

Call for Abstracts:
Population indicators and the politics of expectations

XIX ISA World Congress of Sociology: Power, Violence and Justice: Reflections, Responses and Responsibilities, July 15 - 21, 2018, Toronto, Canada.

Session host: RC41 Sociology of Population

Organizers: Walter Bartl, Reinhold Sackmann

Deadline: September 30, 2017

In the sociology of quantification, the relevance of population numbers in democratic politics and democratic representation was among the earliest issues addressed. A basic assumption in this line of reasoning is that there is an inherently political dimension to what seems to be methodological or technocratic issues in the use of numbers in politics. The planned session picks up this argument by focusing on specific aspects of how population indicators are institutionalized and used in politics.

Population indicators operate largely hidden from public scrutiny—for example, they define the size of electoral districts or the nature of intergovernmental fiscal relations. However, the processes by which population indicators become institutionalized as key elements of collective efforts to achieve larger social goals are still poorly understood. The same can be said about conflicts over alternative indicators.

- How can we systematically describe institutionalization processes of key population indicators?
- Which conflicts arise from divergent practices of using population numbers?

Expectations about the future are often symbolized and narrated in politics by using demographic projections. On the one hand demographic projections belong to the most reliable type of projections that we know. On the other hand, migration movements introduce a notoriously hard to predict element in demographic projections. It has been argued repeatedly that a projection of future demographic developments — such as in shrinking societies — will demotivate genuine political decision-making by suggesting overwhelming factual constraints.

- How do population indicators operate as instruments of imagination?
- How do demographic projections account for the irreducible uncertainty of the future?

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In case you have any questions please get in touch.