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**HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHY IN  
HUNGARY: A HISTORY OF RESEARCH**

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**WORKING PAPERS ON POPULATION,  
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2012



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# 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

## The Problem of Territories

In sketching an outline of historical demography in Hungary, two successive periods can and must be considered in relation to two territories. One of these lasts from the Middle Ages to the end of the First World War; this is the historical Kingdom of Hungary, namely the whole area of the Carpathian Basin, and the greater part of today's Croatia. This territorial approach has two advantages and two minor disadvantages. Its most important advantage is that it seems to be congruent with the geographical area in which the relevant social and demographic processes took place from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century, and to which the integrated sources refer. In addition, demographic research within this framework (and this is the second advantage) makes the region a kind of laboratory of demographic analysis, since it offers a wider range of comparisons compared to other European countries owing to the great cultural, economic and geographical variety of the Carpathian Basin. Related to this are disadvantages, though these are far less important from a professional point of view. These arise from the fact that nowadays sources are spread across archives held in seven different countries, and from the fact that scientific publications and documents written over the last 80 to 90 years are written in several different languages; indeed, Latin, German and Hungarian, which were necessary for understanding earlier sources, may no longer be sufficient.

The second territory and period to be investigated by historical demography in Hungary is the one that has existed from 1920 to the present day. Demographic processes since then have (to much of an extent) taken place within this territory, and sources suitable for the reconstitution of these are also created following the administrative structure of this area (Map 1).

From what has been said so far, it can be clearly inferred that a basic question for Hungarian historical demographic research is the chronological framework used for its analysis. The development of the population in Hungary can be divided into three basic periods. The first division line is demarcated by the acceleration of the disintegration of the traditional demographic system and the beginning of the demographic transition which took place around the 1870s.<sup>2</sup> Naturally, these division lines are flexible. In the economically and socially underdeveloped peripheries – especially in the mountainous regions of the Carpathians – and in the social groups abandoning their old social and demographic patterns more slowly (for example gypsy communities) this turning point slips to a later date.

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<sup>1</sup> In the present study results published in foreign languages are especially referred to. The works written in Hungarian are mentioned only if they are particularly significant.

<sup>2</sup> If we wish to identify the turning point, it may well be linked to the cholera epidemic of 1872–73.

Map 1  
*Current and Historical Boundaries of the Territory of the  
 Hungarian Kingdom*



Source: based on a map of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) dating from around 1920.

The second division line is demarcated by the changes in the territory of Hungary as a result of the peace treaties following the First World War, which placed the population of the previously existing historical country into a different regional, economic, social and political situation. The influence of this is revealed not only in the growing regional differentiation of demographic processes (partly politically supported) within the Basin, but also in the new framework of demographic sources, both in terms of content and regionality, and this cannot be left out of consideration in a field of research so strongly dependent on contemporaneous sources of official data. Finally, the third division line is around the end of the first demographic transition and the beginning of the second, around the 1960s.

## The Problem of Sources

As to the sources used by historical demographic research, the main types are identical with those found elsewhere in Christian Europe. The differences are shown especially in the chronology of sources – in the Hungarian Kingdom innovations started later and changes took place at a slower pace than in the societies of the economic and cultural centres of the West. For example parish registration according to the regulations of the Council of Trent was started in the second half of the sixteenth century in the Carpathian Basin, but only in regions not directly threatened by the Turkish wars, while in the territory under Turkish rule it was rarely introduced. In such adverse conditions, barely more than one hundred parish registers (of births, marriages and deaths) were produced up until the middle of the seventeenth century (Table 1). The registration of demographic events became more frequent only from the beginning of the eighteenth century, and was widespread by the end of that century (Fügedi 1980). However, a different rate can be seen in the different religious denominations. The picture above refers only to the Western Christian churches. Parish



registration in the case of the Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches and also in the Jewish denomination was often delayed until the start (or even middle) of the nineteenth century in the eastern part of the Carpathian Basin, which already marks the beginnings of the official statistical system.

Table 1  
*The Advance of Parish Registration in the Hungarian Kingdom  
by Churches and Languages*

Period	Roman Catholic		Calvinist	Lutheran	Greek Catholic		Greek Orthodox	Total <sup>a</sup>	N
	Croats	Mixed population <sup>b</sup>	Hungarians	Mixed population <sup>c</sup>	Ruthenians	Romanians	Serbians		
	Percentage								
Before 1600	0.9	0.1	0.3	0.5	–	–	–	0.2	18
1600–1649	1.3	2.6	0.3	2.0	–	–	–	1.2	100
1650–1699	21.4	15.2	1.1	4.9	0.5	–	0.5	7.5	615
1700–1749	27.5	<b>37.5</b>	21.7	26.5	4.4	0.5	16.2	22.9	1872
1750–1799	<b>40.2</b>	36.4	<b>62.9</b>	<b>49.8</b>	<b>65.0</b>	13.3	<b>64.6</b>	<b>42.2</b>	3443
1800–1829	6.5	6.8	9.6	11.3	24.9	<b>51.6</b>	4.5	17.1	1394
Since 1830	0.9	1.1	2.5	4.9	3.2	34.3	7.1	8.0	655
Unknown	1.3	0.3	1.5	–	2.0	0.3	7.1	0.9	74
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	8171
N	552	2938	1887	548	563	1485	198	8171	

<sup>a</sup>Parishes founded before 1880, without Greek orthodox Romanians, Lutheran Saxons and Hungarian Unitarians in Transylvania.

<sup>b</sup>Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks, and Slovenians.

<sup>c</sup>Germans, Slovaks, and Hungarians.

*Source:* Author's calculations based on church records.

