

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

VICTO PICHÉ and CÉLINE LE BOURDAIS (Dir.), *La démographie québécoise: enjeux du XXI^e siècle*. Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal. 2003 319 p.

The members of the Centre interuniversitaire d'études démographiques (CIED) have produced eight excellent chapters on various aspects of the demography of Quebec. The chapters in *La démographie québécoise* are well held together by an enlarged version of the demographic transition model, that includes the transitions in fertility (including family and gender change) and mortality, producing aging, but also the urban transition (migration) and transition of the labour force population. The various elements of the régime démographique are thus well integrated, producing a clear perspective not only on the immediate demographic phenomena of fertility, mortality and migration, but also on demographic consequences, especially in terms of the age structure and the labour force.

Besides chapters on demolinguistics, and family change, the inclusion of a chapter on fatherhood makes this book unique. However, one looks in vain for a chapter on the size of the population, possibly comparing to the rest of Canada. There is no chapter on internal migration and the changing regional distribution of the Quebec population. There is one figure (p.188) showing the size by three age groups over 1901 to 2051, but the objective here is mostly to show the changing age composition. Eying in the numbers of this graph shows a population growing from some 1,750,000 in 1901 to 7,600,000 in 2001 and about 7,900,000 in 2021 before declining to some 7,500,000 in 2051. It would make an interesting story to present the differential dynamics of this growth, possibly placed in the historical record of the previous century, and comparing to other relevant populations like Ontario or the rest of Canada.

Except in the chapters on aging and language, the authors pay remarkably little attention to the macro aspects of population. Even the chapter on the labour force moves rather quickly to matters of participation rates, and pays little attention to the changing size of the labour force. One looks in vain for discussions on the implications of the changing size of the population and of the labour force. There is a danger, from this post-Cairo focus on micro aspects of population, that aggregate phenomena receive inadequate attention. After all, the public interest in population comes not only from appreciating the individual dynamics in these trends and variations in numbers of children, life span, and the propensity to migrate, but especially from the implications that derive from aggregating these individual phenomena into the changing size, distribution and composition of the population.

The quality of the analysis in the individual chapters is the envy of the demographers from outside Quebec. While referring in their title to “from high fertility to desired fertility,” Lapierre-Adamcyk and Lussier present an especially good set of tables and graphs that follow the demographics of childbearing over the 20th century. Given the disciplinary bias to look only at women’s childbearing, it is refreshing to see a chapter on fatherhood. Do I detect from Marcil-Gratton, Le Bourdais and Juby a push for men to care less about biological paternity, and more about social and serial fatherhood? Are there other ways to accommodate the interests of children, given the important changes in marital behaviour documented in the chapter by Péron, under the insightful title “from obligatory marriage to optional marriage.” The immigration chapter by Piché sees phases in immigration that moves “from fear to openness,” but there could be more attention to the costs and benefits that immigrants may represent for specific sectors of the society.

While the title of the book refers to the 21st century, most chapters provide an excellent summary of the previous century. In effect, the demographic regime that we see at the end of the century belongs to a different world compared to a hundred years earlier. Who could have predicted this? As observed in the last chapter, we should have a strong dose of humility in trying to predict the next century. Key, as the authors note, is the extent of openness to immigration, the ability to control the onset of new diseases, and the ability of reproductive technologies to accommodate late childbearing. The future will clearly see a different world. Besides a radical change in the age structure, the unevenness of immigration will mean that many regions will decline. These declining areas will hopefully provide a guide to futures that are not based on population growth, and where one needs to maximize the human resources of all sectors of the population.

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