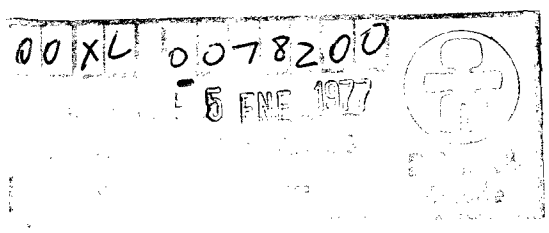


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CLADE

RESEARCH PROJECT ON HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHY  
IN LATIN AMERICA

CELADE, November 1975.

## I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. The urgent need to study Latin America's current population problems prevented CELADE from devoting its attention to their historical background until more or less recently. In 1965, a retrospective survey of the evolution of population was included in the Basic Course on Demography. In the following year, one of its researchers was designated to give an introductory course on demography to a group of international fellowship-holders who were studying research into Latin America's economic history at the Centro de Investigaciones de Historia Americana; two participants in this Course attended later CELADE's Basic Course.

2. CELADE's interest in the field continued to grow during 1971 and 1972. A number of monographs were published with a historical content and discussion groups and seminars were organized on the main problems and methods of historical demography. CELADE thus began to fulfill the long-standing aspiration to carry out a more comprehensive study of population problems by means of a broader chronological approach to the subject. This entailed the incorporation of new methodological techniques and of a complex supporting apparatus for solving the problem of historical sources, that of connexions with groups involved in this type of research, that of bibliographical, etc. 1/

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1/ A complete account of CELADE's activities in the field of historical demography can be found in Julio Morales Vergara, "Actividades del Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía en el campo de la demografía histórica", presented at the Second Symposium on Economic History of Latin America, Section II: Historical demography; XI Congreso Internacional de Americanistas (Rome, 3 - 9 September, 1972).

3. The decision was accordingly taken at the beginning of 1972 to tackle the problem on a more organized and systematic basis. The services were recruited of a historian interested in historical demography who was acquainted with the historical archives of Latin America and with research experts engaged in the study of the population in the past. At meetings held at the beginning of 1972, plans were made for work to be carried out in at least two main stages: (a) exploration of the possibilities of conducting scientific and original research on historical demography in the Latin American continent and (b) the actual carrying out of such research as appeared feasible in terms of available sources, on the one hand, and potential resources on the other.

4. Throughout 1972 and part of 1973, attention was devoted to what was considered the fundamental implications of stage (a). Bibliographico-documentary surveys were carried out in some of the areas of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru on which most information was available. Permanent contacts were established with historians and institutions involved in demographic research in these and other countries. Finally, a seminar on historical demography was held between 23-27 July 1973 at CELADE headquarters in Santiago which was attended by some of the researchers that had shared CELADE's interest in past months and experts from Europe, the United States and Latin America.

5. The basic reasons that led CELADE to hold the aforementioned working meeting can be summarized as follows:

a. examination and commentary of the regional reports that had previously been made available on documentation concerned with historical demography;

b. present situation and future prospects of historical demography in Latin America;

c. accessibility and conservation of the historical documentation required for demographic research.

In a sense, this meeting was the culmination of the first stage of CELADE's work on the historical study of population and therefore served as an opportunity for voicing both general and highly specific and practical considerations. The former, for example, included significance that research into this field could have, while the latter covered methodological problems, the possibility of a quantitative compilation of certain types of data, etc.

6. In the absence of any clear terms of reference in the field of historical demography in Latin America and because there existed no effective promotional and co-ordinating agency, the researchers attending the July Meeting asked CELADE to fill the gap - a role whose implications go much further than the original objectives of the institution-. This was clearly shown by the final conclusions of the Meeting which were interpreted as much as a petition as a recommendation:

a. A Co-ordinating Committee was created, consisting of Professor Maria Luiza Marcilio of Brazil, Professor Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz of the University of New York and Professor Rolando Mellafe of Chile, who were subsequently joined by Professor Alejandra Moreno Toscano of Mexico. This Committee is to be responsible for promoting interchange of information on historical demography in Latin America and for editing an information bulletin on the subject to be printed and distributed with the assistance of CELADE. 2/

b. CELADE undertook to promote, in conjunction with the appropriate institutions, the preservation and greater accessibility of the collections of documents that are of value to the

