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EDWARD ROSSET (1897-1989) - THE NESTOR OF POLISH DEMOGRAPHERS AND STATISTICIANS

Czesław Domański¹

On 26 of September 2015 a ceremony was held to mark 70th anniversary of foundation of the University of Lodz and 50th anniversary of establishing the Faculty of Economics and Sociology. On that occasion a commemorative plaque was unveiled to pay tribute Professor Edward Rosset - a Great Scholar and one of the Founding Father of the University of Łódź.

Professor Edward Rosset was born on 4 of November, 1897 in Łódź and died there on 2 June, 1989.

Childhood years of Edward Rosset fell to the time of a very intensive development of textile industry, where his father found employment selling textiles manufactured by local, privately-owned companies to the Russian markets. Rosset's mother, who studied the piano under Ignacy Paderewski, was a talented pianist, composer and graduate of the Academy of Music in Warsaw. The future scholar was growing up in a large family - he had five siblings (a brother and four sisters, all of whom died during the Nazi occupation of Poland). In the year 1916 he passed the examination for the secondary school certificate (Matura) in Philological Secondary School of Bogumił Braun. In the years 1917-1922 he completed his studies at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of Warsaw University.

After graduating in 1922 Edward Rosset, aged 25, returned to Łódź and took up his first post at the Department of Statistics of the Municipal Office. He was soon promoted, becoming the head of the Department, and he held the position until the end of 1940s, except for the period of war. Rosset made his professional debut at the Department of Statistics when he co-authored the publication entitled „Statistics of the City of Łódź 1918-1920”. Edward Grabowski, the professor of statistics at the Polish Free University and Rosset's predecessor as the head of the Department, was the chief editor of the publication.

Published for the first time in 1922 and then for subsequent years, “Statistical Yearbook of the City of Lodz” was Edward Rosset's important accomplishment. It was a continuation of the earlier-mentioned „Statistics of the City of Lodz 1918-1920”. Until the year 1929 yearbooks were comprehensive volumes which contained detailed descriptions of the most significant socio-economic and natural

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phenomena, presented in two languages – Polish and French. From 1930 onwards, a shorter version entitled „Little Statistical Yearbook” was appearing until the outbreak of the World War Two, as a consequence of the Great Economic Crisis. After the war three more volumes of “Statistical Yearbook of the City of Łodz” were published for the years 1945, 1946 and 1947.

Following his life motto „there is a problem hidden behind every number, it only needs to be discovered”, Rosset did not limit his activities to editing source materials.

The problems he tackled in his works in the pre-war period could be classified into the following areas:

- manifestations of social pathology in big cities,
- living standards and health conditions of inhabitants of Łodz,
- political profile of inhabitants of Łodz.

A separate group of research areas followed directly from Edward Rosset’s deep interest in the influence of war on population relations and processes, as well as his interest in the post-war revival of Estonia and other Baltic States.

One of the publications which deal with the problems of social pathologies is „Alcoholism in Łodz in the Light of Statistical Research”. It was published in 1925 and its extended version „Alcoholism in Polish Cities”. Similarly painful problems of big cities were discussed in the work published in 1931 and entitled „Prostitution and Venereal Diseases in Łodz”, and an interesting fact was that it used police sources. Considering the problem of venereal diseases, Edward Rosset expressed the opinion that they reduced the reproductive capacity, and thus could become a significant depopulation factor.

It is definitely worth paying attention to three of his works published at the turn of 1920s and 1930s, viz. „Political Profile of the City of Łodz in the Light of Election Statistics” (1927), „Proletariat of Łodz in the Light of Demographic Research” (1930) and „Łodz in the Years 1860-1870. A Historical-Demographic outline” (1928). The first of the publications offers an analysis of statistics of the four consecutive parliamentary elections in the years 1906-1912, preceding the regaining of independence, and elections for City Councils, the Sejm and the Senate (the Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament) in independent Poland.

Undoubtedly, one of the highlights of Edward Rosset’s scientific career was his participation in the international demographic congress, which was held in Rome in 1931. It was a pan-European meeting of demographers organized by the Italian Committee for Population Research and chaired by professor Corrado Gini. Edward Rosset presented two papers on this forum, i.e. „Demographic laws of war” and „Venereal diseases and war”. Many years later the Author wrote: „The first of the two papers caused quite a stir during the Congress. The audience were impressed by the original approach I took, namely the generalization of demographic phenomena caused by war and formulation of rules based on them, which I called the demographic laws of war. Not less impressed by the book was the demographic and statistical literature all over the world”. The paper in

question became for Edward Rosset a pass to the European demographic circles, and a clear evidence of his position was the fact that he became a member of the Italian Committee for Population Research.

