
Twenty-one authors from varied fields have made contributions to this rather diverse collection of articles and essays. Regional "medicometrics" is defined by Bailly in a brief introduction as a wide-open discipline ("discipline ouverte"), which studies medical functions ("fonctionnement médical") through the confronting of diverse viewpoints emanating from econometricians, economists, geographers, hospital administrators, private and hospital physicians, and "users", and which emphasises the regional side of medical practice together with the resulting cost-benefits that are associated with such practice (p. 7). The book is divided into three sections (after brief surveys of regional medicometrics and of the history of medical geography): 1) analysis of medical behaviour; 2) the management and planning of hospital locations; and 3) medical education and regional ambulatory health care. It would seem that regional medicometrics as a field so-defined should cover more themes than these three. For example, it might be logically concluded that the spatial analysis of user locations in relation to hospital and clinic networks would fit well into this same interdisciplinary field. As it is, in this book the supply side is emphasized; even in the brief chapter by Gilliand ("Swiss medical demography", p. 59), the author zeros in on the supply of doctors, even though the title of his paper might have lent itself to some treatment of the demand side of medical services and health care in general.

The style of presentation varies enormously from one chapter to the next (chapters are not numbered), all of which contributes to the impression of a fairly disparate collection of papers on the general field under discussion. Huguelet's paper on hospital planning, while giving seminal ideas, resembles a detailed lecture outline with numerous series of points. One of the very few papers that makes an attempt to come to grips in some way with actual hospital data is Wagenaar's contribution on the problem of num-

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bers of hospital beds (the Netherlands case, p. 129). He compares the numbers of beds by province in 1974 and 1981 and comes up with a fairly simple growth forecasting model (with 1995 as the target date), which, incidently, predicts a decrease of available beds. The approach seems to be one of extrapolating present trends into the future, although correction factors by province (11 provinces) are introduced.

In general, the volume is useful as a collection of essays in the fairly vaguely defined field called regional medicometrics. However, the highly uneven character of the numerous contributions, the seeming lack of connection between them, and the paucity of actual "mediometric" analysis have the net effect of leaving the reader wanting "something more". The review articles at the beginning of this work are very useful in defining some of the components of this emerging field and the effort required to assemble such a varied panorama of viewpoints is extremely commendable. This book will be useful as a reference text in graduate seminars or courses in medical economics, medical geography and other related fields. However, it should always be used in conjunction with related works which will shed more light on the actual methodological problems of research based on real hospital and patient data. Professors Bailly and Périat are to be thanked for a first step in elucidating this complex field of study.

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Regional Analysis and the New International Division of Labour.

Perhaps it is a truism to suggest that academic analysis follows, rather than precedes, the patterns of economic behaviour which ebb and flow with the tide of the capitalist system. Nevertheless the efforts to document, theorize and clarify the behaviour patterns of capital in the current downswing have been worthwhile and substantive. One is led to recall the work of Massey and Meegan in the U.K., Harvey and the URPE collective in the USA, and Taylor and Thrift, and Gibson and Horvath in Australia. There are many others, but the trend of the genre is now quite clear: a neo-Marxist political economy approach is now well established in academia and is being published by the conservative houses.

The series of essays edited by Moulaert and Salinas is one such example of a radical political analysis of the current international economic crisis. The book is divided into three parts: I. Theory, Methods and Concepts; II. Applications to Developing Countries; III. Applications to Developed Countries. The Introduction presents a carefully defined set of concepts to be followed by the essayists. The editors have used the concepts of mode of production, class conflict, social control over the means of production, and historical materialism, and to a greater or lesser degree these are fairly applied throughout the text. A more consistent usage of the theory, and references to it in the empirical chapters, would have strengthened the contribution to our understanding of both critical behaviour and theory.

In the first substantive chapter Moulaert follows the emergence of a new regional science paradigm enriched by the injection of dialectical materialism: to wit, social and economic relations form a unique structure which is both a constituent and determinant element. These relations are intrinsically dynamic in that they are simultaneously conflictual and contradictory - and necessarily historical in context. This framework is significantly different to Economic Idealistic Positivism - which is the generally accepted term for contemporary scientific methods under the rubric of traditional economic analyses. Indeed, throughout this volume the authors juxtapose these two diametrical positions offering useful comparative and critical points.