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2/ More background information on the contents of the regional reports and on the July Seminar can be found in "Documentos Útiles para la demografía histórica en América Latina. Resumen de informes". and "Seminar on Historical Demography - CELADE". Santiago, Chile, August 1973.

study of historical demography. In addition, a specific project is to be prepared, including the creation of a data bank on the subject. 3/

c. CELADE would submit a propose for a pilot project on historical demography covering four or five different parts of the continent.

d. An effort would be made to provide technical assistance for research which has already begun or in respect of which, although completed, the authors request the opinion and help of specialized demographers. Such assistance would not necessarily involve special funds or the publication of the study concerned.

e. The study entitled "Typological description of useful documents for historical demography that exist in Latin America archives" by Rolando Mellafe (Series D, N° 71 of CELADE's publications) would be expanded with the addition of the documentation on the republican era.

f. The foregoing would entail considerable research and adaptation of new methodologies in the field of historical demography, culminating in seminars and periodic study meetings and, above all, in the eventual publication of a methodological handbook for future researchers.

7. During the months preceding the July Meeting, CELADE was already complying with some of the requirements to which attention was drawn on that occasion and is currently dealing with other points that were raised. To carry out all the recommendations however, particularly those listed in paragraphs c and f, would

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3/ In this connexion, CELADE prepared a document entitled "Informe sobre la documentación histórica demográfica y proyecto de creación de centro de documentación". Santiago, September 1973, which has been sent to UNESCO and other agencies that might be interested in the subject.

necessarily entail a considerable increase in available resources and in the present work-load of its researchers. It would also mean embarking upon a second stage in CELADE's work on historical demography. In view of the size and scope of such an expansion of its activities, the following paragraphs contain a brief description of the bases and possibilities of the project.

## II. PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHY IN LATIN AMERICA

1. Research on historical demography is by no means a separate intellectual or scientific venture from the study of current population problems. A thorough demographic research generally implies a historical perspective, either because an ideal demographic analysis requires a wider chronological approach or because the society being analysed retains certain features from past eras which are absent in other regions of the continent. Seen in this light, therefore, historical demography is highly topical.

2. The historical study of the population, however, is not only useful because of its topical implications. Historical demography has an important area of its own in the field of social sciences in so far as, unlike Europe for example, Latin America has not yet defined its primary objectives, let alone an appropriate methodological framework. This was made quite clear during the July Meeting; the confusion among demographic historians, the variety of techniques and methods, the inadequate or poor use of demographic analysis all detract from the value of much of the research in this field.

3. The picture that was drawn in some of the sessions of the Seminar referred to was discouraging. There is almost a complete lack of resources: in such countries as Chile, Argentina, Peru, etc., much painstaking research has already been completed over

the years that has never been published because the means to do so have not been available. Very often the work requires a preliminary critical revision by demographers accustomed to this kind of study. There is over-lapping and repetition or errors owing to the lack of communication between researchers, often within the same country. People working on a thesis and graduate students interested in this kind of study, especially Americans and Europeans, find no clear guidelines to work on in the face of impressive but disorganized volumes of documentary information throughout a vast continent. At times the data contained in these documents are poorly suited to present-day methodology.

4. Discouraging though this situation is, there are a few positive aspects worth mentioning. CELADE's research in various countries of Latin America has uncovered many places that have some good and well-organized documentation that is suitable for research on historical demography. Equally important is the fact that CELADE is in permanent contact with a considerable number of persons and institutions who are prepared to participate in serious research in the field. At the same time, CELADE possesses an efficient infrastructure and demographic researchers that have already indicated great interest in historical demography. The seminars on various problems of historical demography and the publications that have appeared so far are ample evidence of this fact. 4/

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4/ The enquiries into useful documentation for historical demography are contained in the reports referred to previously which, classified by area and country, will shortly be published by CELADE and by the National Institute of Anthropology and History of Mexico. The statements made here are based in part on these reports. With regard to publications that are indicative of CELADE's interest in recent years in historical demography, in addition to those already mentioned in previous notes, reference can here be made to Jorge L. Somoza, "Nivel y diferenciales de la fecundidad en la Argentina en el siglo XIX", (Documento de trabajo N° 43); Jorge L. Somoza and Alfredo E. Lattes, "Muestras de los dos primeros censos nacionales de población, 1869 y 1895" (Documento de trabajo N° 46); with no author but with an introduction by Julio Morales V., "Bibliografía de demografía histórica (Publicaciones desde 1960 en adelante)", Series B, N° 35, July 1971).