As a practitioner-statistician, Edward Rosset was invited in the 1929/1930 academic year to join a group of collaborators of the Łódź branch of the Polish Free University. Initially, he worked as an assistant lecturer giving lectures in statistics, demography and population policy, but shortly before the war Professor Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska submitted a request to the University authorities to appoint Rosset to the post of assistant professor.

After the outbreak of the World War Two Edward Rosset lost his job, and was forced to leave his flat and home town. He moved illegally to Warsaw, with his wife Zofia and their two children – a daughter Irena and a son Stefan, and he spent the whole period of the Nazi occupation in a hideaway suffering extreme poverty. „We were living illegally”- he recalled after many years- „as we were refused by the occupier not only the right to honour and dignity but also the right to live. For all this time I was poring over the textbook. It was in the scientific activity that I found salvation from the threat of a nervous breakdown. Andrzej Grodek – a professor at the Main College of Trade, despite the fact that he was putting his personal safety at risk, granted me an access to the college library. I was set a limit – eight volumes per week - and I used this allowance eagerly. From the rich collection I was choosing methodically all those items which I found useful for my future university lectures”. It is worth adding here that Edward Rosset could read fluently in five foreign languages (English, Russian, German, French and Italian). Although the notes he made at the time perished during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, the knowledge the Professor acquired was stored up in his excellent memory.

The motivation for intensive, secret work despite the hardships of war can be found in another passage from Rosset's memories: „I had little hope to survive the war, but I said to myself if heavens allowed me to see the day of freedom then I had to be ready to take up my dream job of the professor of statistics at the University of Łódź”.

Extensive reading of demographic, statistical and economic studies was not the only activity that the Scholar was engaged in during the years of occupation. He was also commissioned by the authorities of the Polish resistance to conduct an expert analysis (signed with a pseudonym Edward Nieżyński, engineer) which examined the occupational structure of the rural population on the territory to be incorporated into Poland after the war.

In the early 1945 Professor E. Rosset became seriously involved in organizational, didactic and scientific activities. The dreams which he had had in the gloomy days of the Nazi occupation finally came true. In 1940s he established two departments of Statistics – one was a unit of the newly-founded University of Łódź, the other was a part of the School of Economics. In 1961, when the two institutions merged, a Department of Demography and Statistics was established

as a part of the Faculty of Economics and Sociology. The Professor held the post of the head of the Department until his retirement in 1968.

The academic career of Professor Edward Rosset can be divided into the following stages: the position of an assistant in the Department of Statistics of the Polish Free University in the years 1929-1939, the post of an assistant professor of the University of Łódź, receiving a doctor's degree on the basis of the dissertation „The Demographic Laws of War”, the position of adjunct professor at the Higher School of Economics and the University of Łódź in the year 1954, being awarded the title of associate professor in 1958, and full professor in 1963. In the Higher School of Economics the Professor held the following positions: vice-dean, dean, vice-Rector and the Rector. In the years 1961-1965 he was the vice-Rector of the University of Łódź.

The contribution made by Professor Rosset to the organization and development of demographic research in Poland is hard to be overestimated. He acted as a promoter of this research on behalf of the Polish Academy of Sciences, whose corresponding member he became in 1962, and the real member in 1976. In the period of 1978-1983 he held the post of the deputy chairman of the Łódź Branch of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He was the initiator of establishing the Committee for Demographic Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and he chaired it for several terms of office. Towards the end of his life he became the honorary chairman of the Committee. In 1963, thanks to the Professor's effort, the journal „Demographic Studies ” was created and it became not only the organ of the Committee for Demographic Sciences but also the forum for publishing papers of Polish and foreign demographers. Edward Rosset was the editor-in-chief of the journal for 25 years.

The scientific output of Edward Rosset in the post-war period is extremely rich and varied. In contemporary demographic science there are practically no fundamental problems which were not examined by the Professor at some point of his research. The total number of all his published works (papers, monographs, reviews, reports, expert analyses) exceeded 300, including 16 books, and taking into account unpublished works we get an impressive number of 401 items.