The registration of the population in respect of number and structure, suitable for the purposes of demographic research, was first started in the 1770s in the Hungarian Kingdom, and the first census took place in 1785 (Thirring 1931a). However, it was followed by a long pause of 66 years. The continuous sequence of modern censuses started in 1851. During the period in between the first and second census, that is from 1804 to 1847, only the non-privileged population was listed in randomly selected years, and clergy and noblemen were excluded (Thirring 1936).<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, prior to the 1770s the only attempt to reconstruct changes in the population within the Carpathian Basin was for the purpose of assessment of taxes. This type of source first appeared in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, though an unbroken sequence of information is available from the 1540s, and even this refers only to the territories free from Turkish rule until the end of seventeenth century. These datasets, with only a few exceptions, are broken down to settlement but not to household, which makes them suitable only for estimation of the number of inhabitants without any demographic details. Although some statistics from the sixteenth century referring to the Christian population living in the territory under Turkish rule are available on household level, they still do not include each person, not to mention data on age and sex. Moreover, this type of source vanishes after a few decades, rendering the seventeenth century a blank period in the whole Carpathian Basin in respect of demographic sources.

<sup>3</sup> Further informations are available on the census type historical sources in the paper of Őri and Pakot (2011).

## **2 The First Steps: The Beginnings of Historical Demography in Hungary**

The two predecessors of demographic research belong to the field of (so-called) population history: the collection of sources on the history of public health from the middle of the nineteenth century and the making of chronological datasets based on the number of inhabitants broken down into the different parishes in the twin city of Buda and Pest by Joseph Kőrösy (1844–1906), the first director of the Budapest Statistical Office (Linzbauer 1852–1861; Kőrösy 1873). However, population history as an independent field of research became more widely accepted only in the 1890s in Hungary. A general feature of research at that time was that each author dealt with historical populations as a ‘hobby’, and the results published were therefore the outcome of personal interest and effort. There is one exception to this, the national tax assessment from 1715 to 1720, which was published in a thick volume by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) as an attempt to reconstruct the number of people living in the different settlements as well as the structure of native languages spoken in the whole Carpathian Basin (Acsády 1896).

The most common research topics of that period were changes in the number of inhabitants, changes in the ethnic composition, the population history of separate regions and the source publications. Another group is constituted by the works on the history of public health and epidemics; however, with a few exceptions these were focused on medical history rather than the demographic impact of epidemics (Wertner 1880). The majority of research was concerned with descriptive or less exciting subjects for the professional researcher today, while the greater part of published or analysed sources were based on tax assessments, not really valuable from the demographic point of view. The only exception to this was Gustav Thirring (1861–1941), who worked as a vice director for the Municipal Statistical Office of Budapest. He stands out from the other scholars both in respect of methodology and fields of research. He was the first person to explore and professionally analyse the early population enumerations dating back to the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, and the first one to attempt a long-term historical analysis of vital events and the demographic changes (Thirring 1912).

It can generally be stated that the majority of studies – perhaps excepting the writings of Thirring – published before the First World War are obsolete, though the greater part of the source publications are still applicable. Nevertheless, comparing population history research in Hungary with professional standards of contemporary research on the international scene, we quickly form the impression that it is not much inferior in quality. This type of research started in Hungary a few decades later than in Britain, France or Germany, though the differences appear to be quantitative rather than qualitative in nature and in most of these countries the approach also differed from those used by modern demography. The fact that the greater part of Hungarian research results were also published in foreign language publications (first of all in German) is of special interest, as it shows that the language barrier that has blocked publication of the results of our demographic research was not yet seriously felt, probably as a result of our place and participation in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

### **3 Transformation and Deformation: Historical Demographic Research in Hungary between the two World Wars**

The seemingly idyllic state of population history – researchers' creative uncertainty, their joy in discovering new sources along with a relatively rapid expansion of research – only lasted for about 30 years, and came to a sudden end with the start of the First World War. Up until that time, the research was based on a multicultural society in the Carpathian Basin that had developed as a rather compact demographic and economic unit (if we ignore the political fights of the ethnic elites between each other which had not yet really penetrated the uneducated mass of people). Looking through contemporary publications – demography and ethnography, as well as geography and history – these still covered all regions and all cultural groups and they were not as ethnicised as they would become later on in the twentieth century. However, as a consequence of the chaotic situation that emerged at the end of the First World War and the peace treaties which followed it, the Basin disintegrated into small states which entered into mutual political fights and ethnic societies to get separated from each other (they became already 'better educated'), and thus research could never again be independent from politics.

The so far interwoven source material of the different regions in the Carpathian Basin started to belong to different, mainly newly established states, and since then their availability to researchers – especially in the case of foreign citizens – has depended upon political relations until the end of the twentieth century. The new elites – whether Hungarian or non-Hungarian, both in their language and identity, – created new institutions for education, new organisations, and even different sorts of historiography in the different regions. Of course, they consequently produced a separate reading public of their own. All this led in practical terms to the disintegration of population history research in the Carpathian Basin. As a direct consequence of this, the research going on in Hungary and starting up over its new borders became increasingly differentiated, both in terms of language and in terms of approach.

After 1920, population history in Hungary was clearly concentrated in Budapest, because the majority of the regional research centres previously existing in the country were now over the border. It limited the professional background, both in the number of scholars and in the respect of readers, and as a consequence regional research gradually died away. Population history became greatly centralised, deeply politicised and its approach severely restricted. Most Hungarian researchers concentrated on the reasons that had led to the break-up of the supposed political unity of the Carpathian Basin (Kovács 1920). A similar process can be traced in the new population history of the Carpathian Basin in the Slovakian, Romanian and Serbian historiography after the First World War. The latter concentrated on justifying the new borders from ethnic and religious standpoints, labelling it historical demographic research (Šveton 1943 cf. Szabó 1944). These two parallel processes had the practical result of restricting research to the statistical analysis of the native languages and denominations in all the successor states of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and research work consequently fell behind international trends in demography,

**Disintegration  
after the First  
World War**

**Reorganisation  
and Ethnicisation  
of Historical  
Demography  
after 1920**

population statistics and public health research. Glancing over the publications produced, it can be concluded that the majority of authors after 1920 – in contrast with those before the war – were no longer interested in (or attempted to follow) the creation and development of the determining methods or approaches in the field, and were less and less able to join in international trends of research.

