

SCANDINAVIAN
POPULATION STUDIES

9

THE NINTH NORDIC
DEMOGRAPHIC SYMPOSIUM
April 1989, Gausdal, Norway

THE NORDIC DEMOGRAPHIC SOCIETY
OSLO 1989

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THE BIRTHMORBID
DEMOGRAPHIC SYMPOSIUM
April 1986, Umeå, Norway

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THE NINTH DEMOGRAPHIC SYMPOSIUM

Arrangement committee

*Erling Berge
Turid Noack
Øystein Kravdal*

Program committee

*Erling Berge
Jan Erik Kristiansen
Per Sevaldson*

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INTRODUCTION

By

Erling Berge

Scandinavian population studies 9

This 9th presentation of the proceedings of the Nordic Demographic Symposia follows the course staked out by its predecessors. By being as inclusive as possible in coverage, we hope to give an overview of current population research in the Nordic countries.

Looking at the present collection, the first point we would like to stress is the breadth of themes discussed¹. Ranging from models exploring the epidemiology of AIDS to a study of "Infant mortality in South-Western Finland 1750-1850", and from a study of the incompatibility between education and early childbearing to a discussion of the problems of improving public statistics on families, not many aspects of demography were completely untouched. Cutting across this range there also is a range in method and depth, from the theoretically and methodologically sophisticated to the simple descriptive reports on current activities.

The second fairly obvious point is that historical demography is a strong part of Nordic demographic research. Ten out of 31 presentations were based on historical data. The strength of historical demography in the Nordic countries is clearly linked to the third characteristic we will emphasize: the quality of our population data.

¹ See the program.

Nordic population data, particularly historical population data, are considered to be the best in the world. This has inspired historians to learn demography in order to mine this wealth of data, with, as we see, considerable success. Yet so much more could have been done. Nordic demographers regret they both are too few and do not have the resources to produce the research which would do justice to the high quality of the data. However, working in a small, albeit old and respected, science in small countries one cannot, perhaps, expect much more in the way of resources.

The strength of demography in the Nordic countries.

A look at the papers presented during the symposium is illustrative: ca 40% of the presenters were from Sweden, another 40% from Norway, while Denmark and Finland had 10% each. Distance from the place where the symposium was held, is one reason for this distribution, affecting particularly Finland, but is not the only reason. The situations in the five countries² are rather different both in terms of resources devoted to teaching and research, and in terms of the interest in demography shown by researchers in related sciences. Iceland is, of course, a special case being such a small country. The economy, as well as population, of Sweden is more or less twice as large as any of the three other countries. This shows up in almost twice as many researchers in demography if we count as researchers all the persons who have participated in the 8 previous symposia³.

Demography in Sweden and Norway differ in that Norway do not have a chair or teaching program in demography. Hence, the Norwegian research is done exclusively by researchers working in related social

² Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden.

³ Counting participants in the 8 symposia before the 9th we find that from Sweden 105 different persons have participated, from Norway 71, from Denmark 62, from Finland 61, from Iceland 2 and from other countries 3.

sciences (history, geography, economics, sociology and statistics), or in applied research institutions like the Central Bureau of Statistics (the secondary institutions of demography). The Swedish research is strongest around the chairs and teaching programs in demography, and, compared to Norway, has a lesser base in the secondary institutions. The few contributions from Finland are not representative of the strength of Finnish demography. There is a notisable institutional support both through chairs in demography and interest in demographic research in secondary institutions.

The 9th Nordic Demographic Symposium

The 9th Nordic Demographic Symposium opened in Gausdal, Norway, on the 6th of April 1989 in an optimistic mood. The program looked both varied and interesting. The prospects for skiing looked good. The association was about to celebrate its 20th anniversary. The celebration came a bit late, perhaps, since the association was established on the 15th August 1968, but it was expected to be all the more exuberant. Also the general assembly of the association was about to consider a proposal for establishing its own professional journal, Nordic Population Review.

The symposium closed on the 9th of April, stimulated by the papers and discussions, a bit exhausted by skiing and celebrations, but also a bit downbeat. The new journal was not to be started. Doubts about the viability of a new journal won out and carried over to a pessimistic mood considering the future of Nordic Demography. We do not think this was warranted, as we hope the present collection of essays will testify.

The journal was intended to partly supplant this series of proceedings from the Nordic Demographic Symposia. Without a journal, the proceedings has taken a new lease on life. For some years yet, this series along with the Finnish Yearbook of Population Research, will be the best source for the English speaking world if they want to know what

is going on in Nordic Demography. For this reason we have tried to be inclusive in the coverage of the papers presented.

The papers presented to the symposium in English are all printed in full, except those published and easily available elsewhere. These are included by an abstract and a reference to where they are published. For the papers written in a Nordic language an effort was made to get an English language abstract. Where this effort failed, the presentation is only mentioned in the program. This added up to 23 papers or abstracts.