

Reviews

Brezák, Jozef: Basics of Demography

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Basics of Demography by Jozef Brezák has been published at a time when not only politicians and professionals, but also the general public, are becoming more and more interested in the issue of demographic development in Slovakia. This book helps readers to better understand demographic developments and their statistical and demographic monitoring. At the same time, it may be seen as an introduction to demography as an independent scientific discipline. Primarily, it is an overview suitable for students and nonprofessionals. In this sense, it does not focus on the author's scientific methods or knowledge (unless we consider the author's knowledge of working with statistical data). Nevertheless, even though an active sociologist will not be surprised by any new knowledge from the current state of demographic development, it can be useful for him/her too, for it provides a clear and comprehensive overview of basic demographic terms, methodology, and calculations regarding demographic variables, as well as a description of how these are interlinked.

Undoubtedly, the book may become a valuable part of the library of humanities students and professionals who do not work with statistics and demographic knowledge on a regular basis, but occasionally need to clarify the structure of statistical variables, statistical surveys, or basic development trends in population changes. In fact, the book can be read in two different ways.

Firstly, it is a “page-turner” from beginning to end. Even though it is structured as a brief summary of basic terms, the reader can still find it interesting. The author has intertwined the text with interesting reflections from real life (from the past or from the present) or drawn attention to interconnections between various indicators, which often give an illustrative character to that particular part of the text. Of course, this kind of reading can be tiring, especially for the reader who – being just a beginner in the field of demography – will have to go back to those terms, which he/she had not understood properly the first time. However, what we still think is positive about the book is that despite being structured as an overview of demographic terms, it can be read uninterrupted without causing the reader too much pain. In this sense, the book can be compared to a handbook. Nevertheless, the author brings attention to links and issues, which could motivate students to study them more closely and which they should be acquainted with. However, their solution falls within the scope of experts.

Secondly the book may serve as a dictionary, which can be consulted if need be. It is logically structured, and divided into parts with shorter chapters.

These are labelled in a similar fashion to a dictionary, according to the terms explained in each particular chapter, which makes the book clear. If reader decides to read the book in this way, he/she will certainly appreciate finding several interconnected terms or terms, which represent various methods of measuring similar real phenomena. Thus, the reader is guided in an easy manner as to the meaning of individual terms, and to their more appropriate use in different demographic contexts.

The book comprises 11 parts. In the first part, *Population – the subject of focus*, Brezák introduces the issue of demography. He writes about the term “population,” distinguishing it from similar terms (the people, inhabitants); and points to circumstances of its origin and duration, or rather the autochthony of population. Then, demography as a scientific discipline is introduced, as well as its subject and methods, including the subdisciplines of demography. This is complemented by a brief overview of demographic thinking dating back to the first censuses in ancient times up to the development of demography in the 19th and 20th centuries with focus on Slovak pioneers in the field of demography. Significantly, this book is supplemented by information on the history of legal and institutional conditions for the development of population surveys and their development in present-day Slovakia.

In the second chapter, *How many of us were there and are there*, the author introduces the development of population in global, European and Slovak contexts. He provides estimations and data on the development of global population growth (since the birth of the so-called contemporary man up to the present) and similar data on a European scale. More space has also been given to the history of population development on the territory of Slovakia. Here, the author highlights several turning periods that have influenced further growth of the population. In view of this, he also explains the term “demographic revolution.”

The third part, *Generations, descendants and life cycle*, aims to explain the terms mentioned. Here, Brezák notes how these terms are related to family and life cycle. The author also explains the terms’ generation and descendants in their various meanings as well as their relations to demographic variables. He distinguishes between real and hypothetical descendants, a historic and demographic understanding of generation; he shows the naming of subsequent descendants and methods for measuring the length of generation; he clarifies the understanding of the terms’ contemporaries and cohort and how there are used in demography. Brezák introduces the basic social unit of statistical surveys – the family followed by household and its various types (family and non-family). The third part brings more clarity to such terms as the life cycle of an individual, of a family and the collective life cycle of a particular generation.