Factual analysis of the results in the 25 years between 1920 and 1945 in Hungary shows that barely ten per cent of researchers were concerned with the history of pure demographic processes or the structure of the population. About 60 per cent analysed the changes in the ethnic structure of historical Hungary, or tried to reconstruct the medieval or early modern settlement history of certain regions. However, for the latter type of analyses the counties selected were almost always the ones with a population of mixed nationalities, even more those crossed by the new borderline of peace treaties. The manifest purpose of these studies was to explore the reasons behind the falling number of Hungarian inhabitants in those regions, in contrast to their imagined great number and proportion in the Middle Ages (Szabó 1943). Unfortunately, researchers of ethnic questions almost never tried to explore the effect of genuine demographic factors (fertility, mortality and migration) on the ethnic structure. Their work was usually based on questions suggested by political thinking, such as by whom and with which methods statistics were falsified, or which group of the population had changed the ethnic structure of the region through immigration since the original conquest of the Hungarians (which in other cases was referred to as a forced change of a structure, previously dominated by the imagined mass of ‘ancient’ non-Hungarian inhabitants).

Research on demographic trends from this period can barely be found, whilst the use of parish registers for historical purposes was applied only by the researchers dealing with the population history of the German minority in Hungary. It was undoubtedly influenced by the new historical demographic approach introduced in Hitler’s Germany (Bonomi 1940; Steinsch 1942). Hungarian scholars did not react to this trend by writing studies; their reflection was restricted to criticising the factual exaggerations of German settlement and cultural history. There are only three fields of research where the results of Hungarian population history can be valued by the modern mind between the two world wars. One of them is the resettlement process of the depopulated territories after the Turkish wars. It greatly expanded our knowledge as regards appropriate sources for historical analysis of migratory movements, and through co-operation and debate with German researchers promoted the development of historical demographic research methodology on the micro and macro levels (Schünemann 1931; Németh 1936; Kósa 1938). The second field of research, which clearly has a demographic character, is investigation of the ‘single child’ problem, an examination of the reasons for falling fertility rates. This question had been the cause of political debates since the beginning of the twentieth century, and launched historical exploration of fertility research on a considerable (though still insufficient) scale (Kovács 1923; Thirring 1931b cf. Vasary 1989). The third successful field of research is the detailed analysis of the first census in Hungary in 1785–87, with the comprehensive, monographic elaboration of its most important achievements, but this is exclusively due to the personal efforts of Gustav

Thirring, a professional demographer, whose name has already been referred to (Thirring 1931a, 1936, 1938).

As a consequence of all this, the historical demography formed in the decades between 1920 and 1945 walked into a double trap. On the one hand, the prevalence of the ethnic-denominational topic prevented the majority of Hungarian researchers from the thorough historical analysis of the basic processes essential from the point of view of demography, which greatly affected the population of interwar Hungary, such as the demographic transition and its consequences, declining fertility, and the international migratory processes influenced both by political and economic conditions. The second trap is that this substantial deformation gradually entangled population history research as well as demography into the web of politics. This would prove to be a dangerous situation should a new political regime take over the power. It was already considered so by several scholars around 1943, who perceived it to be a threat to scientific achievements, and indeed the whole field of research.

#### **4 A Rupture and a New Start (1945–1959)**

After the Second World War fundamental changes took place in international demographic research. Population history was transformed in terms of approach and methodology by the French school of demography led by Louis Henry in the 1950s, and by the Cambridge group formed about a decade later. The new school of historical demography was born. However, Eastern Europe – and within this Hungary – took a different path, though not entirely on their own accord.

In the second half of the 1940s, the Soviet system of institutions and education led by Russian researchers, which had a specially interpreted version of Marxism-Leninism<sup>4</sup> took over the Hungarian world of science. Research was gradually brought under state control, and researchers fell in practical terms under the direct supervision of the Communist Party (Glatz 1995). The demographic and population history research of Hungary was reduced in a manner similar to other small countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The new dominantly left-wing political authorities put an end to former research trends in sequential phases. Along with the expatriation of over half of the German inhabitants of Hungary in about 1946, demographers of German origin who had mastered the analysis of parish registers and were at the forefront of population history research work in methodological terms, had to leave the country as well. After 1948, when Communists overtly took over power, topics of research were determined by economic and social history backed by Marxist theoreticians. Demographic issues were left out of the programme, and in addition demographers were labelled politically unreliable, so population history and historical demographic research was actually halted for about a decade.

The recommencement of research coincided with the slow erosion of the severity of state socialism after Stalin's death. The first branch of demography, whose position eased after 1953, was the one focusing on contemporary issues. The softening of the situation was fortunately felt early enough by the Hungarian researchers of population history too. This is

**International  
Trends and  
Developments in  
Eastern Europe**

**New Start  
after 1953**

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<sup>4</sup> Perhaps better termed Stalinism.

the personal achievement of Joseph Kovacsics (1919–2003), the director of the CSO Library at that time, in co-operation with Victor Ember, the director of the National Archive in Budapest. In the mid-1950s they were able to resume this research under the umbrella term ‘historical statistics’. The Research Group for Historical Statistics was established within the framework of the CSO Library, and in the National Archives a similar new group of researchers was set up. The first members were recruited from among the historians and archivists who had formerly dealt with the banned settlement history and statisticians interested in historical research. The first handbook of sources was published in 1957 (Kovacsics 1957), and in the same year the ‘Történeti statisztikai közlemények’ (Review of Historical Statistics), a periodical mainly concerned with issues of population history and historical demography was also launched.

