
CONFERENCE REPORTS

Demography and Economic Growth

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The International Committee of Economic Historians took the problem of the changes in urban populations during the 19th and 20th century as one of the topics to be discussed during on the Sixth International Congress on Economic History at Copenhagen in August 1974. Demographic and social problems are clearly important while the problems of urban societies are of central interest for both economic and social historians. Urbanization represents a revolutionary change in the whole pattern of social and economic life and is itself a product of economic and technological development. Its pervasive influence cannot be limited to the urban milieu alone but extends to the rural hinterland, to entire countries, and even the whole world.

Professor György Ránki (Budapest) was appointed by the International Committee as convener of the meeting. As the 'B sections' were concerned mainly with the presentation of brief papers with the aim of exchanging information on the state of recent research, the convener wanted to limit the topic to a short period and to widen the area covered in the papers presented. The original idea had been to attempt a comparative discussion of different types of urban development taking into consideration not only Western development — the best known due to previous research — but other regions of European economic growth, like Scandinavia, Southern, and Eastern Europe together with its effects. Even South America was to have been considered. However the plan could not be carried through in its original form. Papers from Scandinavian countries and from Eastern Europe were obtained but the convener was not successful in obtaining scholars from Italy or from South America. (So South America and non-European countries, other than USA and Japan, were very under-represented in the Congress as

well). The programme of the session held on the very first day of the Congress (19th August), was as follows:

S. Åkerman, Uppsala: « Migration and Social Mobility »; E. Jutikkala, Helsinki: « Changes in the Occupational and Social Structure of two Medium-Sized Towns during Early Industrialization »; M. Lackó, Budapest: « The Structure of Urban Population in Hungary in Recent Decades »; W. E. Minchinton, Exeter: « Europe's Major Cities, 1800-1970 »; W. Hubbard, Montreal: « The Growth of Cisleithanian Cities »; M. Drosdowski, Warsaw: « The Structure of Population in Poland, 1870-1970 ». (Prof. E. Jutikkala — because of illness — and Prof. Drosdowski were unable to come, and summaries of their papers were given).

The first speaker, S. Åkerman, summarised his long paper which dealt with the methodological problems involved in his research. Prof. Åkerman is director of a group who are examining social mobility in Sweden through a study of career mobility in the city of Wäs terås at the end of the 19th century. They have compared their results with those of two other research projects based on the same method, concerning Halmstad and Orebso. The first difficulty, Professor Åkerman stated, was to establish the relevance of the occupational categories and to group them in larger clusters. A five-staged scale was established in order to distinguish agricultural workers and similar labour categories from industrial workers. Group IV: Craftsmen and artisans below the rank of master craftsman; group V: *a*) unqualified workers in industry and commerce; *b*) farm workers, domestic servants. They also tried to structure the white collar group on a more detailed basis. Group I: *a*) owners of large business, entrepreneurs, landowners; *b*) higher civil officials, university graduates. Group II: *a*) small-scale business entrepreneurs, master artisans and craftsmen; *b*) lower civil officials, clerks, shop workers, foremen. Group III: Farmers, tenant farmers.

This research has succeeded in showing that migration was relatively high, and that the higher social classes were more mobile than the lower ones. Geographic mobility was connected with social mobility, and geographically mobile persons had more than twice as many opportunities to change their occupational position compared with stationary persons. The research on 700 individual careers attempted to examine social status at the age of 20 compared with social origin, and that at the age of 35-40 as well compared with 20 years earlier. A striking upward mobility among farmer's sons (the research dealt only with males) was revealed. Through stopover among the ranks of unskilled labour, about 20 per cent moved to lower white collar status. Strong regressive movement was found from low white collar status, but mainly in the case of the young generation, because when an individual attained white collar status he generally managed to remain there. Research has also been directed to the question of the differing possibilities for those coming from urban and rural environments, and showed

that the difference of the proportion which changed social status was not very high, but that people coming from an urban background changed status mainly at the very beginning, while people coming from rural areas mainly later. The research also showed that urban immigration was a complex process and was not motivated by the search for industrial work alone.

Methodological questions were raised in the short paper by Professor Hubbard (Montreal, Canada), which was presented orally. His approach was based less on individual files, and using cohort analysis dealt with some more general sources of the economic process of urbanism. He discussed the comparative analysis of the growth and structure of the seven great cities of Habsburg Austria, complementing this comparative study with a micro-analysis of the city of Graz based on censuses, parish registers, archive material.

Professor Hubbard's main interest was the interrelation between urbanisation and economic change. He attempted to analyse the different socio-economic variables, which affect urban growth: 1) rural population pressure (labour supply I); 2) labour-absorbing capacity of agriculture; 3) urban population pressure (labour supply II); 4) labour-absorbing capacity of non-agricultural sector (industry and services); and 5) restrictions on the movement of labour and materials.

Although his study was far from being completed he concluded that the major impetus behind urban growth in Austria was the push away from agriculture rather than the pull into industry and commerce. He suggested three preliminary generalizations: 1) a rationalization of the socio-economic structure in the Weberian sense is perceivable; 2) average household size declined; 3) horizontal mobility was relatively high.