In the fourth part, *Demographic statistics*, the author presents various terms from the basics of applied statistics: statistical set, structure, distribution, demographic attributes and their types, demographic units and collectivities and their types, classification in demography and its types, demographic indicators and their types, and standardization and its types. He also explains tables and graphs and how these are described in order to be read properly. At the same time, he also explains how demography works with the category of time and how this is projected into demographic analysis. An important thing about this part of the book is the description of the system of data collection in which author uses valid legislation and provides a list of institutions collecting demographic information (such as register offices, health care institutions, marriage offices, residence registration offices, courts, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, and the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, in other words, the population register office and the police).

In the fifth part, *Analysis of a population base*, Brezák aims to explain the methods for measuring the state of population (direct method and balance methods) and also basic terms related to the measuring (beginning and end of the measured period, mid population). Here the author presents basic attributes used for measuring the state of the population, namely biological characteristics (sex and age) and related demographic variables. In addition, the author analyses space structures and living (distribution and density of population), ways of registering place of birth, of residence or categorization of household, houses, and flats). The last chapters of this part are devoted to the analysis of social structures, such as marital status, state citizenship, education and employment qualification. He also focuses on indicators of economic activity, employment and affiliation to social class, nationality, and population structure according to mother tongue and religious affiliation.

The sixth part, *Marriage and divorce rate*, is the shortest. It focuses on the two indicators of social and legal development. The author presents the main methods for measuring and monitoring these indicators and trends in their development.

The seventh part, *Processes of natural variability*, presents changes in the development of a population related to the natural reproduction of population. Here, author describes elementary situations in human life related to this sort of variability (pregnancy, birth, state of health, morbidity, accident rate, and death) and various indicators used for monitoring natural variability. Brezák outlines trends in the development of various indicators from a chronological point of view, in Slovakia and set within a wider international context. This part is supplemented by a brief insight into the process of shaping a unified classification of diseases followed by a current list of classes of the International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10).

In the eighth part, *Processes related to variability in migration rates*, the author focuses on explaining the basic indicators of the mechanical, or rather spatial variability of a population. He specifies the capacity and migration turnover rates, internal and international migration, commuting mobility and indicators of other spatial mobility (indicators of the travel industry). Here too, he indicates current trends in the development of these indicators and highlights the importance of their monitoring. In addition, he brings attention to those types of travel which are not included in any demographic sources (such as travelling related to big sport events, cultural events, or pilgrimages).

The author has also included a short part called *Changes in the number of population*, in which he explains the indicators of natural increase, migration increase and total increase, and how these are linked and measured.

The tenth part, *Population growth and reproduction*, is very rich in information. Here, Brezák explains the issue of population projections and prognoses as well as demographic models. He explains in great depth the terms “stationary” and “stable” population. He provides basic biometric characteristics (life expectancy, death probability, number of survivors, number of dead, number of living, number of years of life remaining for people at the age of x), he shows how these can be used in mortality tables and applied in practice (mainly in actuarial demography related to the insurance industry). This part also includes chapters synthesizing the indicators of fertility rate, (total fertility rate, gross reproduction rate, and net reproduction rate) and their state. The author explains the indicator of life expectancy and its current state in Slovakia

The last part, *Economic and social impacts*, also serves as a conclusion. Here, the author summarizes the current trends in demographic development in Slovakia in a global context and highlights areas of social and individual life influenced by these trends. Particular attention is paid to the demographic ageing of the population (distinguishing between absolute and relative ageing) analysing it from the viewpoint of potential measures of population politics. In conclusion, Brezák highlights the importance of demographic information in the search for a population optimum, which he does not only relate to terms such as living standards, gross domestic product per capita or population maximum, but also brings attention to the fact that some countries have begun to deal with the issue of ethics and population policy.

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