However, this new start was in many respects very similar to the research period 60 years earlier – the greater part of authors still regarded the exploration of sources as their main duty. Only a few authors or studies were able to outdo this in approach and method, thus commencing the modern criticism of the sources of historical demography or restart the professional demographic analysis based on parish registers, decades after the German researchers had been exiled. The ‘heroic age’ of the new start ended in about 1959. Joseph Kovacsics, its key protagonist, following a collision with the management of the Central Statistical Office left for the Faculty of Law of Eötvös University, and went on with his work as the head of the Statistical Department, where he carried on working, though in inferior working conditions compared to the CSO Library. The directorship of the CSO Library, the crucially important institution for historical demography, was taken over by Dezső Dányi (1921–2000), a colleague of his, who had already taken part in this research work. Thus the structural, personal and professional framework of historical demography, which was formed by 1960, actually determined the following period until the end of the millennium. For this reason it is possible to survey this long period based on institutions, education, publications and the projects, trends and results of research, instead of further following a chronological order of events.

## 5 Historical Demography in Hungary between 1960 and 2000

### Groups, Institutions, Publications

While in most of countries historical demography as a profession was based on a community of historians, in Hungary the most important centre of research has been the Central Statistical Office and its background institutions since the late 1950s. The former significance of the National Archives started to fade away as the leading generation of researchers of settlement history became older and older. New generations of historians and archivists turned to other directions of historical research. Gradually, the Research Group for Historical Statistics as part of the CSO Library became the heart of historical demographic research. Nevertheless, this unit was management-dependent, and it lost significance after the resignation of Dezső Dányi, the director of the CSO Library in 1983. The centre of research was slowly transferred to the Demographic Research Institute (DRI), established in 1963, another institute belonging to the CSO. Its importance started to grow in 1984, when Dezső Dányi began to organise

the research work for historical demography as a part-time member of the institute, and in 1985 he launched a new series of publications by the title 'Történeti demográfiai füzetek' (Working Papers of Historical Demography).

The other centre of research with a different approach to work was the Department of Statistics at Eötvös University, under the professional management of József Kovacsics. He was an organiser of conferences and launched a foreign language periodical in 1971 ('Historisch Demographische Mitteilungen/Communications de démographie historique').<sup>5</sup> He also officially represented historical demography at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, being a member of the Committee of Demography since its foundation in 1962, and headed its special subcommittee for historical demography up to the end of the millennium. His role was undoubtedly of great importance in that period.

Apart from the two institutions referred to so far, there were only temporary circles of historical demographers usually linked to one person, which kept functioning just until this person remained active. The most important of these groups from a professional point of view was linked to Rudolf Andorka (1931–1997). He started to explore the history of birth control in Hungary using Henry's family reconstitution method when he worked for the CSO in the late sixties, then from the middle of the seventies supplemented it with an analysis of family and household structure based on the method formerly developed and popularised by the Cambridge group (Andorka 1971, 1976). In 1984, when he first became head of the Department of Sociology, later the rector at the Karl Marx University of Economics (now Corvinus University of Budapest), he also started to orientate some of his students to the field of historical demography. Unfortunately, without proper job opportunities none of them stayed there for long. Other circles of historical demographers at different Hungarian universities, such as Pécs and Miskolc, or the Teacher Training College of Szeged, were not successful either.

Our impression is that the basic problem with these unsuccessful attempts is rooted in two main factors. On the one hand, none of the great historical demographers in Hungary were able to create a circle of followers owing to lack of wider interest of students and the rigid regulations of the PhD system. On the other hand, without proper and institutionalised job opportunities it was not possible to create a co-operative team of researchers in the field of historical demography. Consequently, there was no place where a 'critical mass' of researchers could form to produce demographic work. As a result, they were not able to represent professional interests, raise enough money for research, or attract young researchers to the subject by producing a bustling climate of intellectual debate. Indeed, up until 1990 there was no PhD dissertation written on a subject in the sphere of historical demography.

The series of publications on historical demographic issues can be described as follows. They have been published continuously since the 1950s with various titles and in various forms – as periodicals, annals, book series – for a narrow circle of readers and written by an even narrower

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<sup>5</sup> During the 28 years of its existence up to 1998, nine issues were published. Unfortunately this periodical does not provide non-Hungarians with a complete picture of the Hungarian research of that time because the papers of those who belonged to the informal circles around R. Andorka and D. Dányi were never published there.

circle of authors. One series of writings on different subjects of historical demography, economic, social and statistical history has been issued since 1960 with different titles by the CSO Library and supplemented by another one since 1979. Between 1985 and 1997 DRI published 16 small books in its Working Paper Series mentioned above. Since 2000, as a continuation of the latter it has published hundreds of pages of historical demographic research, usually once a year, edited by Tamás Faragó and Péter Óri called ‘Történeti demográfiai évkönyv:’ (Yearbook of Historical Demography). This yearbook ceased to exist in 2009. Articles on similar subjects have also been published regularly since 1958 in the quarterly journal of ‘Demográfia’ (Demography) by DRI, or sometimes in the monthly journal of ‘Statisztikai szemle’ (Statistical Review), which has been published by the Hungarian Statistical Society since 1923.<sup>6</sup>

The major research projects in the period under survey can be outlined as follows. In the 1960s several major projects were launched by the CSO Library:

1) Through co-operation between the CSO Library and the CSO Department of Vital Statistics, settlement-level vital statistical datasets were collected from parish registers and published in nine volumes covering the present territory of Hungary as well as Burgenland in Austria, covering the period between 1828 and 1900 (Klinger 1972–1984, 1981).

2) In 1961 Dezső Dányi made an attempt to process the nominal 1787 census data of the city of Győr, trying to link those to the individual information of the contemporary parish registers. The large amount of data – more than one-hundred thousand cards – rendered its processing practically impossible. At that time computers were not yet in use, and this project remains unfinished.

