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Demographic development in the context of integral history

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Introduction

Historical demography was introduced in regional economic and social history by the French *Ecole des Annales*.¹ A Malthusian approach was used in most studies concerning the *ancien régime*, stressing the discrepancy between rapid population growth and the much slower growth of production which resulted in subsistence crises. Esther Boserup's theory, in which she pointed out that this gap between population and production can be reduced by innovation and the input of labour, received less support.²

The Malthusian perspective was adopted in the Netherlands by the Wageningen School, a group of historians at Wageningen University who were led first by Professor Bernard Slicher van Bath and later by Professor Ad van der Woude.³ They produced a large number of regional studies, most of which were concerned with the pre-modern period, with the Malthusian perspective as the central theme.

When the industrial period is considered, however, the Malthusian perspective no longer suffices as the central theme, and therefore historians studying this period use regional demographic development in different ways. Demographic development is sometimes used just as an introduction to a regional study without any links to other developments. It does not then form an active variable in the total study and remains a segment on its own. In other cases, demographic development is used as the context in which to place regional developments such as the development of the labour market, labour migration, the formation and size of social groups and demand factors influencing relative prices.

Unfortunately most studies have used the first approach. The Integral History project, however, follows the second one, aiming to link demographic development to as many other societal variables as possible.

¹ See for instance P. Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730* (Paris 1960).

² E. Boserup, *Population and technology* (Oxford 1981).

³ See the 42 volumes of *A.A.G. Bijdragen*.

Demographic development in a regional setting

In order to be able to link demographic development to other societal variables it is necessary first to reconstruct the general characteristics of this demographic development. This has been carried out for the Groningen clay area by Richard Paping for the period 1750–1860 and by Geurt Collenteur for the period 1860–1920.⁴ Knowledge of regional demographic development is an excellent starting point for the reconstruction of regional societal development. In the context of the Integral History project, however, the goals are more ambitious. The ultimate aim is not the reconstruction of the developments in just one region but the construction of a model which includes the main aspects of regional development in the nineteenth century, differentiated into general and region-specific aspects. Therefore, it is very pleasing that it will be possible to compare the results for the Groningen clay area with those obtained using similar methodology in the Brabant sand area in the Netherlands, and in the Karelian, Olonets, Yaroslavl and Tambov areas in Russia.

In this research the region is considered as a laboratory serving wider aims. The impact of the major societal transitions in the nineteenth century – the economic, demographic, political, cultural and religious transitions – are followed for various regions.⁵

The demographic transition is the best documented thus far. The results of cohort analysis in four regions were compared in the book *Where the twain meet* in order to determine how the age at marriage, the death rate and the birth rate developed. The general characteristics of the demographic transition, as described in the general literature, were found to be true for the Groningen clay area particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century. There was a rise in the age at marriage, longer life expectancy and a fall in the number of children born in individual families, accompanied by a rise in the number of nuclear families.⁶ In these respects the predominantly Roman Catholic province of Brabant lagged somewhat behind. The results for the Russian regions are less clear due to a lack of information. It seems, however, that there was a drop in the birth and death rates there also, as well as a rise in the number of nuclear families and in the age at marriage, so that there was some convergence to the Dutch pattern.⁷

⁴ R. Paping, *Voor een handvol stuivers. Werken verdienen en besteden: de levensstandaard van boeren, arbeiders en middenstanders op de Groninger klei, 1770-1860* (Groningen 1995); G. Collenteur, 'Consistency in matters of life and death?', chapter 6 in this volume.

⁵ P. Kooij, 'Introduction. The Integral History project', in: P. Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet. Dutch and Russian regional development in a comparative perspective 1800-1917* (Groningen/Wageningen 1998) 1-6.

⁶ Kooij, *Where the twain meet*, chapters 18 and 20.

⁷ P. Kooij, 'Dutch and Russian regions compared. Some results of cohort analysis', in: Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet*, 223-228.

Cohort analysis is performed at the level of succeeding generations. This has the advantage that changing demographic patterns are analysed for a group of people who enter the marriage market at about the same time. The use of birth cohorts also provides information about which people did not marry at all. This approach allows new patterns to be discerned more quickly than when the whole population is taken into account, with earlier generations with their different marriage patterns and age distribution masking the changes taking place.

A cohort is, in fact, only representative for itself and for a specific generation, and even when analysing these generations two problems have been encountered which have yet to be solved, apart from the problem of the sources.

