

Important Figures in Demography

PROF. ING. VLADIMÍR ROUBÍČEK, CSC. (1930–2005)*



Vladimír Roubíček was born on 11 May 1930. After completing gymnasium, from 1949 to 1953 he studied economic-statistical engineering at the College of Special Studies and at the Economical Engineering Faculty at the Czech Technical University in Prague. In August 1953 he began working as an assistant in the Department of Statistics at the University of Economics in Prague (VŠE; formerly the Faculty of Economics at the University of Political and Economic Science). As a very successful young teacher, within two years he was appointed a lecturer in the department. In 1956 he began lecturing on demographic statistics and prepared its first course book, titled **Demographic Statistics** (1958). It became the primary teaching resource in demography at the time and represented an important step towards obtaining recognition for demography as an autonomous scientific field. Demography was first taught in the Department of Statistics as a part of economic statistics, and Roubíček initially worked on economic statistics

in the Department of Statistics headed by *Bohumil Korda*. **Demographic Statistics** became the basic resource for teaching demographic statistics and Roubíček submitted the text as his PhD. thesis, which he defended in 1962 at the Faculty of Economics and Public Policy at VŠE (in the field of economic statistics). He was awarded the title of PhD. in economics that same year. His career in research and teaching progressed successfully and in 1967 he was awarded the position of senior lecturer in the Department of Statistics at VŠE. He wrote his habilitation thesis on the subject of potential demography, and a large part of the dissertation was published in *Statistics and Demography VII* (1967) under the title **Population Prognoses and Potential Demography**.

At the initiative of Doc. Roubíček, in 1967 the *Demography Lab* was founded at the *Faculty of Economics and Public Administration VŠE*. The status and affiliation of the Demography Lab changed frequently in the ensuing years (it was always a part of the Department of Statistics, and for a limited period it was part of the Institute of Prognostics at the University of Economics). The Demography Lab enjoyed a strong reputation in professional circles, directly owing to the work of Doc. Roubíček.

Vladimír Roubíček's career was not, however, always successful and simple. In 1968 he became actively involved in various political initiatives and activities. This had negative consequences for him during the normalisation period and later on. He could no longer be promoted, he was not allowed to supervise graduate students, and he was not allowed to travel to conferences in the West. After 1989, the situation changed, and Doc. Roubíček, who prior to 1989 had been prevented for political reasons from any promotion at work, was appointed a professor in the Department of Statistics VŠE. The university underwent reorganisation in 1990 and the former Department of Statistics was turned into three new separate departments: the Department of Statistics and Probability, the Department of Economic Statistics, and the Department of Demography. Professor Roubíček was named head of the Department of Demography, which became an important department in the newly established Faculty of Informatics and Statistics VŠE, and he remained head until 1995. He continued to work actively after that, even though he was suffering from a number of health problems. He was an active member of the department almost to the end of his life and was devoted to working with his students.

Prof. Ing. Roubíček, CSC., was undoubtedly one of the most important Czech post-war demographers. He also published prolifically. His professional scope was broad from the time he joined the Department of Statistics. He initially focused on computer technology, then on the problem of economic statistics, and he remained interested in graphic methods. He only then went on to specialise in demographic statistics. This is reflected in his publications. In 1955 he and a collective of authors from the Department of Statistics published **An Anthology of Papers from Statistical Theory** (SPN, 317 pp.), and in 1956, with the same group of authors, he published **Statistical Methods** (SPN, 382 pp.). Alone he published **An Anthology of Examples from Economic Statistics** (SPN, 1963, 157 pp.) and **Graphic Representation in Statistics** (SEVT, 1963, 218 pp.). Between 1959 and 1972 he published another

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six textbooks on economic statistics in which he was one in a collective of authors. He was also one of the co-authors of **An Abridged Statistical Lexicon for Economics Professionals** (Svoboda, 1967, 341 pp.).

Of much greater significance for the field of demography was his publication work in the field of demographic statistics and demography, particularly, as noted above, the publication in 1958 of **Demographic Statistics**. Neither Antonín Boháč nor later František Fajfr published any course book in demography. Korčák's **The Elements of Population Science** was no longer available. Roubíček's **Demographic Statistics** consequently became the main teaching resource for students of demography.

Roubíček dealt with several areas in his works. These included life tables and mortality tables (*Demografie*, 1959, p. 105-109), fertility tables (**A Collection of Papers in Demography**, 1959, p. 101-118), and labour activity tables (*Statistická revue*, 1970, p. 49-76). Of major significance was his use of cohort analysis in the study **Studying the Fertility of Marriage Cohorts** (Statistics and Demography, 1961, p. 347-370) and in the study **Cohort Analysis and the Problems Involved in Using It to Estimate Specific Fertility Trends** (*Statistika a demografie*, 1965, p. 43-75). Roubíček was also interested in population prognoses. He published a number of papers on this topic and applied them in various commissioned work in practice. He also dealt with the methodology of potential demography, particularly in the study **Population Prognoses and Potential Demography** (*Statistika a demografie*, 1967, p. 117-147).