3) Two years later, in 1963, there was an attempt to analyse the collection of non-nominative settlement-based data of the population enumerations between the years of 1772 and 1783. Again, manual processing of the mass of data – corresponding to the amount of information produced by a census – rendered the project impractical, so it had to be stopped. The project was finally followed-up in the 1990s, by which time technological facilities had much improved (Dányi 1997; Óri 2005).

In the second half of the 1960s, Dezső Dányi also tried to publish a collection of studies in two volumes. He planned one of them to be concerned with epidemics, while the other would have comprised studies on the subject of family reconstitution, something that would have been unique in central-eastern Europe around 1969. Unfortunately, publication of these volumes – although they could have been outstanding in the region and even on an international scale – was not completed for several reasons. Only a few studies were finished partly because some of the authors were not proficient enough in demographic analysis, and partly because the sources did not always correspond to those analysed in the English and French studies serving as models. Thus, eventually the few ready-made studies were published at different places and times and their impact was much smaller than would have been if the collection had been published as a whole. They didn’t really have an impact on most historians’ analysis of key demographic processes.

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<sup>6</sup> Since the 1990s, both of them have a special bi-annual or yearly English edition.



In the period between 1960 and 1990, several major history-oriented projects were organised by the DRI. From the collection of nominative vital statistical data based on a sample of parish registers referring to the period between 1821 and 1830, which took place in the 1960s, the most valuable part concerning mortality resulted in the calculation of differential life tables by gender and settlement types (Hablicsek 1991a).

Another research programme, organised by the DRI in the late 1960s and managed by Ansley J. Coale of Princeton University, was linked to a project on the demographic transition in Europe and the reasons behind falling fertility rates. CSO supplied the data of the Hungarian Kingdom essential for this project. The collection of data – apart from constituting part of the Princeton project – resulted in three interesting studies on fertility history (Tekse 1969; Dányi 1977, 1991a).

A third DRI project was also managed by Dezső Dányi in the 1980s. It was an attempt to trace the fertility and mortality histories of women belonging to two different marriage cohorts (1830–1839, 1850–1859) based on a sampling of parish registers. The outcome of this unique analysis set the process of demographic transition in Hungary and its relation to fertility in a new perspective (Dányi 1991b).

In addition to this, the collective of DRI, composed of its own staff and guest researchers, discussed the characteristics of demographic transition in Hungary during two seminars, and published their most important conclusions in 1991 in a separate, professionally valuable, volume (Szentgáli *et al.* 1991).

The other sections of CSO specialising in modern demography have also supplied and published important data from the perspective of historical demography. In 1969 the Department of Vital Statistics published the official settlement-based vital statistical datasets referring to today's territory of Hungary for the period between 1901 and 1968 (Klinger 1969). Two outstanding members of the department wrote a monograph about the vital movements of Hungary in the interwar period, collecting and publishing all the available data on the county level, in a format which enables technical comparison with present-day information (Acsádi and Klinger 1965). Finally, the third important publication of the Department related to the years between 1867 and 1992, and contains demographic data – both censuses and vital statistics – on a national scale, relating to both the territory of historical Kingdom of Hungary before 1920 and its present territory. This publication followed the well-known structure of volumes on historical statistics, but was much richer in demographic details, and where possible, basic data were adapted to the territory of today's Hungary and calculated back to 1865/1870 (Klinger 1992).

The members of the Department of Census of CSO did not make historical demographic analyses but they were involved in several source publications important from the point of view of population history. Perhaps the earliest of these was the abridged publication of the first census of 1785–87 related to the Hungarian Kingdom on settlement level, as an annex of the census series of 1960 (Dányi and Dávid 1960). Another important job was completion of the elaboration of the 1941 census data and their publication in eight volumes, which was stopped in 1947 as a result of political orders. The most comprehensive compilation of data was the third project, publication of the regionally summarised data of earlier censuses, broken down to settlements, denominations, native languages and nationalities,

based on both the territory of historical and modern Hungary, in some instances also supplemented with the data of Czechoslovakian, Romanian, Serbian and Soviet censuses carried out after 1920 on the territory of the former Kingdom of Hungary. The series, which actually contained all the denominational, language and nationality data of the Carpathian Basin on a settlement-basis in the years between 1880 and 1990, consisted of 20 volumes. In addition to this, the same section published another small but important volume collecting the data of the censuses held between 1869 and 1949 referring to disabled people.

Three further unofficial projects must also be mentioned. These came about as a result of personal efforts, but still can be related to the CSO (as the people involved were all members of the team of the CSO for a while). The most important of these is Rudolf Andorka's research series, exploring the history of birth control in Hungary, which he worked on practically all his life independently of his position. This research work included two historiographical review articles and analysis of family reconstitution in no fewer than 12 villages, focusing on the history of fertility. Later on, he attempted, where possible, to combine methods of household analysis and family reconstitution (Andorka and Balázs Kovács 1986; Andorka 1979, 1994, 1995).<sup>7</sup> Tamás Faragó started his regional analysis of the structure of the population and society in the Pilis and the environs of Buda. The most important results of this individual research, which took years and ended in 1990, refer to marriage as well as family and household structure (Faragó 1986, 1994, 1998). Erik Fügedi first researched the demographic conditions and social mobility of the medieval elite, and then in the 1980s explored kinships relations of the nobility (Fügedi 1982, 1994).