Professor Hubbard based his conclusion on his research on the city of Graz, but whether other cities will provide him with the same conclusions is still an open question.

Professor Walter Minchinton (Exeter, Great Britain) concentrated on the development of Europe's major cities. He emphasized that in terms of the consequences of modern economic development it is not sufficient to concentrate on the number of cities alone, because a marked increase in the number of large cities and metropolitan areas is the most important new tendency in the growth of urban populations. (In 1910 there were only 7 cities with over 1 million inhabitants; in 1960 there were 25 cities with a population of more than 1 million). Professor Minchinton did not raise particular methodological questions because his paper was less concerned with microstructural problems, but he formulated his general conclusion from the research that he has done as following: 1) Europe clearly demonstrates the trend towards ever-larger cities. 2) By 1960 this trend had affected most European countries. 3) The existence of large cities is not directly correlated with the size of the total population of a country. 4) The urban pattern

shows a remarkable degree of inertia. 5) Political considerations are clearly important and most capital cities are now the largest cities in the country of which they are the chief city. 6) Before 1800 commerce was a major factor in urban growth: in the nineteenth century industry was the major factor: in the twentieth century the growth of bureaucracy and the tertiary sector has become the most important factor in the growth of the largest cities.

Professor Miklós Lackó (Budapest, Hungary) attempted in his paper to define the concept of city. According to his conception any approach to the problem must be related to the complex functions of town formation. Unfortunately statistical data are available mainly from censuses themselves dictated by the needs of public administration. In Hungary for instance this causes two directly contradictory problems. On the one hand the suburbs of the capital are not taken into account in spite of the fact that they may be regarded as part of the urban population; on the other hand, in the case of several other provincial cities the administrative boundaries are far larger than the real urban population. After discussing this methodological problem Professor Lackó turned to a specific problem, the changes in the urban population in Hungary after Second World War. During the last two decades the main economic developments in Hungary may be described as socialist industrialization which has transformed Hungarian economic and social structure as well. The Hungarian urban population has increased by 33 per cent. Professor Lackó gave more detailed data for the population growth of Budapest (35 per cent), of five other big cities (59 per cent) and of three newly created cities (population growth 800 per cent). (These cities developed in the early fifties as large centres of newly developed heavy industry, and arose mainly from small villages). In Budapest, comparing data from the 1930, 1949, 1960 and 1970 censuses, it becomes apparent that up to 1960 there was a marked tendency for the industrial population to grow (both in absolute number and in relative proportion as well), however in the last decades this tendency has changed. The main characteristic of these decades was the shift of urban population from the tertiary sector affecting both white collar, and blue collar workers in this sector. Although not to the same extent, this tendency occurred in the newly created industrial cities as well. Finally the paper claimed that a new tendency of change among the urban population in Hungary can be traced in the gradual concentration of individuals of higher social status, in Budapest in particular but in other towns as well.

The limited time left for discussion did not allow for more than a few questions to be put to the authors of the papers. Professor Poljukov from the Soviet Union gave a short description of recent developments in urban population changes in the Soviet Union, while Göran Ohlin (Uppsala) raised some important critical remarks concerning methodological issues, such

as the problem of the real and actual rate of city births, and the problem of inertia in the development of the main cities. From the floor the remarks of Professor Hanna Jedrusczak (Poland) and Eric Lampard (USA) are worth mentioning because they referred to the difficulties of treating qualitative changes in modern urban populations.

The chairman and convenor of the session, Professor Ránki, concluded by stating that both the papers presented and the discussions constituted an interesting and scholarly approaches to the problem, although it had not been possible to concentrate the topic and focus the papers and discussion on a narrower range of problems. According to Professor Ránki the papers had presented interesting views and information, and had raised important methodological questions. However, owing to different approaches they had not fully clarified what was meant by the term cities; the notion of city had widely different interpretations in the literature dealing with urbanism. He also suggested that it is very difficult to compare urban populations in the various countries due to the different size scales under consideration.

Modern tendencies in changing urban populations show that Minchinton's final argument is right in that the growth of the bureaucracy and the tertiary sector has become the most important factor. However, while that is probably valid for western developed countries in the twentieth century, the process began in Eastern Europe more recently and it might be said that by the middle of twentieth century the labour absorption of industry contributed mainly to city growth. This leads to another problem which was not treated by the papers or the discussions and that is the function of the so called parasite cities, to be found mainly in the countries of the Third World where the growth of the urban population is not connected with direct economic process. It is well known that urbanisation is not unconditionally an indicator of economic growth and that even among the European towns many might be considered more as administrative and intellectual rather than economic centers. However, in these cases a certain correlation does exist. In the Third World many cities developed as enclaves in the countryside without wider effect and without any generative function. Cities were thus created without large pulling force and the unemployment in villages pushed a proletariat into the city in contradiction even to the orthodox theory that labour shifts from low yield to high yield occupation.

The session was not able to answer to all these questions, however they might perhaps be regarded as a starting point for further investigation and discussion on this topic.

