

## **A CRITICAL APPROACH TO THE DEMOGRAPHIC POLICY**

**Assoc. Professor Carmen Radu, Ph.D.  
University of Craiova,  
Faculty of Economy and Business Administration**

**Abstract:** This study presents some critical opinions regarding the definition of the demographic policy, pointing out the differences between the two concepts – population policies and demographic policy –, the history and the evolution of the demographic policy during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its contradictory measures and their opposite effects in different countries; the major international plans adopted in this field and its results until the present time.

**Key words:** demographic policy, population policies, birth control, pronatalist policy.

The population grows according to an objective legitimacy, the demographic transition being the expression of the adaptation of the demographic phenomena – especially of fertility – to the changes of the economic, social and cultural conditions of society. The life points out that in the process of those adaptations appear moments of tension and lack of balance between population and economy and that the ensuring of a durable development also presupposes measures in the population field, to hinder or stimulate its growth. Separately, such measures that have influence on population, existed long time ago. But only after the second World War, when the effects of the fast increase of the population or its decline became obvious, the necessity of adopting, by all countries, some population policy measures, it was outlined.

The state intervention in the demographic sphere and, especially in the determination of the ideal dimension of the family, can not be considered *a priori*. It must be completely justified: what is the reason of the state action in the population field and which are its intervention means?

Roland Pressat [1] defines the population policy like *the series of measures, more often adopted by the public power, destined to influence the demographic evolution*. He adds that there are numerous the state interventions which have, in some way, influence on the population by involving quantitative or qualitative changes, so that an extensive definition of the population policy could include all decisions regarding the community. A more restrictive definition, and then more adequate, in the author opinion, it only maintains the adopted measures with the deliberate intention to modify the demographic evolution course. These measures can be legislated for the purpose of favouring the population increase or decrease; in other words, the fixed objective can be a higher population growth rate, for the improvement of the depopulating tendency, or the *zero increase*, for the achievement of a stationary population condition.

The determinants of the population policy can be underlined by studying the population doctrines, defined by Roland Pressat like *the series of opinions, conceptions regarding the desirable characteristics of a population, from the point of view of its number, structure and evolution and of the demographic phenomena which condition them*.

If the populationism tendency prevailed in all period of the Middle Ages – it manifested more by the affirming of the respect of the fertility and life than by the explanation of the demographic growth advantages - , the mercantilism of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and the physiocracy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, even if they were, firstly, the economic doctrines, they also constituted the support of a demographic thought, favourable to the demographic expansion, by considering the man like a source of wealth (at the physiocrats we meet a pre-malthusian elements: the underlining of the tendency of population to put pressure on resources).

At the same time as Malthus and the neo-malthusian movement that followed him, the populationism tendencies were vehemently attacked; the Malthus partisans considered the controls on population, by sexual abstinence or birth control, as a mean of improvement the working-class extreme poverty; they will be the echo of different economists proposals: Ricardo and Stuart in England, J. B. Say in France. For the Malthus partisans, any action which concerns the changing of the inhabitants number from an area, it is illusory, as long as the population number is depending on the resources and its growth has not the positive effects on them. J. B. Say perfectly summarizes this point of view in *Cours d'économie politique* (1840), by indicating as a cosequence of the Malthus population principle *the perfect inutility of all public measures for the population increase. If the people can multiply, that is only possible through actions favourable for the multiplication of the products* [2]. The Malthus population law was combated by the Utopian socialists and Marxists, who considered it specific to capitalism and worthless in the communist societies.

In the contemporary world, the antagonistic doctrinaire positions appear, especially for the problems of the under-developed countries population: in some specialists opinion, the problems of those countries will be solved on its own from the moment that they will achieve an adequate economic development; other specialists consider that the economic development from those areas will not be produced before the significant decreasing of their population growth rate.

If between the two World Wars, the refering to the *optimal population* concept it often was an argument in favour of the partisans of the short time limitation of the population from a country or from another, after that, the *zero increase* slogan mobilized the people worried about the powerful global demographic growth.

We can affirm that until the ending of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the interventionism in the demographic field was based, in the first place, by political reasons. From Bodin to Quesnay and Vauban, for the mercantilists and physiocrats, *the men are the power of a state and the greatness of a king is measured by the number of his people* [2]. From the same perspective – of the appreciation of advantages and disadvantages generated by a specific demographic situation – it can be explained the population policies of the Nazi Germany, the fascist Italy and the imperialist Japan, before the second World War, with the object of increasing their power at the international level, the pronatalist policy from France in the thirties, due to the fear against the demographic weakening of the nation or from Romania, between 1965-1990. At the antipode, they are the policies of encouraging the birth limitation, used in the present time in most under-developed countries, like a brake in their overpopulation phenomenon way.