The greatest achievements of József Kovacsics and his circle were the conferences that he organised, and publication of the volumes containing the material of lectures given on these occasions. The most important are the 'Történeti statisztika forrásai' (Sources of Historical Statistics), which came out in 1957 (and which has already been referred to on these pages), followed by the collected studies with the title 'Magyarország történeti demográfiája' (Historical Demography of Hungary) in 1963. The latter summarised the data available on the number of inhabitants in Hungary, and the structure of its population from the medieval conquest of the Carpathian Basin by the Hungarians up to 1949. Probably the most important series of events linked to his name were the four succeeding *mille centenarian* conferences organised by him in 1995 and 96, the lectures of which were published in 1997 (Kovacsics 1957, 1963, 1997).<sup>8</sup>

Naturally, not all the important results of historical demography in Hungary can be associated with either individual projects lasting several years or those linked to institutions. Apart from the projects and authors listed so far there were several other researchers and studies that managed to solve particular problems of population history and historical demography. These works are either by authors not mentioned above, or shorter pieces by those who took part in the above-mentioned projects, but were not part of 'centrally organised' research. Most of them are dissertations, source-

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<sup>7</sup> Andorka's collected studies in historical demography were published only in Hungarian (Andorka 2001), but he utilized many of the historical experiences in his fertility monography (Andorka 1978).

<sup>8</sup> For the German version of the volume with a selection of these studies, see Kristó *et al.* 2007.

publications, or expanded versions of conference lectures. These individual pieces of research are touched upon, as follows:

1) A few of these researchers were interested in particular questions related to marriage – exogamy/endogamy, seasonality, re-marriage – or investigated the structure of families and households following the method of the Cambridge school. Different studies on fertility and a longer, comprehensive study on illegitimacy must also be mentioned here (Ájus and Henye 1994; Faragó 1991, 2006, Granasztói 1984).

2) Several important subjects were tackled, from mortality in the Middle Ages to the history of suicides, using a wide range of methods from life tables to analysis of individual parish registers. Historical investigation of epidemics and infectious diseases or natural disasters based on demographic data, constitute a larger, independent group of studies. Some of these concentrate on the loss of life caused by disasters at the local level, while others attempt to write a comprehensive history and summarise the devastation caused (mainly) by plague and cholera on a national level (Dávid, Z. 1973; Faragó 2008; Mádai 1979).

3) In Hungary it is known only in narrow professional circles that Hungarian palaeodemographic experts are regarded as outstandingly successful at the international level (Acsádi and Nemeskéri 1970; Éry 2000).

4) Several major studies were published on the problem of migration, comprising the processes from medieval migratory movements to overseas emigration (Kubinyi 1988; Dávid, G. 1993; Faragó 1998; Puskás 1982).

5) Finally, the most important source publications from the perspective of population history are, independent of the great projects mentioned before, especially those on the sixteenth-century Turkish “defter” (tax conscriptions), eighteenth-century church lists of inhabitants and the collection of eighteenth to nineteenth-century wills and probate inventories.<sup>9</sup>

Five thematic groups of research can be identified during this period. The first and largest of these is the publication of data and sources. The volumes belonging to this group are held in the CSO Archives and the CSO Departments of Censuses and Population Statistics. In certain cases it was the first time that these institutions published the data collected by political administration since 1850 (censuses of Transylvania in 1851 and 1857), but the majority of volumes contained republished data of censuses between 1880 and 1990 on the basis of one principle: figures of denominational, ethnic or language structures. All of these can be referred to as collections of historical population statistics in a slightly obsolete way. The second groups of researchers collected and analysed data based on hand-written sources referring to particular demographic subjects. The greater part of the demographic studies of the Research Group for Historical Statistics and the DRI falls into this category. The third group is constituted by micro-research of demographic processes and structures the analysis, which requires a more detailed – either nominal or non-nominal – elaboration of data on the local level. The fourth group comprises efforts aimed at the complex exploration of the demographic history of one local community or social group.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the fifth group consists of a volume of studies which

### **Evaluation of the Period between 1960 and 2000**

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<sup>9</sup> These were published in several volumes.

<sup>10</sup> Several local demographic research could be mentioned here (e.g. Benda 2008, Faragó 2000, 2003, Husz 2002, Melegh 2000), unfortunately they are only in Hungarian version exist.

either aspired to be a comprehensive work on the history of the population of Hungary, or focused on one subject approaching it from different aspects and by different authors.

The above grouping, however, does not touch upon two important, closely related aspects: the approach and research methodology. If we consider these the basis of grouping, concentrating on research and leaving out consideration of the data and source publications the division line will be simpler and much sharper. By this division historical demographic research in Hungary between 1960 and 2000 can be divided into two parts. One of them follows the new wave in historical demographic research, which dates from the 1950s, while the other keeps to the old way of posing questions, the traditional approach and methods of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century population history.

The main common feature of researchers belonging to the first group is that they tried to follow internationally introduced innovations, and used the methodology and indices applied by demographers researching the present demographic situation. Thus, their work was based on the methodology of family reconstitution, research on the structure of families and households introduced in Cambridge, as well as epidemiology and modern demography, sometimes already through more advanced statistical analyses (e.g. life tables, linear correlations, etc.). The main subjects of their research were changes in the lives of historical groups of population in respect of nuptiality, fertility, mortality, migration and reproduction, as well as the structure of the population along with changes in family and household structure and kinship relations. Consequently, the research in this group attempts to keep up with international trends in historical demography. Zoltán Kováts tried to apply the French method of family reconstitution as early as 1962 (Kováts and Cs. Tóth 1962), while Dezső Dányi, as has been mentioned before, wanted to publish a volume of studies based on this method at the end of the same decade. Although his idea was not fully realised, the wish to take this step shows in itself the ambition to keep pace with international research. It is also a good indication of the fact that about half a dozen researchers were trying to introduce the new method of family reconstitution in Hungary, which meant exploration of the subject of nuptiality, fertility and mortality in historical groups of the population based on parish register data. Dezső Dányi's representative work on family reconstitution, attempting to link the micro and macro analytical approach is unique and stands out amongst these. The parish register-based research of both Andorka and Dányi also reveals the fact that birth control appeared in Hungary as early as in France – in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an internationally acknowledged professional result.