The second chapter, by Corragio, introduces a spatial component. This is not to suggest any radical departures, because space per se has always been a concern; rather, what we have here, and in the following section by Markusen, is an attempt to place regional space into a materialist framework. Both authors tread carefully through the morass of the previous literature on the topic and conclude that spatial fetishism must be replaced by an understanding of social, political and economic forces and conflicts which both define and shape regionalism. Essentially, they offer an intelligent guide to those wishing to escape from the sterile and simplistic constraints of spatialism. Markusen in particular offers a summary of some important steps bridging the gaps between theory and praxis, and between space and process.

The final chapter in the theory section, by Liossatos, offers an alternative explanation of interregional transfers of value. The analysis draws on both Marx and Sraffa and argues that firms in sectors of a higher value composition of capital than society's average realize greater profits than their respective contributions to the mass of surplus value. The analysis is valuable only at the level of simple reproduction and becomes too complex when
proper accumulation and multiple transfers of value between different sectors are considered. The author also offers a redefinition of the value/price problem, which is often debated in the literature, by suggesting that transfers of value from one region to the next can be considered as expressions of the transfer of purchasing power over the net social product. While this is a useful thought, the extent to which it can be operationalized is yet to be demonstrated.

Part II of the book contains two chapters focusing on Developing Countries - Peru and Mexico. While both are interesting studies in themselves, they could have been integrated more completely into the theoretical framework presented in Part I. The chapter on Peru, by Salinas, has a strong historical emphasis, but it would also have been very useful to see the analysis extended to a more detailed discussion of the contemporary material conditions in that country. Barkin's chapter on Mexico demonstrates the modus operandi of multinational corporations, which incorporate developing countries and their poorer regions into the world capitalist system. Essentially, he argues that the internationalization of capital has transformed the economic structures of most countries in the world system. Barkin emphasizes that his argument, drawing on the impact of the new international division of labour, contradicts the traditionist arguments which suggest that comparative advantage will improve the welfare of all participants. This particular section on the developing countries could have presented further and more detailed case studies of the varying impacts of the current crisis: it would be useful to see studies of industrial restructuring, class conflict, and internal class/capital responses to the phase of internationalization in a traumatic condition.

Part III offers three detailed studies of industrial restructuring, the state, and labour migrations in developed countries - namely the United States and in Europe. While the choice of these empirical examples is not clear, they do provide some interesting new portrayals of crises in a political economy framework. However, the choice of what is covered in this section must be matched with those topics and countries which have been excluded and which may well have offered more cogent examples of critical behaviour and restructuring. Would, for instance, a chapter on the Japanese penetration of the United States steel and automobile industries contribute more to our understanding of political economy theory? Or, would a discussion of labour migration and the responses of labour, capital, and the state to the current crisis in the whole of Europe be more useful to us than a discussion limited to Belgium alone? Such comments should not detract from the originality or utility of the chapters in this section - rather what should be achieved is a deepening of our understanding of the internationalization of capital and the responses of people, capital, and the state to the changes in material conditions. Nevertheless, there are some very useful data in the chapters by Noyelle and Cohen on restructuring in the USA and the new spatial organization of the European and American automotive industries. Much of the empirical information here is readily available in other sources, but it is well presented in their political economy framework. Noyelle's debunking of the simplistic notion of snowbelt-sunbelt movements of capital and industry in the USA is well presented and quite useful.

This book needs a concluding chapter - which of course is very easy for a reviewer to request. The empirical experiences need to be pulled together into a coherent whole to enlarge our understanding of both process and theory. It is, however, a useful contribution to the burgeoning literature on political economy, regional underdevelopment, unequal and uneven development, and class conflict at different spatial levels. It would be useful to upper level undergraduate students and to some graduate specialist classes. The juxtaposing of traditionalist and radical explanations and arguments is a useful teaching tool. More of this type of discussion could have been included in the concluding chapter which this reviewer would like to have seen.

