

Science or Advocacy? A Comparative History of the PAA and the IUSSP

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There is an argument that a discipline does not exist until it has formal associations and institutions. The first formal associations and institutions in the field of population studies date from the 1920s. While the history of the discipline itself lies further back in academic studies in Europe, the history of the discipline's associations lies mainly in the United States and the initial driving forces were philanthropists and advocates rather than scientists. Because of these initial driving forces, from the beginning, population associations were faced with the question of whether or not the association should take a formal position on political or social issues relating to population. Through this lens of science or advocacy, the paper examines the history of the two oldest population associations, the Population Association of America and the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population.

In the 1920s, philanthropists in the United States supported the field of population studies for three reasons all of which involved increased use of contraception:

The neo-Malthusian view that (capitalist) economic development could only proceed in association with control of population growth using contraception,

The eugenics view that differential use of contraception led to differential fertility which, in turn, had implications for the quality of the population,

The feminist view that the full liberation of women involved universal access to methods of contraception.

The most controversial of these three causes was the feminist motivation and the least controversial was the eugenic motivation. In the pre-fascist 1920s, eugenics was accepted science in the Darwinian tradition. Eugenics had had its origins in the observation of differential fertility by Francis Galton in the early 1870s; the fertility of the genetically inferior was higher than the fertility of the genetically superior meaning that, overtime, through natural selection, the quality of the population would fall. Population scientists of the 1920s and 1930s argued about the number of points that the average IQ of the population would fall as a result of differential fertility. Their estimates varied between one and three points in a generation. John D. Rockefeller III and the Milbank Memorial Fund were strong supporters of eugenics and their philanthropy underpinned the creation in the late 1920s and early 1930s of the Population Reference Bureau, the International Union for the Scientific Investigation of Populations Problems (the fore-runner of the IUSSP) and the Population Association of America.

The International Union for the Scientific Investigation of Population Problems

In 1927, Margaret Sanger with financial assistance from the Milbank Memorial Fund enlisted Raymond Pearl to organise a World Population Congress be held in Geneva. She also called for the Congress to be used as a vehicle for the formation of an international population association. Pearl was Director of the Institute for Biological Research of Johns Hopkins University. He applied

statistical approaches to human biology. A Provisional Committee was set up at the end of the conference to work towards the establishment of an international union. Margaret Sanger was not a member of the organising group despite the fact that she had found the financial support that enabled the Geneva conference to take place.

The first professional association in the field of population studies was created at an assembly in Paris in 1928. It was called The International Union for the Scientific Investigation of Population Problems. It was constituted as a consortium of national associations, not of individuals. The International Union recognised 21 national associations.

The new Union was constituted with a very long list of statutes and regulations. One particular sub-statute provides a vehement and eccentrically-worded rejection of the activists and philanthropists who had organised the financial support that had helped to create the Union. Statute 1(e) reads:

The Union confines itself **solely** to scientific investigation **in the strict sense**, and **refuses** either to enter upon religious, moral, or political discussion, or as a Union to support a policy regarding population, **of any sort whatever**, particularly in the direction either of increased or diminished birth rates (IUSSP 1985: 35)

There could not have been a more strongly worded expression of the primacy of science or a more total rejection of advocacy. Margaret Sanger had no more to do with the international association that she had instigated saying only that some elements in the International Union, the Italians and the French, were pronatalist in their orientation (IUSSP 1985). It seems that the eccentric IUSIPP statute was a compromise between opposing advocacies.

Soon after its creation, IUSIPP was faced with a more extreme advocacy challenge, the rise of fascism. Two opposing conferences were held in 1931; the Rome conference (originally scheduled) and the London conference. The United States had opposed the Rome conference because of Italian fascism and this division continued to the 1935 conference in Berlin which was boycotted by the United States. While the Paris conference in 1938 was a success, during the war, the Germans attempted to take over the then Paris-based IUSIPP and direct it in the cause of fascism. This takeover and an attempt to take over the IUSIPP journal, *Population*, were resisted successfully by Adolphe Landry, the IUSIPP President. Immediately after the war, Landry and others moved to create INED and it adopted the name, *Population*, as its journal. Population and population growth were major issues in the early post-war years especially in the newly-created United Nations. With French and American endeavour, IUSIPP was recreated as the IUSSP, now with individual membership following the PAA model but members had to have high scientific credentials.

