

Reflections on Demographic Studies of Two Communities

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Demographic studies, by their very nature, give us a "snap shot" of a single period in time. The value of such "snap shots" grows significantly when one can lay several of them side by side and see the trends that exist over time. Cross comparison of communities gives us a sense of both the common themes and the distinct differences that exist between and among them.

A comparison of two recent demographic profiles, one of St. Louis, Missouri and the other of Palo Alto, California, highlights striking differences as well as similarities, and offers important implications for Jewish communal services. St. Louis is an older, midwestern community, with a Jewish population of 53,300. Palo Alto represents a younger, western, suburban, sunbelt community south of San Francisco, with a Jewish population of 15,900.

Under the direction of Dr. Gary Tobin of Washington University, the Jewish Federation of St. Louis completed a major three-year study in 1982, and published a 240-page report titled: "Demographic and Attitudinal Study of the St. Louis Jewish population".¹ The Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco conducted a demographic study of its Palo Alto area in 1981, under the direction of Professor Bruce Phillips of Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles. The purpose of the Palo Alto study was to provide basic demographic information and to test the level of interest and support for a proposed major program of expansion by the Jewish Community Center.²

¹ Gary Tobin, "Demographic and Attitudinal Study of the St. Louis Jewish Population," unpublished mimeo., 1982.

² Bruce Phillips, "South Peninsula Study," un-

Differences and Similarities

In reviewing the demographics of these two communities, one is foremost struck by two basic characteristics: (1) stagnant population growth, and (2) a growing elderly population. The St. Louis study states that "planning decisions should be based on the assumption of a no-growth and generally shrinking population for at least the next five years."³

The Palo Alto area, with a younger population, has grown by less than one percent per year during the last decade, and this trend is expected to continue. Given the extremely high cost of housing in the Palo Alto area, an influx of new families is not projected. This, coupled with the fact that 60 percent of all married couples now living in Palo Alto are dual career families, makes it unlikely that natural increase will exceed the zero population growth (ZPG) rate of two children per married couple. The "average" family of two adults and two children is not sufficient to make up for those individuals who do not marry, or for those couples who do not reproduce themselves or have only one child.

published mimeo., 1981. The findings of the study indicated sufficient community support and need for the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation to go ahead with a \$2.5 million program for a new center facility.

³ *op. cit.*, Gary Tobin.

The population loss caused by not producing a sufficient number of babies to replace the existing adult population is accentuated by the growing rate of inter-marriage, estimated to be 25 percent in St. Louis and 40 percent in Palo Alto. Many, if not most of the children resulting from these intermarriages, will not be raised as Jews. It would thus seem that many of our Jewish communities have already slipped past the ZPG mark and are currently on the slippery demographic slope of population decline. In many communities, including Palo Alto, it has only been the addition of Israelis and Russian emigres that has created the appearance of a stable ZPG community.

The inevitable result of fewer children being born is that the proportion of elderly in the community increases dramatically. The percentage of the Jewish population in St. Louis that is 60 years or older is 22 percent of the Jewish community. In Palo Alto, the percentage is only 12 percent, but this is double the percentage that existed ten years ago. The St. Louis study states that "a sizable minority of the elderly in the Jewish community are 'service poor'. Because of location, disability, lack of transportation and lack of family support, this population lives in poverty or near poverty and geographic isolation."⁴

Funding Conflicts

Given a growing proportion of elderly, as contrasted with a declining proportion of children, it would seem that a rational planning and budgeting process would be able simply to shift federation funds from services to children (including Jewish educational activities) to services of immediate concern to the elderly.

Federations are increasingly faced with the conflict of funding "good and

welfare" services versus services to ensure Jewish continuity. The most poignant example of this central priority question is embodied in the dilemma that professionals and lay leaders grapple with, in considering the growing demand for more funds for senior services. Increasing senior services often means taking funds away from other areas, including Jewish education. In a time when there are fewer children, each child becomes more valuable on the scale of Jewish survival and continuity. Some argue, therefore, that a greater proportion of community funds should be used to provide Jewish education services, as a central strategy for ensuring Jewish continuity, *even if* this means denying needed services to the elderly.

The dynamic tension between these two viewpoints will grow in the years ahead. Over time, the concerns of our middle-aged cadre of donors and leaders will shift from the needs of their children for Jewish education to the needs of their aging parents, as these aging parents begin to move from the category of active, healthy elderly to that of the frail, vulnerable elderly.

A series of interrelated factors are converging to increase the pressure for additional senior services. Severe cut-backs in government funding for senior services, upon which the Jewish community has come to rely, are just beginning. More families are made up of dual-career couples, leaving less "free time" available to take care of aging relatives. Since the 1950's, fewer and fewer families live in the same city as their family of origin. A final major factor is the dramatic increase in longevity which has occurred over the past decade.

The pressures are mounting, and will first come to bear in older cities like St. Louis, in which the sixty-and-over group is already significantly larger (22 percent) than the school-age group (age

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

6-17) which makes up only 13 percent of the population. Palo Alto, as a younger community, has more of a balance, with 15 percent of the population between the ages of six and seventeen, as compared with 12 percent for those over the age of sixty.

The Jewish Future

The task of reaching out to Jewish school-age children will remain a challenge for both communities. For St. Louis the problem, as mentioned above, will revolve around the question of allocation of resources between competing age groups. In the Palo Alto area the challenge will also be to find and maintain contact with the Jewish school-age children, as only 45 percent are receiving any formal Jewish education, as compared to over 80 percent in St. Louis.

