

# Reflections on the Helsinki Conference on Economic and Demographic Change

*The IUSSP organized its first specialized conference on Economic and Demographic Change: Issues for the 1980's in Helsinki, Finland from 28 August to 1 September 1978. The Demographic Society in Finland, the Central Statistical Office of Finland and the Finnish Population and Family Welfare Federation represented by its Population Research Institute had the honor to act as the Finnish hosts for the IUSSP conference. Following in the Yearbook you will find evaluations and comments on the conference made by Ansley J. Coale, president of the IUSSP, and Aarno Strömmer and Aimo Pulkkinen, chairman and vice-chairman of the organizing committee.*

ANSLEY J. COALE

The Helsinki Conference in August 1978 was the first large scale conference of the IUSSP to be devoted to a single large subject rather than to the full range of demographic topics, or to the demography of a region. The genesis of the Conference can be traced to the World Population Conference at Belgrade jointly sponsored in 1965 by the United Nations and the IUSSP. Prior to 1965, it had been the custom of the Union to have plenary meetings every two years. The growth in membership and the large number both of participants and papers that characterized the Belgrade Meeting led the Union to decide to reduce the frequency of meetings from every two years to every four years. Because of the lengthened interval between plenary sessions, it was agreed that the Union could profitably sponsor additional special meetings on a regional basis. There have been regional meetings for Asia and the Far East in Sydney, for Africa in Accra, for Latin America in Mexico since 1965.

The idea of specialized conferences was proposed by the Council of the Union in 1972 when C. Chandrasekaran was President, and was formally approved in 1975 under the Presidency of Carmen Miro.

The Committee on Economics and Population under the Chairmanship of Victor Urquidi sponsored a major meeting on economic and demographic change. The various interrelations between demography and economics were of sufficient scientific interest and importance to policy to serve as the basis for a large meeting. It was also the hope both of this parent Committee on Economics and Demography and of the Organizing Committee that was later constituted, that a conference on this topic would serve to increase the attention that economists give to demographic factors, and to raise the level of knowledge of demographers about the economic aspects of their field.

The meeting was held in Helsinki as a result of the generosity of the Finnish Government in offering an eminently suitable site and excellent facilities. Its quality was greatly enhanced by the hard work of the Finnish members of the Organizing Committee in contributing to the scientific planning, in establishing flawless mechanics for the meetings, and in providing memorable hospitality.

How valuable was the conference? How well did it serve the purposes of providing useful guidance for policy and building stronger connections between economists and demographers? One year after Helsinki, I am confident of its value. The solicited papers, supplemented by the informal sessions, encompassed most of the ideas generated by economists interested in population and most of what demographers perceive as the economic causes and consequences of population trends. The plenary sessions, addressing major issues of policy, included statements by outstanding scientists, such as Alvin Weinberg and Wassily Leontief, from other fields. The discussion of mortality, morbidity, fertility, migration, labor force and employment as aspects of rural development was an unusual emphasis that filled a gap by paying attention to topics previously underemphasized. Balance was maintained by including the more conventional subject of demographic factors in the development of urban areas.

The hope of attracting the interest of a number of economists not previously concerned with demography was not fully realized, but the meeting was an important step in that direction. The selection of topics for discussion, the choice of authors and discussants, and the organization of informal sessions, did contribute to the extension of knowledge and to the interchange of ideas on topics highly pertinent to social and economic problems connected with population in the next decade. The published proceedings will serve as a valuable reference for both economists and demographers for years to come.

The IUSSP solicited reactions to the conference from a number of participants and from the members of the Council of the Union. Almost all of these appraisals were favorable. One participant said it was the best conference organized by the IUSSP that he had attended and added that it was also very much superior to most professional meetings. There was general agreement that the organizational cooperation between the IUSSP headquarters and the Finnish hosts had been effective. In particular, the availability of a volume containing the solicited papers when the meeting began, and the efficient physical arrangements contributed to the effectiveness of the meetings. Many

of the reservations and criticisms expressed by those asked for their opinions were related to the inadequate opportunities for discussion at the plenary sessions and at some of the organized sessions. These difficulties, in my opinion, are not easy to avoid in a conference that attracts several hundred participants and encompasses so many papers that a volume five centimeters thick is required for their reproduction. It was also generally agreed in the discussion by the Council at the end of the meeting that substantially more participation by economists and demographers from the less developed countries would have been desirable.

The timing of the meeting was not ideal, because the organization of such a large conference only a year after the plenary session in Mexico City created a number of difficulties, including overwork for the IUSSP staff in Liege in completing reports, preparing financial statements, etc., on one large project while getting ready for another. It was also difficult to find new authors and fresh ideas on some of the topics that were closely related to those that had been discussed in 1977. The Council contemplates a new form of meeting in the next period between plenary sessions (following the meeting in Manila in 1981). The tentative plan is to organize meetings on specialized topics of special importance to a particular region, combining the advantages of a specialized meeting and a regional meeting. One possibility is to hold a meeting somewhere in Tropical Africa in the early 1980's on mortality, subfecundity, and other topics on which African demographers and public officials have expressed concern. Such a meeting would be aimed at insuring a large participation of experts from the region, but the planning of the conference would encompass papers and discussion by experts on these topics from among the membership of the Union in all parts of the world.