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This volume is one of fourteen titles in Hutchinson's "Built Environment Series". The ambiguous title suggests a primer on urban renewal. In fact, the authors trace the history of renewal policy and administrative practice in Britain from the mid-nineteenth century to 1980. The book consists of three related endeavours: 1) historical overview of urban renewal policy with an emphasis on the post-World II era (the largest section of the three by far); 2) case studies of renewal practice in Birmingham and Leeds; and 3) a critical review of housing policy from a theoretical perspective of urban political economy.

In their introduction the authors offer to interpret urban renewal policy as a product of specific political and economic cir-
cumstances. The problem of slum development itself is similarly understood to have resulted from larger forces of capitalist society, a society that is inherently "unequal". A central theme here is that "until society becomes more equal urban renewal may ameliorate and modify the form of 'the inner city problem' but it will not go away" (p. 316).

The concern with theory is secondary, however, to a detailed history of renewal policy initiatives. This is presented on two levels; at a higher level of generality, each chapter is organized around a particular policy perspective as enunciated in successive Housing Acts and considered by the authors to mark fundamental intellectual shifts in orientation to the problem of urban renewal. These orientations include slum clearance, comprehensive redevelopment, rehabilitation, gradual renewal, the poverty program and economic renewal. At a more detailed level, the specific policy delivery measures, as enacted within each orientation, are summarized, and a comprehensive analysis of their success (but more usually, their failure) in implementation is provided.

For the student of urban renewal policy there are several crucial issues of policy orientation that are highlighted by the authors' presentation. One of these concerns the trend towards area-selective positive discrimination with state housing funds and, increasingly, with economic aid, targeted to the most devastated urban areas. The shift to economic from housing aid is said to have originated with the recognition, by the late 1970s, that urban decline was the product of market forces and could only be addressed by solving the threefold problem of the inner city in late capitalism: 1) migration of skilled workers, 2) heavy job losses, and 3) insufficient investment in new manufacturing industry. The authors are unhopeful that spatial discrimination, whether in housing or in more general economic aid, will effect a solution for the inner city: "At best, inner cities policies can reduce the rate of decline in the priority areas, but at the expense of more rapid decline in other areas where conditions are only marginally better" (p. 203).

The overall impact of this book's review of every conceivable form of British renewal program since 1868 is to make one aware that the attack on the inner city slum has, above all, lacked coherency or consistency. The authors are only partly successful at explaining the reasons for this incoherence and the comprehensibility of the work suffers as a result.

Most crucial of all issues covered in this text is the ideological shifts that have occurred on the concept and role of renewal policy and, more generally, state social welfare legislation, during the tenures of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. It is perhaps a sign of the times that, whereas in 1979 Stephen Merrett concluded his analysis of State Housing in Britain with suggestions for a housing strategy "in the event of a socialist government taking power in this country", the present volume is required to evaluate such recent urban experiments as Enterprise Zones and Urban Development Corporations. It is unclear, now more than ever, when a socialist government will return to power in Britain; in the interim we have a new, monetarist, lexicon of inner city policies to begin weighing in the historical balance. The authors' opinion on this is conveyed as a central tension in the book, summarized succinctly in their concluding chapter: "The obvious paradox of urban renewal in the 1970s has been an increasingly sophisticated analysis of the symptoms and causes of urban decay paralleled by a declining commitment to investment in programmes to deal with either" (p. 318).

Despite a deceptive title, this book should prove useful as an encyclopedic reference source on British urban renewal policy, perhaps as a basis for cross-national comparisons, especially with the United States. The authors are to be commended for placing the historical evolution of renewal policy in political and economic context, although their attempt at developing a theoretical perspective of urban political economy is thin and unsatisfactory. Perhaps most significant of all, this text begins the task of assessing the current Conservative government's experiments with inner-city renewal in Britain. Success with these policies should be important to the fortunes of the Conservative Party as well as to the extent to which such endeavours as Enterprise Zones will be copied in declining inner cities around the globe.

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The Urban Retailing System: Location, Cognition and Behaviour.