In contrast to the general stereotype that lower income Jewish families maintain traditional ways, while higher income families are more likely to assimilate, the Palo Alto study indicated that families with school-age children whose income is over \$60,000 are 2½ times more likely to enroll their children in Jewish education classes than are families whose income is less than \$40,000. This relationship between family income and synagogue affiliation is an area which needs further exploration and policy consideration. The St. Louis study indicates that 30 percent of those who do not affiliate claim that cost is a major factor.

The Role of Demographic Studies

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shots" grows significantly when one can lay several of them side by side and see the trends that exist over time. Cross comparison of communities gives us a sense of both the common themes and the distinct differences that exist between and among them.

What stands out in this review of demographic studies of such widely separated communities is that, lacking an influx of new arrivals or a change in personal choices regarding the number of children couples elect to have, both St. Louis and Palo Alto are going to experience a leveling-off and slow decline in population size. Both communities will also experience an increase in the number of elderly, and an intensifying conflict between serving the ever-growing elderly population and the increasingly valuable, but statistically smaller, younger population.

Demographic information is both difficult and expensive to obtain. Because the U.S. Census Bureau, as a major source of demographic information, does not ask questions regarding religious preference, it does not provide the data federations need. It is incumbent on federations themselves to develop the demographic data needed, to use it to establish a base line for planning, and to update this material at least once a decade.

A more immediate challenge is to utilize effectively the wealth of material that a major demographic study can provide. Studies in and of themselves cannot provide solutions to the problems that they highlight. They can, however, serve as a catalyst for community discussion, and a tool in the planning and budgeting process.

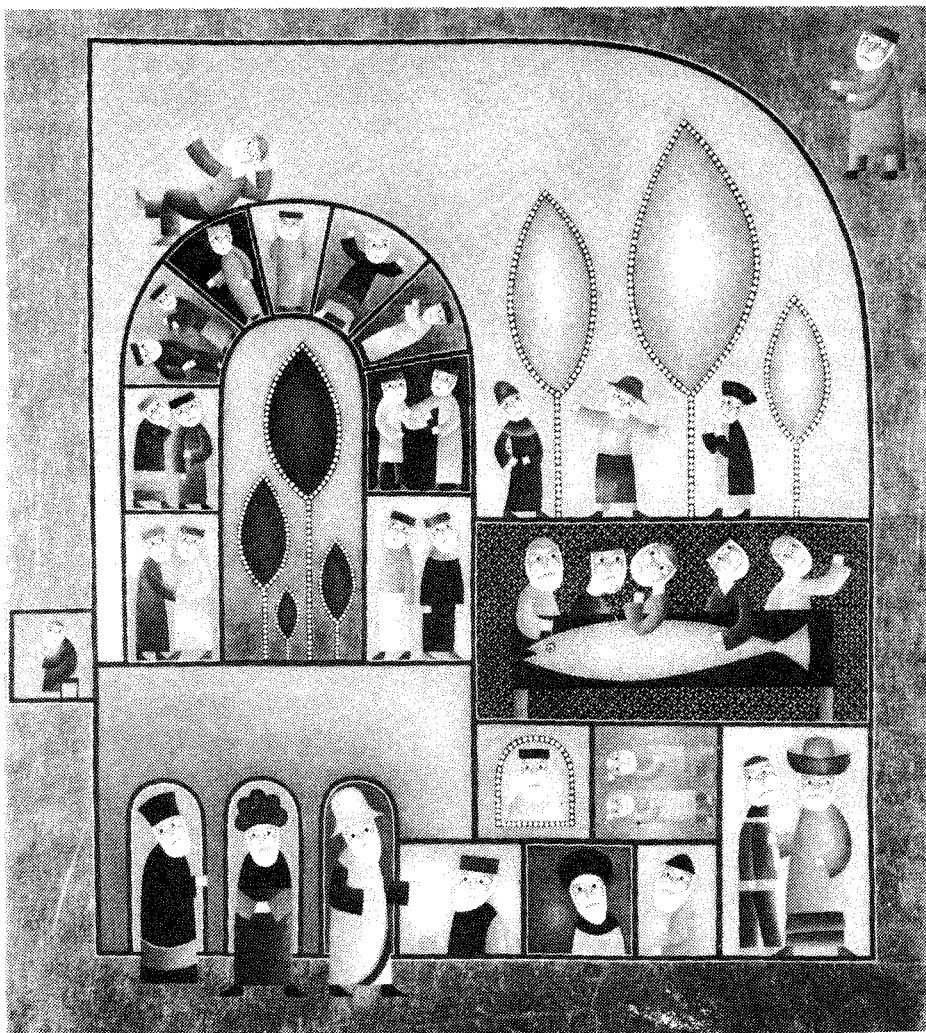
The issues specifically cited, i.e. the needs of the elderly and the needs for further Jewish education, can only be satisfactorily resolved by increased fund-raising. Most Jewish communities,

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including St. Louis and Palo Alto, have the potential of raising sufficient funds to meet these as well as other pressing needs. The challenge before federations

is to use the results of demographic studies as tools for education and fund-raising, in addition to their traditional applications.

Oil by David Shair. Courtesy of Pucker Safrai Gallery, 171 Newbury St., Boston, MA 02116 and also available from Seraphim Gallery, 780 West End Ave., New York, NY 10025.



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