The first of these is outmigration. About 30% of the generations studied were lost because they migrated outside the clay area. These people must be followed in order to find out whether they show common demographic characteristics. It is possible that this group, or part of it, was more modern than those who remained behind. It is also possible that these people adapted their demographic behaviour to the pattern which was manifest in the areas to which they migrated modern in the big cities in the west and traditional in the country. It will be necessary to follow these people in order to evaluate the conclusions made for those who remained.⁸ There are indications that people from the clay area who migrated to large cities did not adapt themselves to the modern urban pattern. In the city of Groningen, migrants from the clay area village of Hoogkerk (cohort 1870) raised old-fashioned large families. The 10 women from Hoogkerk who remained in the city of Groningen during their whole fertile period gave birth to a total of 72 children, whereas the average for the cohort born in 1870 in the city was 4.2.

The second problem is immigration. People from outside the clay area moved in to take the places of those who left and it is possible that they had different norms and values concerning demography. These people must, therefore, also be analysed, particularly those belonging to the same generation, to be used as a control group to find out if changes in demographic patterns can be attributed to autochthonal as well as to allochthonous people.

However, despite these uncertainties, enough is known about the demographic transition and demographic development in general in the Groningen clay area to link these developments to the other societal transitions. In fact, all transitions at the level of one village, that of Hoogkerk which is situated a little to the west of the city of Groningen, have been studied. The village

⁸ This research is now being performed by Riemke Westerholt.

Table 1 The outcomes of the transitions in the individual domains

	Economic unification and industrialization	Demographic transition	Political unification and party formation	Enlightenment	Secularization and orthodoxy
Economic domain	Extension of the market Diversification of the occupational structure Economic growth	Extension of the labour market	Free market Opposition of labour versus capital	Disappearance of the moral economy	Corporatism versus individualism
Demographic domain	Labour migration	Slight fall in birth rate Fall in death rate Drop in age at marriage	Codification of opinions concerning morality	Family planning Education	Differentiation in opinions concerning marriage
Social domain	Growth of social distance Social mobility	Growth in number of nuclear families	Sharpening of social relations	Development of class consciousness	Pluralism
Political domain	Development of economic infrastructure	Development of social infrastructure	Patriotism Liberalism Socialism	Issuing of rules Spread of civilization from middle to lower classes	Cleavage
Cultural domain	Commercialization	Acceptance of birth control	Formulation of group codes	Disappearance of popular culture	Differentiation in social control
Religious domain	Professionalization and commercialization of religious care	Relative changes in denominations	Separation of church and state	Latitudinarianism	Orthodoxy versus secularization

Source: Kooij (ed.), *Dorp naast een stad*, 342.

of Hoogkerk industrialized early, partly as an overflow of the city of Groningen, so that the major transitions appeared more clearly and prominently.⁹

Table 1 shows the main ways in which the transitions manifested themselves in the different domains. The effects of the transitions on the different domains of society are shown in the columns, while how the transitions occurring in a specific domain affected the other domains is shown in the rows. The whole matrix gives a complete overview of the main changes in this village. It may be expected that these changes also occurred in the entire region.

The effects of the demographic transition

The column for demographic transition shows the ways in which this transition took place. In the economic domain the demographic transition resulted in an increase of the labour market because the birth rate remained higher than the death rate. However, this increase was not as large as it would have been had the demographic transition not taken place, since the birth surplus would then have been much higher. The increase in the labour market, however, did result in a degree of proletarianization, especially of the lowest income group, that of the agricultural labourers.¹⁰ This was reinforced by the agrarian depression, one of the main outcomes of economic unification, which in its turn was one of the main characteristics of the economic transition.

Research by Paping and Collenteur centres on this aspect but also includes consideration of labour migration. The analysis of migration within the clay area and outmigration to other parts of the country will not just be of interest in tracing differentiation in demographic patterns, as has been pointed out above, because migration is also an important part of the labour market strategies of individuals and families. Cohort analysis is an appropriate tool for relating the complete life cycle of individuals and families to the developments of the labour market. At the present time a great deal is known about the labour market strategies of succeeding generations who stayed in the Groningen clay area or moved to the adjacent peat area,¹¹ but not enough is yet known about people who moved to other parts of the country. A large number of cohort members migrated to America. During the agrarian depression between 1878 and 1895, migration to the USA was a short-term strategy to escape unemployment and poverty (push), but after 1900 more

⁹ P. Kooij (ed.), *Dorp naast een stad. Hoogkerk 1770-1914* (Assen 1993).

¹⁰ Paping, *Voor een handvol stuivers*.