### III. EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT ON HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHY

1. a. Duration of the project. The fact that research on historical demography is slow and complicated has probably been one of its main drawbacks. Generally speaking, the compilation of data requires the services of several people who have studied paleography, preceded by a painstaking search of usable documentation; thereafter, yet another element that slows down the whole process is the constant revision and checking that is needed to ensure the accuracy of the data. It is therefore very important to possess, as does CELADE, comprehensive documentary descriptions of the regions where the research is to be carried out. Nonetheless, because the work has to be carried out in several different places at the same time and because it depends on research teams operating far from the institution's headquarters, we believe two years to be the minimum time necessary to obtain some definitive results.

b. Broadly speaking, this period of two years could be divided up in the following way:

i) three months to re-establish contacts in the field and to set the teams in operation;

ii) twelve months for extracting data;

iii) nine months for processing and interpreting the data. Two years would be sufficient, in our opinion, to obtain specific results in certain parts of the continent. However, bearing in mind that our final objective is to incorporate these regional experiments in a general methodological handbook, the period indicated would not necessarily be final.

2. a. Intensive research areas. As already indicated, one of the main concerns of CELADE in recent months has been to find a number of places in Latin America offering ideal conditions for embarking upon research on historical demography. The problem



is all the more complicated because a good location is not only a place which has an impressive volume of documentary information but one which also fulfills other requirements, such as a minimum degree of organization of the archives, on-the-spot researchers interested in the subject, etc. In the light of a number of variables of this kind, we believe that the following four areas would be suitable:

i) Argentina, where some parish in the vicinity of Santa Fé or San Nicolás de los Arroyos in the Province of Buenos Aires would have to be chosen.

ii) In Chile, we would opt for a fairly extensive area where some work has already been carried out; namely, the so-called Norte Chico which historically would stretch from what is now the Province of Valparaíso to that of Coquimbo inclusive. A few parishes would have to be chosen within this area, after studying the various possibilities with the team that would be responsible for collecting the data.

iii) In Peru, the area of the modern city of Arequipa and its vicinity offers very favourable working conditions.

iv) Finally, we believe that field work would have to be carried out in the central region of Colombia, opting for some parish of Bucaramanga, Curití or Socorro.

b. We should point out that the areas mentioned above have been studied from the documentary aspect and that contact has been made there with working groups or people interested in conducting the research. They are mentioned here, however, merely by way of example, since the final decision could not be taken until a careful visit had been made and a sample taken of the relevant archives.

3. Other projects. As stated above, a large number of researchers currently exist, including research teams that have made considerable headway in their work but cannot complete it for lack of funds, for lack of the advisory services of professional demographers or for both reasons at once. In addition, there is a further body of research that has been completed but that still needs revision or discussion with experts. In Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Colombia and Mexico alone, to our knowledge, there are at least twenty experiments in this situation. CELADE would be interested in providing technical and financial assistance to some of these, under a reciprocal agreement that would permit the use of some data series or some of their findings for methodological purposes. This would not necessarily entail material assistance in publishing the results, although in certain cases this might be possible.

4. Training and publication and diffusion of findings. Researchers working on locations selected for intensive research could not work efficiently unless they received rapid preliminary training in the collection and, possibly, the organization of historical demographic data. We also believe that many high-level study centres or research institutes will be interested in some of their members having an opportunity to receive specialized training or to describe the results of their research in meetings specially convened for the purpose. Finally, it would perhaps be a good idea to organize a meeting of researchers who request assistance in the field of demographic analysis in order to complete their work. All this would suggest the need to hold at least two working seminars in the next two years. As regards diffusion, priority will be given to publications: these will include the bulletins and handbook already mentioned, but thought will also have to be given to the publication of a series of monographs resulting from the work in which CELADE participates directly or indirectly.

5. Specialized personnel. For the last few months, CELADE's researchers have included a historian interested in demography whose work has proved indispensable for the preparation for the current project. It will in future be necessary to establish a basic team of experts, formed by the above mentioned historian plus at least one historical demographer. This team would be responsible for orienting the various working groups, answering questions and preparing the final reports on the research.

6. Secretariat, etc. The permanent presence of researchers working on this project, the storage of data, the data-processing activities, etc., mean that special premises will have to be made available and some auxiliary personnel recruited. CELADE's existing facilities are almost permanently occupied and an additional budget item for the purpose will therefore have to be considered.