A few researchers made early use of the methodology based on the analysis of family and household structure developed by the Cambridge research group. Several studies were written for about a decade beginning in 1975, then in 1983 a general study and a comprehensive working theory were published based on the results achieved up till then (Andorka and Faragó 1983). Research in Hungary made use of John Hajnal's thesis concerning the emergence and types of households, and found evidence on a micro and macro level that different types of family and household systems co-existed in the Carpathian Basin with larger or smaller regional variations, and also that their geographical outlines did not exactly match the virtual

East-West division line between Trieste and St. Petersburg as envisaged by Hajnal (Faragó 2003).<sup>11</sup>

The explorations of demographic transition which took place at the DRI resulted in important findings, both in terms of method and content, proving several facts at the same time. First of all, they proved that the beginning of the demographic transition in Hungary coincided with the same phenomenon in western European societies, with the only difference from the main trend of changes being sporadic though gradual spread of birth control starting in Hungary much earlier and the fertility decline in national level was nearly parallel with the mortality decline. Secondly, it can be demonstrated by regional data that in the different regions of the Carpathian Basin, Eastern and Western demographic patterns can be found side by side at the same time, in a specific geographical arrangement. It is also demonstrated that at the end of the nineteenth century the previously diverging patterns became more similar (Hablicsek 1991b; Kamarás 1991; Faragó 2003; Óri 2007; Óri and Pakot 2009, cf. Melegh 2002).

From the aspect of approach and methodology the greater part of research work launched by the Research Group for Historical Statistics and the DRI falls into this first professional trend. It has to be noted that in most cases we can find Dezső Dányi and Rudolf Andorka in the background, either as authors, participants, editors, or initiators.

The other groups of researchers who represent the second, more traditional trend, stick to the approach of the late nineteenth century, and explore the size of population in different periods and the characteristics of their denominational, linguistic and national composition. The lecturers of the conferences organised by József Kovacsics, and the majority of the authors working under his protection, especially traditional historians specialising in medieval history and statisticians not specialised in historical demography, all belong to this group. A typical illustration to this is , that ‘Historical Demography in Hungary’, the volume published in 1963, still widely used as a handbook and which even had positive reviews outside Hungary at the time, does not include the subject of demographic processes at all; with the exception of one chapter on the period between 1870 and 1949, fertility, mortality and nuptiality are not mentioned. Moreover, the majority of the studies and authors of the volume published 30 years later, containing the material of the lectures given at the conferences in 1995–96; represent with a few exceptions the same approach at the end of the millennium (Kovacsics 1963, 1997 cf. Kristó *et al.* 2007).

In trying to understand why a number of distinguished researchers – historians in the first place – write about population history without having the faintest idea about the revolutionary changes in the methodology and approach of historical demography since then, we can only conclude that the reason must reside in something of a conservative mentality. Historians generally concentrate on annals- and political history even today, owing to the training they have received. No wonder that neither the great general handbooks of Hungarian history nor the monographs on local history have separate chapters on historical demography, or the subject is just referred to in tables representing the increase in the size of population and the ethnic and denominational structure followed by a few brief comments. This is the strongest evidence of the backward attitude of the greater part of Hungarian

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<sup>11</sup> The family and household research is further explored in the last years: see the works of Faragó 2010, Óri 2009, Pakot 2009, and Pozsgai 2006.

historians compared to their English, French or German colleagues, and of the consequences of the professional standards that declined after the First World War and which has to-date remained uncorrected.

The other great problem of historical demographic research in Hungary is that researchers' efforts and their achievements are not proportionate to each other. The lack of proper professional training and that of methodological knowledge resulted in studies where the investment of a lot of time and effort in micro-analysis was practically wasted owing to the difference in methods, the indices used, and the highly individualised ways of analysing data and interpretations. The sporadic research places of the scholars did not favour success either. The researchers primarily interested in historical demography usually belong to different institutions in different cities and they are often compelled to work on projects which are far from their field of interest. They have to do their research work in demography individually, instead of joining forces in workshops or teams.

Owing to the problems mentioned above, Hungarian researchers have not reacted to several problems raised by international research since the 1970s. For instance, there was no one to investigate the historical relations of height/nutritional status/health conditions – so the data referring to Hungary in this respect were processed by John Komlos (Komlos 1989). We did not enter into debates about proto-industrialisation, only a few detailed studies were written on the problems of mortality in the period before the twentieth century, and there is no research on the nineteenth-century history of epidemiological transition. We could list several additional examples. Apart from the research on family and household structure and on the beginnings of birth control, researchers in Hungary could not engage in international discussion or join international projects, and were at best simply suppliers of data.

A further special problem lies in our peculiar and isolated language. Not only are our researchers isolated from literature existing in different languages, but local research faces barriers being recognised outside Hungary. Most of the research in historical demography sponsored by the CSO and DRI was published only in Hungarian until the end of the twentieth century, and the results of Dezső Dányi, for example, are practically unknown to the international scientific community.

An even greater problem than gaps in research and language is that it is harder to keep up with the methodological development of international research. When we noted that most of the researchers in Hungary had not adopted the new methodology and approach after the turning-point of the 1950s, it was not mentioned that at international conferences this trend is often labelled as 'the old school' and that most of the scholars believe that the heyday of the family reconstitution method is over already. In the past 20 to 30 years a significant new trend has developed which applies methods of mathematical statistics (such as non-linear regression analyses, back projection of the population, event history analysis, etc.), builds upon the general use of personal computers and the rapid development of statistical and database handling programs. Research is increasingly based on the material supplied by large databases (data banks), limiting the one-community family reconstitutions or household structure analyses for the level of local history research. The reception of this new trend in Hungary is restricted to three or four researchers at present, and there is no institution that has tried to develop such a database of population history as the ones

operating in several other countries at a high level. It seems that in Hungary there are no researchers, no funds or demand for that. We have the impression that historical social and demographic research in Hungary is still unable to fully utilise the rocketing development of computer technologies and techniques, or indeed adapt to those made in the 1980s and 1990s.