This book is one of a number of texts on retailing and marketing geography to come out of Britain in recent years. However, it makes no attempt to be exhaustive, and thereby avoids the pitfalls of so many texts which lack any overall framework and where chapters are often poorly connected. Potter's work, on the other hand, has a clearly stated theme and necessitates one considering the work as a whole. That theme, however, almost
seems a statement of the obvious. Potter argues that there is a strong relationship between the urban retailing system and consumer perception, cognition and spatial behaviour; the former influences the latter in the short term, while the opposite is more true in the longer term. This interrelationship underscores the theoretical, conceptual and empirical approaches in the book and results in it being unique among texts in this area. The first part of the book focuses on the urban retailing structure, while the second part relates this to various aspects of consumer behaviour.

Although the approach may be new, much of the material on which the book is based is very familiar. Potter draws upon an extensive bibliography which will give newcomers to the field, particularly undergraduates, a good review of the state of the art. But for old hands it has to be questioned whether they need to be hit again in such detail with the theories and models of urban retail location (Chapter 2) and the basic concepts and models of consumer behaviour (Chapter 5). Potter could have sought a compromise in his appeal to these two different audiences through, for example, cutting back on the first of his basic aims in Chapter 2, by directing the undergraduate more to the original source, and expanding the second aim which includes assessing the validity of the models against an ever-changing urban retailing system.

One of the major strengths of this book lies in the case study approach, which incorporates earlier work by the author, including his doctoral dissertation. Most readers of this journal will not be familiar with either Stockport or Swansea, but that is of little consequence. Potter does an admirable job of 1) explaining and developing the various field and analytical techniques used; 2) relating the empirical work to various theories and concepts discussed earlier; 3) replicating and refining the Stockport study in the context of Swansea, in order to counteract the influence, for example, of actual retail location; and 4) emphasising that too much attention has been given to retail centre size and not enough to centre morphology, functional mix, accessibility and various shopping centre environment issues.

Given the valuable input in Chapters 1 to 7, it is a pity that the concluding chapter is such a let-down. It is almost as if the author shoots himself in the foot! Rather than a summary, conclusion, and future research initiatives style of chapter, Potter, all too briefly, reaches out to various applied and retail planning issues, after admitting that excellent accounts exist elsewhere. Also, instead of addressing issues relating to western industrial countries and linking these to the previous seven chapters, we are mainly presented with a very British debate on hypermarkets and other decentralized forms of shopping.

In spite of these shortcomings the book is well conceived, well structured, and well written and will be of value to senior undergraduate and graduate students in urban-economic geography, planning and business administration.

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The title is misleading. We have a text on urban sociology that relates theory to a limited array of Canadian circumstances. To paraphrase the preface, we have suffered in Canada from course material that does not relate to our experience in Canadian cities. We have had to rely on daily newspaper reports and books written for other audiences and other nations. "It is my hope that this book will help to offset this problem. I have tried to apply universal theories [of urban sociology] to the Canadian context to show the student of cities how we fit into the world context and how our cities grow and develop." To this demanding task is added the practical considerations that "knowing how cities work and how people adapt to them will provide us with the tools to cope with problems in future cities, making them better places in which to live."

These laudable intentions are approached by means of eight succinct chapters, which are consistent in length and format, clearly written and presented. Chapters 1 to 3 are introductory; they review the origins of cities, Canadian urbanization, and the urban transformation - from pre-industrial to industrial to the rural-urban continuum, suburbs, back-to-the-country and back-to-the-city movements. While this material may serve to introduce undergraduates to new concepts, it is both repetitious and incomplete to old hands. To appeal to both audiences, these chapters could have been reduced to present the author's interpretation of Canadian urbanization within its world context, and refer the reader to basic sources. This would have nearly doubled the space available for the heart of the text that follows.

