



Book review

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Maria Rita Sebastiani*

DANIELE VIGNOLI E ANNA PATERNO (A CURA DI), RAPPORTO SULLA POPOLAZIONE. VERSO UNA DEMOGRAFIA POSITIVA, IL MULINO UPM, BOLOGNA, 2025, pp. 280

This book has been presented during the recent Population Days Conference. Those having already read the previous Reports could be surprised by how changes in natural and migratory dynamics and in age structure of the Italian population occurred during the two last decades have been interpreted here. In fact, in this book a kind of little “Copernican revolution” has been made.

Facing ongoing fall in birth and the consequent population ageing, phenomenon that in literature has been named dramatically as Demographic Winter or Demographic Glaciation, most of researchers and media have proven themselves negative, defeatist and very worried about the possible damaging consequences on generation turnover as well as on health and welfare systems. Conversely, here the authors and editors have adopted a resilient approach. They have acknowledged that in modern populations demographic indicators have been evolving very differently compared to the two previous centuries and with respect to what have been predicted by means of the demographic transition theory. Using this traditional model in such modern contexts, one could fail causing wrong and unproductive results. Indeed, modern populations have been involving into a transition process towards a new unknown phase that is qualitatively different from the previous ones. Therefore, agreeing with thoughts expressed by the international scholars polled into the Global Demography Expert Survey on the Drivers and Consequences of Demographic Changes, the

*Department of Methods and Models for Territory, Economics and Finance, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy.

authors and editors have realised that it needs to be resilient, to renew the way of thinking and adopt a positive and can-do attitude. Firstly, positivity: they have invited to identify and give importance to those particular situations or facts related to current demographic scenario, even if they would be among causes of it, that represent an opportunity to realise enhancements in wellbeing and quality of life of people from the Sustainable Development Goals' viewpoint. For instance, women who have decided to have no children (the so-called childfree ones) or to postpone their pregnancies, causing consequently fall in general fertility and births, probably have managed to attain higher levels of education, get a job more easily, succeed in their work and be more satisfied in their personal life. Scheduling their births, couples have been able to choose consciously the more appropriate time (also in terms of available economic resources) to have children. Moreover, among factors that have made transition of the young to adulthood much slower than in the past, as a result putting a brake to processes of couples' formation and births, there are some that have given rise to an enhancement of individual wellbeing in terms of education and employment.

Furthermore, can-do attitude: the authors and editors have encouraged institutions and politicians to design and implement policies aimed to make health and welfare systems more sustainable (that is able to tackle and mitigate possible consequences of population ageing), instead of focusing uselessly on specific demographic targets that could be too difficult or unrealistic to achieve in the medium-short time. Hereafter, some interesting food for thought selected from the Report are reported, that briefly show how this book deserves an in-depth reading.

In the first section, regarding birth and fertility, the authors have asserted emphatically that, in aim to slow down decrease in births and the consequent ageing process, couples wishing to have children should be ever enabled to realise their fertility plans, even to at the biological limit of the woman's fecund age. Two specific chapters have been devoted to this topic. In the first, based on results of an interesting factorial survey experiment study, the most effective policies have been highlighted that seem to be better performing than those being exclusively family-oriented as yet applied.

In the second section, the authors have debated item by item all phases of the transition from youth to adulthood. They have produced many detailed figures and studies with aim to pinpoint the groups of the most fragile young that need to be supported in becoming independent and able to achieve their plans, among them to leave own family and form a couple possibly with children. Several useful suggestions have been provided too for the purpose of this. The third section contains a wide and stimulating discussion about how families and couples have changed in the last decades. In the final chapter, the authors examine in depth the main challenges faced by the health and welfare systems, as well as the most effective public policies to address them, resulting from the increasing incidence of *one-person* households formed by elderly and/or female individuals. Moreover, the major difficulties and disparities experienced by LGBTQ+ couples, compared with traditional families, are also discussed in depth.

In the fourth section (concerning migrations), the authors have explained convincingly reasons why foreign migrants in Italy have played and will continue to have a crucial and undeniable role not only in balancing the population ageing (as it is well known), but also in remedying consequences of this on both social welfare and economy. In addition, the

way immigration contributes to ensure financial equilibrium and economic development of Italy and also to compensate for inadequacy of public social aid to families, has been well stressed. In the final chapter there is an extensive discussion about the most efficacious migratory policies, with a special focus on living conditions of foreign migrants and on their need for social integration actions.

The fifth section deserves a careful reading. There have been reported good news concerning progresses in survival and health conditions of population (specially that elderly one) during the last decades, in spite of crisis due to Covid-19 pandemic. A stimulating debate has been conducted about reasons why in modern populations improvements in survival have slowed down recently, and results from an interesting study about effects of austerity and of cuts of health spending have been shown. Topic of the most suitable policies to promote equality in survival and in health conditions in all people's categories has been well addressed too. In the sixth section, the issue of territorial heterogeneity being in dynamics of the Italian population has been treated. Many insights have been provided to explain why it is crucial to study demography at the more disaggregated levels than NUTS0, NUTS1 and NUTS3, especially if data have to be used to design, implement and evaluate public policies. Pursuing the positive and resilient perspective adopted in this book, a special attention has been paid to some interesting and comforting emblematic cases that stand out from the aggregated context. They have been named as demographic surprises since concern unexpected situations (for instance, about territorial settlement's models of foreign population) or regard areas showing universally enticing characteristics (for instance, zones attracting young people and/or families formed by young migrants, or those whose inhabitants can expect to live very long). The authors have shown how these surprising cases can represent best practices that to take inspiration from, in order to promote local development even in depressed areas and, more in general, to stimulate population's dynamics so that to compensate for ageing process.

In the seventh section has been exhaustively studied the entire education process, from mandatory school to tertiary education, in aim to highlight differences among students by gender and by their potential migratory origin. The authors have demonstrated that education has had a relevant role in promote equity and inclusion of the young. Results from some multivariate statistical analyses, investigating if and how learning's outcomes and education choices of students have been affected by socio-economic and cultural conditions of family, have been discussed. From these, the authors have derived some remarkable thoughts that can represent a good starting point for designing policies aimed to increase participation in the entire education process also by born abroad, as well as to enhance human capital in Italy.

In the eighth section, life conditions and subjective wellbeing of young, adult and elderly people have been explored thoroughly. In particular, the authors have been able to point out the most critical issues that have made the young's life more fragile than in the past. These considerations can be a helpful basis for planning policies devoted to improve wellbeing of the young. Analogously, strong points of life conditions of both adults and elderlies have been stressed, and institutions and politicians have been encouraged to act for holding and enhancing further quality of life of these people.

The last section is very complete, exhaustive and summarising the whole of topics discussed

in the book. The authors have taken stock of all the exceptional situations of the recent Italian demography as described in the previous sections, those disadvantageous that must to be corrected and those favourable having to be consolidated. This section is very insightful. In fact, by means of the analogy of the timepiece, the inner meaning of the new positive demography and the relationship between demography and policy have been explained so well and persuasively that it seems to be obvious and easy to think that a new positive demography is really possible.