The appearance of the population stagnation thesis – at the same time with the great economic crisis – it imprints an economical reason to the population policies. But the economic argument will not prevail until 1950, when, at the same time with the demographic growth in the under-developed countries, the way for fertility decreasing

policies in these areas, was wide open: India (1951), Egypt (1953). In a parallel direction, the natalist fears, which *baby-boom* made them forgotten, reappear in the developed countries. At the ending of the 60<sup>s</sup>, the most developed countries take measures for demographic increase (especially in the Eastern Europe countries, where the economic dirigism more easily adapts to the state intervention in the population field). The economic arguments, predominantly presents in the developed countries population policy, are still accompanied by the major concern for the renewing of the generations, in which absence, in time, the population number is reduced.

The population policy means are diverse; theoretically, they aim at all phenomena that influence the demographic evolution: natality, mortality, nuptiality, migration; practically, they may be translated as inciting policies (natalist measures, immigrants acceptance policy, facilities for using the contraceptive methods) or restrictive policies (the interdiction of the precocious marriages, the severe repression of the abortion, obstacles in the spreading of the birth control methods).

It is almost unanimously recognized and accepted the fact that the population policy measures especially concern two demographic phenomena: fertility and migration.

Regarding the fertility, in a controled fertility regime – the effective births are equal to the desired births -, the justification of the state intervention presupposes that the free choice of the couples does not conduct to an optimal situation for the population. A first argument is based on the existence of the external effects: the children birth involves costs and economic advantages both for parents and for nation. The children can represent a net loss for parents and a net earnings for community or, contrary, they can represent an earnings for parents and an additional burden for community; in both cases, the state must intervene (in all liberal economists opinion, a legitimate intervention), either to compensate the families, that is reflected in a natalist policy, or to practise a birth limitation policy.

A second argument refers to the incomes redistribution and to the inter-generations solidarity. The increase of the family dimension generally involves the decrease of the incomes per family member. As far as the population increase is desired, the state intervention, for moderation of the inequalities due of supplementary children presence, it appears justified. If this argument is enough fragile, the second dimension of the generations solidarity deserves all attention. Irrespective of the technical methods of the retirement system – capitalization or distribution – the active persons at a period of time, who contributed to the guarantee of the resources level for the retired persons at the last period of time, they can not be ensured that their resources, in the form of retired pay, will be honour by the children at the future period of time, unless the population growth rate maintains between some limits that permit, taking into account the labour productivity progress, the guaranteeing of the purchasing power of their debts.

Finally, the community survival objective, that involves the generations replacement, can be considered, from an economical point of view, a good, which only the state, like an expression of the national will, has the power to appreciate and to provide it.

Concerning the fertility, in the developed countries between the two World Wars, the demographic increasing policies aimed the constraint or restriction measures which have been remained in force after that, in the period of the increasing of natality. The last 30 years evolution is marked, on the other hand, by a total access to birth

control, in parallel with inciting and stimulative state measures which attempt to change the decreasing tendencies of fertility. The state intervention means include financial assistance (familial allowances, structured by the number and the age of children and the births calendar or proportional fiscal reductions), payment in kind and other direct benefits (creche, maternity leave).

The effectiveness of the natalist policies are measured both by anticipated direct effects and by contrary unexpected effects, which they involve. The efficacy presumption of the natalist interventions implicitly presupposes that the state actions and the individual efforts are additives; the natalist measures are as more efficient as they have the sense desired by couples. The inverse relation between fertility and activity – irrespective of the sense of causality – makes the increasing tendency of women salaried activity to be an essential element for the counteracting the fertility increase. The efficacy of the natalist policy is, this way, subordinated at the measures which consolidate the compatibility between woman professional activity and procreation; the measures which ignore this problem have not a good hand.

The freeing of legislation in matters of birth control and abortion is, at present, a definite gain in most of the countries. There are very rare the examples in which the liberal dispositions have been suspended; in the case of Romania, which passed from unconditionally authorizing of abortion (1957) to its complete interdiction (1966) is quite extraordinary. It is interesting to mention the fact that the impact of those dispositions was rapidly absorbed by a stabilization of the phenomenon at a comparable value (even lower) with the antecedent level.

In the under-developed countries, the population stabilization in the last decades, has presupposed the efficacy of birth control policies. The main components of the anti-natalist measures were the increasing of age at marriage and the birth control within families. They were applied in the most numerous population two countries: China and India.

Concerning the external migration, we must differently consider the two sides of the phenomenon: immigration and emigration. Regarding the foreign immigration, the legitimacy of public intervention was never contested; the state has to define the entrance and remaining conditions on the national territory for the foreigners. Between a system that fixes a maximal limit for immigration and a free circulation system, there are many intermediary variants, which leave to companies and state option to have recourse to immigrants and to maintain their number between precise limits. These are the policies practised by the Western Europe until the middle of the 70<sup>s</sup>.

Regarding the emigration, the developed countries consider its interdiction like a privation of personal liberty and the possible conflicts between public and private interest have been solved in the last one favour. The policy in this field has, on the other hand, diverse forms in countries with different socio-economic regimes.

We can conclude that in the international migration sphere, the policies of the emigration countries and those of the immigrations countries are decisives as concerning the amplitude, the duration and the tendency of the migratory flows.