Chapters 4 to 7 provide the essence of this book. They examine the roles of competition, social choice, and social power in the allocation of resources, and evaluate the city in terms of its quality of life. The approach is to introduce these themes through the medium of recognized authorities, to summarize very briefly their
essential findings and to refer to some Canadian detail. For example, in Chapter 4, on Human Ecology and Competition, we meet Warren on the functional roles of neighbourhoods; McKenzie on competition for space and resources; concentric, sector and multiple nuclei models; segregation by income, family status and ethnicity; social area analysis; and the mapping of crime. As this array of thought is condensed into the standard length of twenty pages for each chapter, the argument is extremely tight. There is little or no space for interpretation and assessment. It is a staccato approach, providing a series of abrupt comments.

We receive an abundance of lists. "A" states . . ., whereas "B" argues that . . ., "C" adds that . . ., "D" goes further, and "E"'s research finds that . . . This approach introduces a massive amount of detail; it also denies a continuous evolving argument, the author's interpretation, and discussion through bringing in theory and practice to support a particular line of argument.

I found the text to be both intimidating and incomplete. It is a bare bones approach. If you know the basic material then the inadequacies and difficulties of the studies and their conclusions are not sufficiently exposed, and if the material is not known then the succinct summaries lack depth and are too scanty. It is almost as if a series of sociological abstracts have been grouped together. The editor describes it as a "short, fast-flowing book." True, but it is also difficult to grasp the significance of each successive summary as the material flows rapidly by. There is too much in too little space to assimilate. Do we still live in industrial cities? Is the rural-urban continuum still valid given the wide spatial spread of urban characteristics? Is it possible to discuss the ecology of crime in two-and-a-half pages? We have a list of municipal government structures (Higgins), but regional municipalities and metropolitan systems of government are not covered. Intriguing statements that ethnicity and racial segregation may in Canada be the opposite of US. cities, and also decreasing, are not pursued. A large array of material has been assembled, but its presentation is too clipped and terse.

Some Canadian materials are included, but much less than might be expected. Urban models are not updated to Yeates and Garner, or Russwurm on the rural-urban fringe. I am surprised at no mention of Artibise and Stelter, Axworthy, Simmons' Urban Canada, Carver, or Yeates' Main Street, to name but some omissions. What about McGahan's Urban Sociology in Canada or the Lithwick series on Urban Canada? The editor states that "the book can be read both as a discussion of theories of city life and of life in Canada's main cities in the late twentieth century"; it is more the former than the latter.

The book provides a series of headings and thoughts against which the Canadian city might be appreciated, but this analysis is not undertaken by Kennedy. It could be used as an accompaniment to a course in urban sociology. Lectures would extend upon the themes being examined and their source materials, the students would have a convenient but abbreviated summary, and seminars could relate or contrast the theme to local circumstances. It is a useful introduction with breadth, not depth.

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This book contains the forty-two contributed papers presented to the 18th International Conference of Agricultural Economists held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in August/September 1982. The relationship to the Proceedings of that conference, which are published separately under the title Growth and Equity in Agricultural Development, is described in the Foreword as a complementary one.

The book is organized under nine topics: Growth and Equity; Disciplinary Considerations (8 papers); Economic Growth and Agricultural Development (8 papers); Equity in Agricultural Development (6 papers); The Role of Women in Agricultural Development (3 papers); Agricultural Policy (6 papers); Energy (3 papers); Agricultural Research (3 papers); International Trade and Development (3 papers); and Natural Resources (2 papers). In each section discussion is recorded, usually after every three papers. This takes the form of remarks, usually by two discussants, and a rapporteur's summary.

The topics covered by the forty-two papers vary enormously and, although all were supposed to be directly related to the central theme of the conference, the relationship is sometimes quite tenuous. The major strength of the volume is that it presents in summary form some of the major theoretical and methodological approaches currently being used by agricultural economists together with comments by their peers on the validity and value of these approaches. Several presentations are based on recent Ph.D. theses. Many of the papers are based on core studies which draw heavily, although by no means exclusively, on the experience of
developing nations. Most of the papers contain very useful references that readers may find particularly valuable, as the papers themselves are very short.