The Helsinki Meeting will be remembered by most of those present as a stimulating and rewarding intellectual experience. Published results will make available to all the new ideas that the conference stimulated. One can hope that the IUSSP learns by experience and that the Conference of Helsinki will prove valuable not only in its own right, but also as a guide to the planning of better meetings in the future.

AARNO STRÖMMER  
AIMO PULKKINEN

The International Union for the Scientific Study of Population has in its fifty years' history arranged numerous workshops, seminars and conferences. These demographic happenings have been on a general or regional level internationally and they have always received well-deserved attention from demographers. From year to year their importance has grown and the interest they

arouse has spread outside the regular circle of scientists. A clear sign of this is the growing number of participants as well as the increasing attention and economic assistance given the Union by governments and international and national organizations.

The IUSSP's contribution to demographic research and the utilization of its results is indisputable throughout the world. The IUSSP's international meetings are seen as enriching experiences which convey the newest research results and stimulate and air points of view through multinational discussions about current problem areas and the aims and contents of studies attempting to shed light on them.

These international meetings have also created many new possibilities for cooperation for Finnish demographers, who have been members of the Union since the early 1950's. This work has been productive over the years. It has greatly enriched Finnish population study and in many areas has brought it firm international contacts. It was not until now, however, that the Finns were offered the opportunity to act as hosts for the Union's population conference.

As a start to a new decade of activities the Union held its first specialized conference centered on a specific set of topics. This full-scale world wide conference on Economic and Demographic Change: Issues for the 1980's united economic and demographic factors and concentrated on examining changes expected in these factors.

There were four plenaries and 15 formal sessions. In addition, four informal sessions were arranged and about a dozen meetings of various IUSSP committees as customary. During the five days of the conference 62 papers were presented and discussed. Attending the conference were 349 scientists in this field and seven observers. The total number including accompanying persons exceeded 400. And what was discussed?

The plenaries examined population, resources and the environment, the international economic system and long-range economic and population development. The formal sessions covered economic change connected with population growth and structure, with special attention to labor force, income distribution, education, savings and investments, among other topics. The economic-demographic relationships of the rural areas, the resulting phenomena as well as the corresponding problems caused by urbanization were also foci of attention. Decision making in households was seen by the population conference as an economic-demographic happening, which, in addition to determining family size, extends to both gaining an income and using it. Economic factors in migration and their effects in both the country of departure and the receiving country came up in the conference.

This was the list of matters discussed. What about the results and what the population conference had to give to the participants? Making judgements afterwards on a scientific happening like this is always a very problematic task. No matter how ambitious the aims and plans and no matter how the

concluding speeches overflow with praise, this does not yet justify conclusions to be made on the results attained and their significance. At its best this is still merely a matter of opinion formed on a purely individual basis, reflecting a view of the future and expectations for the future based on one's own experiences. Putting oneself in the position of an observer and going over everything perhaps ten years from now might sharpen the picture, if even then.

New ideas and new views may have been stimulated by a few words spoken in the conference hall or just as easily by a conversation held in the corridor between two or more parties. They may immediately set in motion a train of events or lead to this later in an entirely different context. Research work is by nature a process which forms a continuum. The more we know the further we will reach along this continuum and the more results we will achieve. This will not only benefit research itself but above all benefit societal decision making which utilizes these results.

This IUSSP conference gathered together demographers and economists. The theme was equally timely for both groups, but essential in view of the results were the viewpoints of these two different scientific fields and their varying points of departure. An interdisciplinary examination from two fields undoubtedly gave both groups of participants new ideas and the problems were thus handled very much in breadth.

Finnish demographers understandably had as representatives of the host country an excellent opportunity to participate in conference affairs. Naturally there were an exceptional number of Finns among the participants and several papers were presented also by Finns. In this way the Finns had the opportunity to present their views on an international research forum and receive feedback from the participants representing different countries. Finland had the opportunity to put four members on the eleven-member international organizing committee and thus focus attention when the papers were chosen on aspects considered central in the view of the Nordic countries. In order to make Finnish demographic happenings better known an exhibit was arranged composed of photo enlargements of graphs drawn of Finnish population development from the year 1750, of fertility and mortality separately, age and industrial structure. Calculations were included on national income as well as the prevalence of the use of contraceptives according to preliminary data from the World Fertility Survey being carried out in Finland also. The Yearbook of Population Research in Finland 1978 was distributed to the participants and it illuminated research findings of current Finnish population studies.

In sum this population conference was an excellent opportunity for Finland to make known its own demographic research and the results it has attained. Nevertheless it is clear that the Finnish researchers were mainly on the receiving end of the information. The conference aroused a great deal of interest already in the preparatory stage. From the beginning the Finnish State, among others, acted favorably toward the conference and the economic demands entailed in its organization. While the conference was in progress the Finnish

media gave widespread attention to the problems discussed. This was a clear sign that the theme had been well chosen and that the attained results would have bearing outside the conference hall.

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