

Branislav Šprocha – Pavol Tišliar:

Outline of the Development of Nuptiality in Slovakia between 1919 and 1937

STIMUL, Bratislava 2008, 163 p.

Development of Mortality in Slovakia between 1919 and 1937

STIMUL, Bratislava 2008, 204 p.

Fertility and Aggregate Reproduction of Population in Slovakia between 1919 and 1937

STIMUL, Bratislava 2008, 164 p.

It is probably not very common for a professional magazine like the Slovak Sociological Review to offer reviews of three books within one single review. However, after having read three books by Šprocha and Tišliar this was the only logical conclusion. I would like to bring these publications to the attention of professional public since these books were written by the same authors, refer to the same period of demographic processes in the Slovakia (first Czechoslovak republic) and were published in the same year as part of the same grant VEGA with the aim to clarify the Slovakia's population development in the inter-war period.

The very fact that the authors were able to publish three publications indicates that a very prolific and functioning duo was created. Authors still have enough time and energy left for other activities such as publishing, teaching and research.

Branislav Šprocha from Demographic Research Centre of INFOSTAT and Pavol Tišliar from the Department of Archival and Auxiliary Historical Sciences of the Faculty of Philosophy of the Comenius University offer a quite coherent picture of population development, the most important demographic processes of the period that had long been unexplored by analysing nuptiality, mortality and illness rate, natality and fertility. Researchers interested in the historic period and particular issues within the period (such as demographic behaviour, family behaviour, social structure, regional differentiation etc) had either the possibility to analyse primary statistical sources – a time-consuming and somewhat difficult task or they could study the few pioneering works that originated in the particular period or later. Works by Alojz J. Chur (1936, 1938, 1939 – Karol Kizlink et al. also cooperated on the last volume), Ján Svetoň (1958) and Vladimír Srba (2002) work with statistics and demographic processes. Naturally, these sources are known to the authors. They work and further elaborate them, though at the same time critically reflect on and revise the results (mainly the Chur's – Slovakia without the Young Generation)

The cooperation between a demographer and a historic demographer has undoubtedly been very profitable in case of an extensive demographic and archive research and the following work with and an analysis of the material. In all three publications, authors made use of existing professional literature and of the extensive demographic and statistical data sources in particular. As a result, we learn about the characteristics of period sources. However, its role is not only informative, but we also find out about the way authors work with the sources, type of problems they encounter when comparing them and possible solutions to these problems. As the basis for sources, published data on the movement of the population in the Slovakia are used, for which exact definite statistical data for the whole calendar years is available as well as censuses results. Both mentioned data sources were published in the issue of Czechoslovak statistics. During the researched period, three censuses had taken place in Slovakia. The results of the first, extraordinary in 1919 have never been completely published. Pavol Tišliar describes this census in more detail in his previous monograph (2007) 1919 extraordinary census of population in Slovakia: a contribution to the population history of Slovakia. The following censuses from 1921 and from 1930 were elaborated in detail and published in several volumes by the national statistical office. Authors draw on various statistical handbooks, yearbooks, overviews, retrospective calculations, thorough reports or topographic and statistical lexicons published by the Statistical Office. The first of the mentioned books on nuptiality describes in detail the sources and the problems that had occurred while working with and comparing them. Data for the population of Slovakia placed together with the data from the Subcarpathian Russia may serve as example. Furthermore, when monitoring the regional differences authors had to adjust the individual phases of territorial changes that had taken place in 1919 and 1937 in Slovakia. As regards the way data were published for individual regions, some were being monitored only from a certain period, and the method of forming tabular summaries or the whole methodology of publishing the data of individual demographic processes and indicators were changing.

Authors set the individual demographic processes into a wider frame; however not only theoretical, but a more specific such as the status of nuptiality in the demographic reproduction. They also talk about legal norms providing for matrimonial law in the Slovakia. The elaboration and the analysis itself of the results do not only contain absolute numbers, rough rates and the like, but use far more sophisticated methods and rates.

As a result new dimensions and possibilities for interpretation emerge. Individual researched phenomena have been analysed from the view of different factors such as sex, age, family status, nationality, religious denomination, occupation and season of the year (agricultural seasonal works and religious holidays) and provide the analysis with a very important dimension – regional peculiarities. Though the analysis became more toilsome, authors were given very important spurs to the analysis.

It seems that the individual books hold on to the same structure. Authors have clearly tried in the introductory chapter to point out the theoretical possibilities of grasping the individual processes, their importance for the overall understanding and their influence on the development of the population development. In the following chapters they gradually presented basic as well as specific rates and their development in time. This compact image of the development and the intensity of individual demographic processes was supplemented by a sociologically very inspiring effort to provide explanation for the cause of this development. Additionally authors try to set the comparison of the development in Slovakia to international context. If possible, authors give not only national, but a (as already mentioned) regional picture, too. They do not only analyse the mentioned demographic processes and phenomena, but also deal with how they are interconnected. They do not exclude other important phenomena such as divorce, separation, overall reproduction and movement of the population, different forms of migration, stillborn rate etc. The text is accompanied and supplemented by a number of statistical tables and charts even though sometimes at the expense of the text itself. Of course, in a topic like this, their status must play a starting and basic role. However, they should form part of an appendix rather than becoming abundantly presented in the text itself.

Nevertheless, the publications are interesting not only for demographers themselves, but I suppose will draw due attention of the sociologists, historians and ethnologists. They can provide the readers not only with a large number of data, but acquaint them with inspiring statistical and archive sources, they show how to work with them and help better understand mutual relations and factors influencing the development of fertility/natality, nuptiality or mortality and thus enable to see the various aspects of the life of the population.

As the authors themselves remark: “Our aim was to give a draft or rather a broader introduction into the issue and to create basic pre-work that may be followed by a deeper analysis in the future and later on based on its results by a synthesis of the population development in Slovakia in the inter-war period” (An outline of the development of nuptiality in Slovakia..., 2008, p. 7) I look forward to the synthesis. The basis has been created and the authors certainly have the necessary potential. However, I would appreciate a more sophisticated referential frame to be developed and tested since this “base component” of the works of authors has nonetheless been given insufficient dimension. I would suggest drawing inspiration from sociology and ethnology and maybe even enlarging the tandem by other professionals from the mentioned subject fields. The authors probably realize it too, that a more extensive regional research, a large amount of preserved archive material in individual regions can offer still further focus of research activities and can provide an interesting view on determining factors affecting quite large regional differences between individual regions (mainly between the north and the south of the Slovakia).

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