has issued some legal resources that have widened the rights of women within the family. It is worth mentioning that many private research centers have some kind of participation in the design of public policies through consultancies or the design of diagnosis or other studies specially requested for planning.

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ABEP Bulletin

AEPA Bulletin

PISPAL Bulletin

SOMEDE Bulletin