From the papers in this volume it would appear that spatial disparities are of limited interest to agricultural economists. There is a paper by Michel Petit on this topic which draws on some work on villages in the Vosges. Petit argues that "the treatment of space in economic analysis leaves much to be desired" (p. 50), a view which is not shared by the discussant for the session, Ismail Shariff, who comments, "I vehemently disagree with Petit's contention that existing spatial disparity has been discarded by economists" (p. 57). A careful reading of the other forty-one papers revealed no explicit concern with spatial disparities, and spatial inequity was rarely, if ever, mentioned.

The major weakness of the volume is that it contains forty-two papers plus substantive discussion in a little over 300 pages. Although the papers are grouped under topic headings they are often quite disparate, and only in the section on the Role of Women in Agricultural Development is there any real coherence. This is perhaps inevitable with a collection of contributed papers selected from over 300 initial submissions.

The volume reveals a growing awareness of the socio-political context and of the importance of "noneconomic and nonmarket factors" (p. 285) among agricultural economists. In several places throughout the book the recorded discussion draws attention to such issues. As Martin, Huh, and MacDonald comment towards the end of the book, "the methodology of economics must be adapted so as to explicitly account for noneconomic and nonmarket costs and benefits. The traditional methodology of the economist can be used as no more than a starting point in such an undertaking" (p. 286).

Given the nature of the task they were facing, the editors have done an excellent job and the book makes a number of important contributions to our understanding of the complex process of rural development.

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Le Québec connaît depuis une vingtaine d’années des indices de fécondité réduits qui compromettent à moyen terme sa capacité de renouveler sa population. Cette situation, qui s’apprête à celle de presque tous les pays du monde industrialisé, présente ici un caractère original qui tient d’une part à l’ampleur de la réduction des niveaux de fécondité - qui se situent maintenant parmi les plus bas au monde - et, d’autre part, à la rapidité avec laquelle cette réduction s’est opérée.

Tel est le point de départ du livre de Georges Mathews qui identifie à partir de là cinq positions générales dans les discussions autour de cette question. Les deux premières se rejoignent et consistent à dire qu’il s’agit sans doute là d’une baisse temporaire, et donc peu importante : dans un cas, elle serait en bonne partie la conséquence du retardement d’un certain nombre de naissances à des âges plus avancés des mères; dans l’autre, cette baisse s’inscrirait plutôt dans un "long cycle d’interactions entre les variables démographiques et économiques, au cours duquel la fécondité connaît des hauts et des bas" (p. 19). Les démographes surtout sont associés à la première position, tandis qu’on aura reconnu dans l’autre la thèse dite "du pendule", de l’économiste américain Easterlin, qui associe aux cycles de l’économie les variations également vues comme cycliques des niveaux de fécondité. Une troisième réaction consiste à reconnaître l’ampleur et le caractère permanent de la chute de la fécondité, sans y voir des désavantages qui exigereraient des correctifs. Enfin, les tenants des deux dernières positions s’entendent sur le caractère permanent ainsi que les désavantages de la situation démographique actuelle, mais divergent quant à la façon d’y réagir : les uns pensent qu’il n’y a pas moyen d’y remédier, les autres soutiennent le contraire. L’auteur est un tenant de cette dernière position et son livre vise à nous démontrer pourquoi.

Bien construit, d’une logique exemplaire et tout à fait accessible aux non-initiés, l’ouvrage de Mathews comble un besoin important à l’heure actuelle : celui de faire le point autrement qu’à coupures de données chiffrées sur la situation démographique québécoise et d’amorcer clairement par là le débat sur son avenir prochain. La thèse, si elle nous convainc de la possibilité réelle de dépopulation qui guette le Québec au tournant de l’an 2000 et des désavantages certains qui l’accompagnent, ne nous démontre cependant pas de façon aussi claire la voie dans laquelle il faut s’engager pour y remédier, ni les objectifs qui doivent nous y guider. Un aspect de cette question en particulier n’apparaît jamais clairement avec la structure adoptée par l’auteur : examinant tour à tour cinq types de réactions face à la situation actuelle, il néglige de s’interroger systématiquement sur les origines des comportements récents en matière de fécondité qui, ne l’oublions pas, caractérisent de façon plus ou moins marquée tous les pays du monde industrialisé. S’il n’est guère facile d’identifier ces causes, il
parait cependant essentiel de tenter de les comprendre lorsqu’on veut s’engager dans une action correctrice.