¹¹ R. Paping, 'Gezinnen en cohorten: arbeidsstrategieën in een marktgerichte agrarische economie: de Groningse kleigebieden 1830-1920', in: J. Kok et al., *Levensloop en levenslot. Arbeidsstrategieën van gezinnen in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Groningen/Wageningen 1999) 17-87.

people emigrated in order to obtain a better future, especially for their children (pull).¹²

Migration to the regional capital, the city of Groningen, has also been subjected to cohort analysis. Comparison of a Groningen birth cohort (1880) and a cohort of young immigrants at the beginning of the twentieth century showed that the better jobs were taken by the people born in Groningen. There was no unemployment at all in that group while the immigrants showed 28.4% unemployment. In fact, at that time Groningen had a dual labour market, where the modern sector with the better paid jobs was dominated by people born locally.¹³

The effects of the demographic transition in the demographic domain have already been mentioned. In the social domain the main result was the growth in the number of nuclear families, which also had effects on the economics of the family life cycle. Since fewer people from the older generations were living with their married children, mothers found it more difficult to combine a job with bringing up their children.

In the political domain, the growth of the population together with the cultural transition, the Enlightenment, caused views on education to change, resulting in the development of a more sophisticated educational system which was characterized by a more or less national curriculum and the obligation for children to attend school until they were twelve years old. In theory this meant that children were not available for the labour market, but in practice this was not always the case, especially in rural areas. Housing was another aspect of the social infrastructure that changed. More nuclear families required more houses and, moreover, the cultural transition brought new ideas about what was regarded as civilized, so that separate rooms were needed for parents, sons and daughters rather than the whole family sleeping together in the same room.

Other elements of the social infrastructure were health care and poor relief. Compulsory vaccination against some contagious diseases was introduced in order to reduce infant and child mortality. This, however, did not have much effect because many parents did not have their children vaccinated, sometimes because of the cost, sometimes from neglect, and sometimes because their orthodox religious denomination disapproved of it. A smallpox epidemic in 1870/1871 still claimed many victims among the members of the 1870 birth cohort and, of course, their relatives. It seems that a rise in average incomes around the turn of the century, which enabled people to strengthen

¹² Paping, 'Gezinnen en cohorten', 74.

¹³ P. Kooij, 'Artisans and the labour market in Dutch provincial capitals around 1900', in: G. Crossick (ed.), *The artisan and the European town 1500-1900* (Aldershot 1997) 239-257.

their resistance to disease, did much more to reduce infant and child mortality.¹⁴

The growth of poor relief can be seen in part as a result of the discrepancy between the growth of the population and the development of the labour market. The Malthusian trap is evident here but in a much less severe form. The organization of poor relief, though, was also dependent on the available funds, which varied from village to village, and on the vision of the organizers, who were partly the municipality and partly the churches.

The most important transition in the cultural domain was the acceptance of birth control, also a result of the Enlightenment, although some orthodox groups, for instance the new reformed church which had split off from the official reformed church in 1834, forbade all forms of birth control. The Roman Catholic church, prominent in Brabant and other areas in the south of the Netherlands, was also against practising any form of birth control. The priests encouraged the population to have as many children as possible in order to increase the Roman Catholic share in the Dutch population. The end result of the religious transition was a slight increase in the total number of religious denominations while secularization particularly affected the official reformed church.

The effects of change in other domains

Table 1 also shows how changes in other domains were related to demographic development. This can be seen in the demographic domain row. Most of these relationships have already been mentioned in the previous section, but this part of the table clearly shows that the demographic transition not only influenced all the domains but also that it was related to the transitions in the other domains. The extension of the labour market caused by the growth of available labour as a result of the increase in the population was accompanied by labour migration which was made possible by the economic transition as characterized by economic unification.

Political transition was characterized by political unification, which also implied uniform legislation for the whole country. It was also in this context that new opinions on morality, for instance on child care, marital faith and prostitution, were incorporated into the legal system.¹⁵ These opinions, in their turn, were partly the results of the cultural transition, the Enlightenment, and partly of the religious transition. This religious transition, characterized by secularization and more liberal opinions on the one hand, and orthodoxy and more fundamental opinions on the other, advanced divergent

¹⁴ P. Kooij, *Groningen 1870-1914. Sociale verandering en economische ontwikkeling in een regionaal centrum* (Assen/Maastricht 1987) chapter 5.

¹⁵ See V. Sleebe, *In termen van fatsoen. Sociale controle in het Groningse kleigebied 1770-1914* (Assen 1994).

opinions concerning marriage and limiting the number of children in the family.

Conclusion

All the cells in the matrix of Table 1 have to be studied within the Integral History project. The developments mentioned in these cells belong partly to the same domain and were partly caused by the same transition. But since all five transitions influenced each other, and since each of the five transitions had effects in all of the six domains, all the cells are interrelated.¹⁶ Together they constitute the essence of a regional history and they create the opportunity to compare regional histories with each other. The comparison of demographic developments is only a first step in that direction, but an important one.

¹⁶ A social transition does not figure in this table. This is because all changes are studied at the level of social groups. The social domain row mentions the main aspects of social change caused by the five transitions.