The Population Association of America

Having failed at the international level, Margaret Sanger and the Milbank Memorial Fund set out to establish a population association in the United States that would provide active support for the cause of contraception. Many of those present at the meeting to form the association had participated in the debate that had led to Statute 1(e) of IUSIPP regarding the separation of science and advocacy and they still held strongly to that view, excluding Mrs Sanger from any executive role in the association. Significantly, it was agreed that membership of the PAA should be open to all interested persons. In this regard, the PAA differed from the later-formed IUSSP which was strictly

scientists only. However, the initial arrangement was that the affairs of the PAA were to be run by an inner core of population scientists known as the College of Fellows. While this was designed to avoid the association being stacked with advocates of a particular cause, it had the effect of creating a self-serving power group, later described by Irene Taueber as 'a gentlemen's club' (Lunde 1981). The College of Fellows was abolished in 1954 when Irene Taueber was PAA president.

In the Cold War context, there was a battle for the hearts and minds of the developing countries. A series of books produced by American demographers¹ in the 1940s and 1950s, culminating in Coale and Hoover's 1958 book, *Population Growth and Economic Development in Low-Income Countries*, argued the case neo-Malthusian case for control of population growth through concerted family planning programmes. Lower birth rates would concentrate the population in the work force ages and allow scarce development capital to be spent on the quality of children rather than the quantity. It is notable that quality of children was now defined by health and education and not by parentage. The war-time actions of the Nazis had discredited eugenics and studies had confirmed the significance of health and education compared to parentage. In the 1960s and 1970s, the mantra in American demography was that economic development through family planning and capitalism would be the essential bulwark against the advance of communism.

Of the PAA in this period, Notestein said that the rule that the organisation would not take a position on any issue proved to be valuable because:

we had an organization in which people of widely divergent points of view could cooperate. Our technical work often dealt with matters that were then extremely sensitive, but since no positions were taken by the Association, the opposition was minimal. Studies that might have been viewed as dangerous proceeded with little difficulty, and I think the emergence of a consensus was greatly hastened (Notestein 1981: 487).

This is an interesting statement because it indicates that the consensus was the important outcome and the science merely a means to achieve that outcome. Simon Szreter (1993) has traced how Notestein's personal view changed over a short period of time in the late 1940s and early 1950s from the conventional demographic transition theory that fertility fell along with development to one that argued the opposite, that fertility decline was a necessary precursor to development and that it could fall prior to development.

Despite the consensus that Notestein asserted, no theoretical foundation for the assertion was provided. In this sense, it was advocacy rather than science irrespective of whether or not it was correct. This was underlined at the 1967 meeting of the PAA where the assertion was challenged by a group of graduate students who called themselves 'Concerned Demographers'. Their short history is recounted in an article by Susan Greenhalgh (1996). Effectively, the students were not permitted to hold views that varied from the consensus. According to Greenhalgh (1996: 52), the 'professors

¹ *The Future Population of Europe and the Soviet Union* by Frank Notestein, Irene Taeuber, Dudley Kirk, Ansley Coale, and Louise Kiser; *Economic Demography of Eastern and Southern Europe* by Wilbert Moore; *Europe's Population in the Interwar Years* by Dudley Kirk; *The Population of the Soviet Union: History and Prospects* by Frank Lorimer; *The Population of India and Pakistan* by Kingsley Davis; and *The Population of Japan* by Irene Taeuber.

also denied institutional and organizational resources to their youthful critics'.² Gender equity theory provides a potential theoretical framework to back the argument that fertility might fall prior to development but American demographers in this period were not open to this idea perhaps because it was the tacit theoretical underpinning of Margaret Sanger's advocacy that they had so soundly rejected.

In the three decades following the war, the IUSSP developed as an international organisation with members from both sides of the Cold War and from developing countries. The IUSSP was also closely associated with UN organisations that also had to walk the tightrope between the sometimes strident views of member countries. The Americans were frustrated by the IUSSP's failure to back their position of advocacy. As a consequence, PAA became more isolated internationally and more inwardly focussed but, in funding terms, this was of no consequence because of the rivers of gold that were flowing from US sources to US population institutions. Of the IUSSP at the end of 1970s, Frank Lorimer, a former President of IUSSP, said 'it did not, and it never has, developed effective techniques to foster enlightenment on the critically important but elusive issues' (Lorimer 1981: 490). In other words, IUSSP did not sign up to the PAA consensus on family planning programmes in developing countries. While Lorimer's choice of words may be considered somewhat extreme, IUSSP, throughout its history, has been very careful in following what was described in *Population Index* in July 1949 as a 'pure research approach'. Having different agendas, different approaches and different memberships and friends, the PAA and the IUSSP tended to drift apart from each other through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The end of the Cold War, a return to science on the part of the PAA and reforms to the IUSSP have brought them back together.

The paper elaborates extensively on the themes set out above.

References

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² I also had a personal experience of this ideological juggernaut while working at the University of Indonesia in the early 1970s.

