FOREWORD

The need for an informed debate

Javier Sánchez Cano



A woman and her daughter look out the window at the city of Seoul, South Korea, on a day of high pollution, March 6, 2019. Photography: Reuters/Kim Hong-Ji

From a political science perspective, demography is not only fundamental for defining the *polity* – the community itself, with its culture and forms of organisation – but, increasingly, it also shapes *policy* – the public policies that need to be adapted to demographic changes— and above all *politics*: political positions and party political debate, where issues such as immigration, integration and identity are today used to polarise opinion and divide societies. For this reason, and given that the aim of the Centre for Contemporary Studies is to promote informed, evidence-based public debate, dedicating this issue of *IDEES* magazine to a reflection on demographic challenges makes perfect sense. In a context of profound economic, social and political transformation, few issues seem more essential than *describing the population*, characterising its groups and categories, and analysing the dynamics determining its evolution, growth and contraction.

Such a reflection is urgently needed, as these rapid changes also foster uncertainties and concerns and, as we know, create fertile ground for demagoguery and undemocratic positions. Collectively, we seem to know too little about how population-related issues work. As Andreu Domingo explains in the prologue to this edition, there is a “demographic common sense”, based on outdated paradigms and focussed on a balance between births and deaths, which is no longer a valid indicator of demographic health.

The aim of this publication is to present the state of the art in these issues to a non-expert

audience and to contribute to a more informed discussion. To this end, Catalonia is privileged in being home to a leading institution: the Centre for Demographic Studies (CED) of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The CED is a pioneering centre in this field, with over 40 years of history and its own consolidated research lines and team, which is why we have entrusted the centre with preparing the contents of this issue of the journal, with Professor Domingo as its academic coordinator. The result is a set of articles that place the Catalan reality within the Spanish and international context and clearly show how the changes in our population, which we perceive directly, have placed us in a new post-transitional phase, typical of advanced societies.

Amid the bitter debate that surrounds us, we wish to stress the optimistic tone, although tempered with realism, that runs through the texts of this volume. Experts bring us their findings and the results of their research; they also share, as you will see, a degree of surprise at such uninformed public debate, this false common sense often based on partial, misinterpreted or biased data. The texts, which provide a complete up-to-date picture of the state of the population in Catalonia, Spain and the world from the perspective of birth rates, ageing and migration, also allow us to appreciate the true nature of the situation, as an expression of success, of progress of all kinds, making a longer and more fruitful life possible, rather than the crisis of civilisation.

Javier Sánchez Cano

Javier Sánchez Cano is director of the Centre for Contemporary Studies. He has been director of European Union Policies in the Government of Catalonia and also in the European Centre for Regions from the European Institute of Public Administration. He was secretary general of the Ibero-American Centre for Strategic Urban Development (CIDEU). He holds a degree in Anglo-Germanic Philology from the University of Barcelona and a degree in Political Science and Sociology from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. He holds a PhD in Political Science from the same university, with the doctoral thesis “Non-central governments and their networks: analysis of their role as actors in globalization”. He has an extensive teaching career and has worked as a lecturer at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the CIDOB Foundation, the UOC and the International University of Andalusia. As a researcher, his work focuses on international relations and regional and local governments, with a special emphasis on regional integration, global agendas and decentralized cooperation. He is a member of the Policy Forum on Development and a member of the Spanish Network for Development Studies. He is also vice-president of the United Nations Association in Spain.