Even in the specialized literature the equals sign is often put between the population policy and the demographic policy, regarding the contents and the significance of those two concepts, we assume the opinion that the first concept is more comprehensive. Practically, on one way or another, all states adopt measures concerning population; but these measures do not always intend to reduce or to

stimulate the population growth; its reason and sense concern the wider area of the population prosperity, the quality of life.

Thus, a society can take action on demographic phenomena manifesting, regarding also another purpose than the direct action on the demographic evolution:

- taking action on mortality, by spreading the hygiene and medical care services, the society responds to an universal demands, that of health amelioration and of increase of life duration; the effect of those actions on the demographic evolution still remains considerable;
- correcting the inequality of families living conditions, due to those variable dimensions, by initiating diverse allowances and advantages; in this way the public power can positively act on natality, without that policy having a natalist intentions;
- the possibilities, wide spreaded at present, of having recourse to abortion, to inform and to have access to birth control, have certain consequences on the demographic evolutions; even if these facilities have, more often, as purpose, the giving back to families or couples the total control on their desired off-spring.

These examples indicate how difficult is the delimitation between the demographic policy, in the strict sense of the word, and the policies totally strange from that; the legislator intensions in this field are not always clear, even when they do not deliberately conceal the desired results.

From this last point of view, it is difficult to define the policies applied in the European socialist countries, where, more often, the legislation permitted, after 1956, to have massive access to abortion, that represented an obstacle to population growth. The Malthusian behaviour, encouraged this way, was in opposition with the severe conviction of Malthus opinions by the official ideologies from those countries.

China, on the other side, considerably succeeded to hinder its population growth by encouraging, even imposing, the late marriages, beside the other anti-natalist technics; it justified this policy like a way to protect the mothers health and to improve the children growing up and education conditions; as though, it is obvious the pure demographic reason which its official policy is based on.

In the contemporary world, the major actions of the population policies remain that concern the counteracting of the dangerous quantitative evolutions. On the other side, the most developed countries reached a sufficient low fertility levels as their maintaining to involve, in time, the depopulation (some of those countries had already reached on this situation); the incertitude in reference to the public action means and the government indifference, they often cause to not take any decisive measures. The situation is reverse in a large number of under-developed countries, sensible to the obstacle against their economic development which a powerful demographic growth can be; for that reason, they adopte a birth limitation measures.

In the migration field – especially external migration – the will of government is most significantly affirmed; the public action means are the most sure, either they aim to close the frontier (is the case for the most socialist countries), or they adopt a restrictive modalities at the immigrants receiving. In the Western Europe countries, which received in the period 1960-1980 an important number of immigrants, that phenomenon has more belong to the labour policy – the necessity of labour for disadvantaged sectors of economy -, as to pure demographic policy, which would aim, for example, the improvement of structure of population by age. In the internal

migration domain, the government actions for directing its flows, belong to the population policy only in proportion as they aim changes in the local populations evolution; these interventions, rarely imperative, are especially taken through the economic stimulants qualified to fix population residence in the areas which are afflicted with depopulation process.

For the first time, at the World Conference for Population from Bucharest, 1974, the 137 participant countries, passing beyond the ideological obstacles and the economic and social differences, consensually adopted a World Acting Plan for Population, a political instrument in the wider context of the global strategies, having for an object the national and international progress.

After ten years, at the International Conference for Population and Development, Cairo, 1994, the delegates from 179 countries have negotiated the Action Programme for Population and Development for the next 20 years. The document, adopted unanimously, stipulates a new strategy which emphasizes on the numerous connections between population and development, on providing for individual women and men wants, more than on attaining a demographic purpose. The central element of this programme is considered *the increasing of women role, who must have more options through a wider access to the education and health services and through the promoting of the aptitudes and employment improvement*. The programme provides that the family planning services must become available on the international scale until the year 2015, even earlier, like a component of a more extensive approach to health and reproduction rights.

The action programme includes objectives referring to education especially for the young women and to continuously reducing of the infant and maternal mortality rates. It also includes the problems relating to population, environment, consumption models, family, internal and external migration, HIV/SIDA control, information, education and communication, technology, research and development. The programme is based on 15 principles that ensure the equilibrium between the recognition of the individual human rights and the nation rights for development: equality and equity between the two sexes and the increasing of the human role; integration of population in sustainable development programmes and strategies; eradication of poverty; access to health care, reproduction and family planning services; family role; right to education; children condition; emigrants and refugees rights.

After ten years from the Cairo Accord, the UNFPA Report about the World Population Situation in 2004, underlines that all involved countries have made a real progress for the achievement of a daring action plan at the global level, by tackling of the connections between the decrease of poverty, women rights and universal access to reproduction health services; in the last ten years, the quality and disponibility of family planning programmes has been improved, the maternal health and the efforts for HIV prevention have become priorities and the governments have adopted the action plan for population and development from Cairo like an essential programme for acquirement the development objectives.



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