He focused also on theoretical problems in demography (**On Symbolism – Or On Being Clear and Meaningful**, *Demography*, 2000, p. 299-302; **On Terminology – Or On Gross and General Measures of Natality, Fertility, and Mortality, and On the Philosophical Dichotomy of the General to the Specific**, *Demografie*, 1999, p. 138-140). He took part in debates on Marxist demography organised by Vladimír Srb in 1963 and 1964 with a paper titled **On the Nature of Demography and Demographic Phenomena** (*Demografie*, 1964, p. 258-263). In conformity with Korčák, he defined the subject of demography by proceeding from its focal area of interest, that is, population reproduction, but expanded this reproduction to include migration. He regarded demographic phenomena as biosocial phenomena. He dealt also with the application of demography as a means of achieving certain social objectives or population policy objectives. The scope of Professor Roubíček's interest was broad and encompassed everything that related to demography. He contributed to the advancement of demography with a number of studies. The most recent included **Fertility in the Czech Republic in the Nineties** (1st ed., Prague VŠE, 2001) and **Mortality in the Czech Republic in the Nineties** (1st ed., Prague VŠE, 1998). He was also a member of the collective of authors behind **The Multilingual Demographic Dictionary** (NČS AV 1965), and he published a number of teaching aids on demography, including, in 1966, **Selected Chapters from Demography I** (1965) and **The Elements of General and Economic Demography** (VŠE, 1970, 200 pp.). His book **An Introduction to Demography** (1997) is essentially the culmination of his teaching work (reviewed in *Demografie*, 1998, p. 196-198).

The last-mentioned university textbook on demography is a systematic outline of basic terms and methods that are essential for understanding population, social, and economic development and for economic thought and decision-making at every level of the economy. In it Roubíček provides students with an orderly outline of all the material that he had amassed during his teaching history and that he regarded to be important. As he noted himself in the publication, "One of the basic conceptual problems of a textbook is arranging the individual topics in such a way that those topics necessary to understand other related topics, if possible, precede those related topics". This book was his sixth textbook on theoretical and methodological questions in demography. Based on previous experience, he decided to abandon the standard order of similar teaching texts. In the introductory section he included sub-chapters on standardisation, mortality tables, and demographic models. Although this layout may have been unusual, I personally find it to be very effective. This arrangement proved especially beneficial for exercises during practical instruction. The book was awarded the Dean's Award for Publication of the Year at the Faculty of Informatics and Statistics of the University of Economics in Prague.

Vladimír Roubíček was a founding member of the *Czechoslovak Demographic Society* at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (now called the Czech Demographic Society), as well as being its deputy chair, and for a long time also its scientific secretary. From the founding of the journal *Demografie* in 1959 he was a member of its Editorial Board. He also sat on the Editorial Board of the journal **Acta Demographica**. From 1965 he was a member of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population and from 1985 a member of the European Association for Population Studies.

Professor Roubíček was above all an experienced university lecturer. He taught in the Department of Demography at the Faculty of Informatics and Statistics (FIS), but also at other higher education institutions, such as the Social Economics Faculty of J. E. Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, giving

lectures both for students and the general public. He was the guarantor of the majority of demographic subjects in the Department of Demography at FIS. He laid the foundations for teaching demography at the University of Economics when the Department of Demography was founded and during the accreditation of new courses. He directed his efforts into teaching the other students at the school as well as students in the field of statistics about demography and demographic statistics. He always made an effort to connect theory with practice in his teaching. He refrained from burdening students with unnecessary details and tried to equip them with the ability to employ and make the best use of the indicators and methods he taught them in their respective fields.

When Roubíček was still a student his scholarly interests were broad and not limited just to demography, statistics, and computer technology. Not everyone knows that he was an enthusiastic amateur theatre player (a good teacher must also be somewhat of an actor if he or she hopes to capture the attention of the students and not bore them). In an amateur student drama club he performed one of the main roles in Goldoni's *The Liar*. He had a strong talent for acting, and it is the good fortune of demography that he opted instead for a career in science and teaching. He was able to make use of this unquestionable talent in scholarly debate, often coming in with very original ideas. It is worth recalling the live debates between Pavlík and Roubíček that participants at the annual Demographic Society conference used to look forward to each year. Professor Roubíček possessed great skills of persuasive argumentation. He always came up with something that no one else had expected or even thought of.

Roubíček was also responsible for increasing the visibility of demography as a field of real practical significance.

Vladimír Roubíček passed away unexpectedly on 18 January 2005. Until almost the very end of his full life he spent time among his students, and he enjoyed being with them. Few teachers can boast as much interest in their dissertation topics and the level of interest students showed in the topics offered and supervised by Professor Roubíček. The number of dissertations that were written on demographic topics ranks with the number on purely statistical topics. If I can speak for the students, Professor Roubíček was viewed as one of the most cooperative and obliging professors. While he required his students to be knowledgeable and active, and he sometimes raised his voice, we all admired his deeply human approach. During my years as a student I never met another figure like Professor Roubíček. He was interested in everything. Discussions with him were a wonderful experience for every participant. Members of the Demographic Society shared this same feeling. Few teachers either could boast of such continued interest from former students, who, even many years after completing their studies, would turn to him for practical advice in demography.

But the figure of Professor Roubíček is still among us – whenever I search for materials in the archives I come across his hand-written notes on the topics I'm looking for. He had everything meticulously sorted out and arranged with opinions on individual topics. Czech demography has lost its primary representative. He is missed by everyone who came to know him.

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