S’en prenant d’abord aux démographes, Mathews leur reproche d’avoir fait preuve d’attentisme et de s’être trompés dans l’interprétation des premiers indices d’une baisse importante de la fécondité au Québec au cours des années ’60 et ’70. Il est vrai que les démographes n’ont pas prévu le caractère permanent et l’ampleur de la réduction des niveaux de fécondité qu’a connue le Québec récemment. Mais penser comme l’auteur qu’une telle méprise vient d’une mauvaise compréhension des indices utilisés me parait cependant erroné. Cette mauvaise interprétation traduit plutôt la difficulté qu’éprouvent la plupart des démographes à faire une lecture historique adéquate des phénomènes étudiés, de même que la difficulté, propre à bien d’autres disciplines, qu’il y a à analyser des tendances de fond au moment même où elles se dessinent. En démographie, ces difficultés sont trop souvent résolues, ou plutôt évitées, par une approche technique et mécanique des questions abordées. Dans ce cas-ci, cela a conduit à exagérer l’importance des changements de calendrier de la fécondité au détriment de ceux d’intensité, c’est-à-dire à exagérer l’impact du retard de l’âge des mères à la naissance de leurs enfants comme facteur d’explication de la baisse observée, et donc à ne pas reconnaître l’ampleur généralisée de la chute de la fécondité qui apparaissait dès les années ’75 dans les taux de fécondité du moment.

Le modèle d’Easterlin, qui prévoit une remontée de la fécondité vers le milieu des années ’80 suite à l’arrivée aux âges procréateurs de générations moins nombreuses et donc économiquement plus avantageuses, fait l’objet ici d’une critique empirique : l’auteur fait ressortir, à juste titre, les problèmes liés d’une part à la mesure et à l’évolution du revenu relatif des jeunes adultes et, d’autre part, à l’analyse du caractère plus ou moins permanent de la présence des femmes sur le marché du travail. La thèse d’Easterlin aurait aussi pu être discutée en fonction de ses prémisses théoriques : c’est en partie ce que fait Mathews de façon implicite lorsqu’il écrit qu’à partir d’une perspective historique dont l’intérêt est évident, Richard Easterlin s’enfonce dans une logique ahistorique et aboutit, sur la foi de corrélations discutables et téméraires, à des conclusions pour le moins surprenantes pour le moins avantageuses de la chute de la fécondité qui apparaissait dès les années ’75 dans les taux de fécondité du moment.

Dans un autre ordre d’idées, Mathews avance qu’un Québec moins populeux aurait moins de poids politique dans l’ensemble canadien et nord-américain, ce qui est loin d’être évident. Comme l’auteur le souligne lui-même, le nombre seul ne peut fonder le poids politique d’un État. Il n’est pas certain que le marché québécois ait atteint un tel point de saturation qu’il ne soit plus possible de l’élargir, d’autant plus que la performance économique du Québec ne dépend pas uniquement du marché intérieur, mais découle également de la place qu’il réussit à se tailler au sein d’un marché beaucoup plus large. De plus, l’analyse que fait l’auteur de l’impact de la sous-fécondité sur la situation économique me paraît sous-estimer la force des mécanismes économiques, leur force souvent insoupçonnée pour s’adapter à de nouvelles situations de crise.

Dans un autre ordre d’idées, Mathews avance qu’un Québec moins populeux aurait moins de poids politique dans l’ensemble canadien et nord-américain, ce qui est loin d’être évident. Comme l’auteur le souligne lui-même, le nombre seul ne peut fonder le poids politique d’un État : il s’agit là d’une question que des analyses plus fouillées devraient éclairer davantage.