## 6 Today and Tomorrow

While the great political and economic transformations produced by the change of regime in the late 1980s and early 1990s did not particularly affect historical demography in Hungary, the end of the second millennium did. In the personal composition of researchers – as a consequence of ageing – a considerably fast generational change has taken place since the 1990s. The outstanding scholars of the past decades retired at approximately the same time in the years between 1996 and 2000 owing to old age or unexpected diseases, some of them have even passed away. In fact, within a period of five years, the oldest generation of researchers born between 1910 and 1931 were replaced by a smaller number of colleagues, all about twenty years younger. Since 2000, historical demography has also gained a more important role in training, as it has become a university subject for students of history and sociology, at least as an introductory course. Several students of ELTE aspiring towards a PhD degree in historiography started to study the analysis of parish registers, and although their interest is rooted in social history, they also utilise the approach and methodology of historical demography.

Nevertheless, considering the present situation and the outlook of historical demography we cannot indulge in false hopes and must try to keep sight of reality. No doubt, the research facilities as regards historical demography in Hungary are much better today than a few decades earlier in many respects. First of all, desktop computers (gradually turning into small portable devices) revolutionised possibilities of data processing, like CD-ROMs and DVDs the publication of reference books and sources, and photocopiers and digital cameras for archival research and the collection of literature. Another positive development is that it is natural for the young generation today to follow the international research trends either through the internet, or by participating in conferences. Thus, in the process of the changing of generations the old nineteenth century mentality and approach is hopefully going to disappear from historical demographic research, or at least it will be driven out of scientific thinking. In addition, owing to György Granasztói in the first place and the Atelier Centre<sup>12</sup>, French research on social history and historical demography is growing in Hungary, where previously the prevalence of German and Anglo-American research impact was more common. Finally, the scientific activity in and around the DRI, as well as the regular publication of the results in the 'Yearbook of Historical Demography' and in the journal of 'Demográfia' are also encouraging signs.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.atelier-centre.hu>.

<sup>13</sup> The yearbook is downloadable at: <http://demografia.hu>. (Unfortunately in the meantime because of funding problems the yearbook is ceased to publish.)

However, at the same time there are a few questions about the future. The first and most worrying among is the problem of how to replace the old generation of historical demographers. While in the 1970s dozens of well-trained researchers worked in this field, in the past two decades the retired and the deceased are being (or can be) replaced by fewer and fewer members of younger generations. The most outstanding figures of historical demographic research in the early years of the twenty-first century are all over 60 years of age. Moreover, no matter how well trained young history researchers are (or even better trained than the previous generations in respect of languages and methodology), most of them are indifferent or even show a negative attitude towards quantitative analyses.<sup>14</sup> They intend to follow, probably to a greater extent than desirable, those postmodern trends which based on the narrative analysis, and favour psychology, philosophy, linguistics, folklore, anthropology (especially its cultural, non-quantitative version) instead of demography, sociology, economics or geography as a basis of their research.<sup>15</sup>

Another problem is that the Bologna process in the transformation of higher education (or at least in its Hungarian interpretation) clearly favours rationalised mass education and so-called ‘practical’ training. The former results in a falling number of seminars and simultaneous training of the largest possible groups of students, while the latter means sacrificing subjects that provide specialised though not directly applicable knowledge; historical demography is a typical example of this. The future of the subjects which do not fit into the simplified syllabus and also of the specialised workshops and teaching units which do not launch a ‘Bologna type course’ have been rendered uncertain. At the same time, the opportunities to train a new generation of researchers are gradually declining especially in those historical fields characterised by a quantitative perspective (historical demography, economic history, quantitative social history).<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the tender system both in the EU and in Hungary seems to favour applied sciences as opposed to basic research, and hardly anything else is supported. Unfortunately, historical demographic research belongs to the latter category. The historiography of historical demography illustrates the changing situation very effectively. In the 1960s and 1970s when the conditions were almost archaic as opposed to those of today, the researchers who had been exiled to the peripheries of science for political-ideological reasons, were not only able to keep pace but also – like Rudolf Andorka, who could read and write in several languages but used a typewriter all his life – to break through into the international arena with their personal achievements. By contrast, it is today harder and harder to cover the costs of data processing, pay for the regular replacement of fast-ageing devices, fund the continuous fostering of international professional relationships and participate in international conferences. At the same time, advancing professionally is almost impossible without strong co-operation. The time of solitary researchers being able to develop without any support is well and

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<sup>14</sup> We mention historians here only, because direct training for demographers does not exist in Hungary at the moment. The new generation of demographers usually comes from the fields of sociology, economy or geography.

<sup>15</sup> We must confess – working on their training – students of sociology have about the same level of interest towards history as do history students towards sociology or demography.

<sup>16</sup> The only positive exception is palaeodemography because of its tie to archaeology. (Our impression is that the archaeologists have much more practical sense towards the realities coming from their used methods. For example, the Academic Institute of Archaeology even founded a Laboratory for Historical Genetics some years ago.)



truly over. In addition, it is increasingly difficult to meet these requirements as the regular support of historical demographic research is getting relatively smaller. Over the last five years several university departments and institutions, which could have been potential workshops, were closed down as a result of economic retrenchment. The subvention by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was also withdrawn, so the personal and financial bases of historical demography outside of the CSO are being eliminated. The danger of falling back to the level seen at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s is slowly becoming a reality. It is possible that the survival of historical demography in Hungary will once again depend on the emphatic attitude of the official statistical organisation. At the moment it is impossible to foresee the path to be taken by research in this field after the next and unavoidable generational change in a few years time. All we can do is hope for the best.

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