Examinant enfin l’argument qui veut que l’on ait moins d’enfants parce que la planète est surpeuplée, Mathews y voit là une conséquence directe de la croissance démographique dans le Tiers-Monde : au nom du droit des peuples à vivre et à survivre, il le rejette comme un faux argument, non pertinent dans le débat actuel. Cette attitude me paraît critiquable. En effet, que cette position soit effectivement le produit de la propagande américaine, ou qu’elle traduise plutôt la rationalisation à posteriori d’une décision prise pour de tout autres motifs, il reste qu’elle témoigne d’une vision nettement plus internationale des questions de population, qu’il n’est pas...
possible d'ignorer. Cette vision renvoie plus particulièrement à la question des rapports économiques inégaux entre pays riches et moins peuplés du monde industrialisé et pays pauvres et populeux du Tiers-Monde; elle met en évidence l'existence d'inégalités profondes et de plus en plus prononcées dans les conditions de vie et de survie des peuples. Fondamentale, cette question devrait faire l'objet d'un examen beaucoup plus fouillé.

Confronté aux deux dernières attitudes présentées au début du livre, et donc à l'épineuse question de savoir si l'on peut agir sur les niveaux de fécondité, l'auteur répond résolument par l'affirmative et propose essentiellement deux mesures à cet effet, soit des allocations familiales accrues à partir du troisième enfant et un régime universel d'assurance-maternité comparable à celui de la France. Sans discuter ici de l'efficacité de ces mesures spécifiques, dont la première surtout est coûteuse, mais seulement si les gens ont effectivement un troisième enfant, je veux plutôt parler de l'efficacité générale attendue des mesures natalistes, qui ne me paraît pas démontrée.

Le recours aux données d'enquêtes menées récemment au Québec n'est pas vraiment concluant à cet égard. Certaines personnes y voient la démonstration que peu de mesures pourraient véritablement influencer le comportement procréateur des couples, tandis que d'autres, comme l'auteur, y lisent le contraire. Les exemples pris à l'étranger révèlent la même image contradictoire qui ne peut apporter selon moi de réponse définitive. La question est pourtant essentielle et renvoie à celle des origines des comportements actuels en matière de fécondité, puisque vouloir agir sur ceux-ci suppose, au moins en partie, de pouvoir agir sur leurs déterminants.

L'auteur aborde cette question d'un point de vue essentiellement économique, suggérant qu'une aide financière, surtout à partir du troisième enfant, conduirait un nombre appréciable de couples à avoir plus d'enfants. N'est-ce pas là négliger d'autres aspects moins matériels de la question ? La norme de deux enfants paraît correspondre de plus en plus aux souhaits d'une très grande majorité des couples : si cela traduit le fait que ce nombre réduit répond désormais aux besoins affectifs dans une large mesure, d'avoir des enfants, peut-on véritablement penser inférer les comportements en faveur d'un troisième enfant en en dérivant une plus grande partie des coûts ? Il ne faut pas poser la question uniquement en termes des obstacles, essentiellement économiques, à des nombres plus élevés d'enfants, mais aussi en regard des raisons positives, encore à investiguer, qui permettraient de mieux comprendre pourquoi aujourd'hui les gens mettent peu d'enfants au monde.

Oui, le livre de Mathews amorce bien le débat sur la question. Mais là où il s'achève s'ouvre grande la discussion, encore à faire, des motivations profondes des individus et des familles à reproduire la vie dans les sociétés post-industrielles. Il ne s'agit pas là d'un reproche à l'auteur, qui atteint déjà ici un important objectif, mais bien plutôt d'un constat et d'un appel à de nouvelles études. Au nombre des éléments qu'il serait essentiel d'intégrer à ces études figurent : la question des rapports hommes/femmes, tant sur une base individuelle que sociale ; celle de la fragilité accrue des unions ; enfin, celle du caractère différentiel des niveaux de fécondité qui, bien qu'ayant connu une réduction généralisée, n'en présentent pas moins des différences géographiques et socio-économiques non négligeables.

Notre capacité d'agir dans la situation actuelle dépend de notre aptitude à comprendre le sens profond de ce que nous vivons. Les gens qui se proposent d'agir à court terme seraient bien avisés, comme le propose essentiellement Mathews, de s'en tenir pour l'instant à des mesures dont le coût dépend directement de leur efficacité.

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