His fundamental work “Ageing Process of Population”, which was published in 1959, deals with the reasons and various consequences of the process of ageing societies. The work became internationally renowned soon after it came out and it was translated into foreign languages: English (Ageing Process of Population, 1964) and Russian (Process starienia nasielenia, 1968). The importance of the book is manifested in its numerous citations. Biographers and reviewers stress the fact that the everlasting value of the book consists in addressing various problems which future societies will be faced with, and will result from a constantly growing share of older people in human populations.

The problems discussed in „Ageing Process of Population” are developed in a comprehensive demographic study „Old people” (1969). Analytical elements included by the Author led him to the conclusion that the Polish society would soon reach the border of the old age with all the possible consequences of the fact:

social, medical and economic. „Life expectancy” (1979) is in a way connected with the problems of population ageing, as it provides an extensive analysis of reasons for an increase in life expectancy, which leads, in turn, to a growing share of the elderly in the society. On the other hand, the work can also be perceived as the one which deals indirectly with the problem of population reproduction.

Demographic processes and structures on a national level were analysed by Professor Rosset from the past – present – future perspective in several of his books. First of all, we need to mention here: „Demography of Poland” in two volumes (1975), „Demographic portrait of Poland” (1965), „Demographic prospects of Poland” (1962) and „Poland of the year 1985 – a demographic vision” (1965).

The author presented there some trends in population change and thoughtfully anticipated social and economic consequences of the ongoing demographic changes.

The process of population reproduction, which is the core issue of the second volume of „Demography of Poland”, continued to be analysed - yet only with reference to marriage formation and breakdown - in the last great monograph published during the Professor’s lifetime entitled “Divorces” (1986). Although the author does not totally reject divorce as a way of resolving extreme conflicts in marriage, in his book he appears to be an advocate of permanent relationships and he perceives the massive scale of divorce in many contemporary societies as a manifestation of social pathology. „Social evil does not cease to be evil just because it has become prolific” – he writes in the epilogue to the book, and goes on to say: „How can we assume that family is not in crisis when more and more people complain about their broken lives caused by marriage breakdown, and there are growing numbers of those whose bad experience of broken marriage makes them give up once and for all the idea of ever re-marrying, and when the number of “divorce orphans” is constantly growing. Obviously, the crisis does not mean that the institution of marriage is bound to become extinct. However, the threat of being extinct is real and thus it forces us to make more effort to strengthen the family so that the worst scenario does not happen”.

Professor Rosset never forgot his home town, and its problems always remained within the scope of his interests. In 1962, on his initiative and under his editorial guidance an extensive monograph „Łódź in the years 1945-1960” was published. E. Rosset includes a chapter „Population relations” there, in which he provides an original estimation of population losses suffered by Łodz during the World War Two. Another monograph ”Textile workers of Łodz”, edited by E. Rosset and published in 1964, was also of regional character.

The theory of demography constitutes a separate area in the research work of Professor Rosset. The first signs of his interest in theoretical problems can be traced back in the earlier mentioned “Demographic Laws of War”. A comprehensive monograph entitled „Demographic Explosion” (1978) gives the reader a chance to find a reflection of the Professor’s interest in the theory of demographic transition. The idea is further developed in the work called “The

Theory of Demographic Transition - its Logic, Techniques and Prospects" (1987). The same research area is represented by the book „The Doctrine of Optimum Population in Historical Development" (1983). It presents the notion of population optimum in different periods of history and taking into account different criteria.

While studying the works of Edward Rosset one can only admire his great erudition, which is reflected in numerous references and aptly selected quotations enabling the reader not only to follow the author's ideas but also to get familiar with the world literature on the subject. The great merit of his writing is the exceptional beauty and precision of the Polish language. He also paid a lot of attention to clarity and logic of writing as he was of the opinion that the reader should be able to follow without difficulty even the most complex problems described by the author.

Apart from the aforementioned Demographic Congress in Rome in 1931, Professor Rosset participated in the following meetings: International Demographic Symposium in Smolenice (the present day Czech Republic, 1961), Budapest (1962), Zakopane (1964) and Liège (1973), among other things. He was also an organizer of the National Demographic Conference in Zakopane (1966).

Throughout his academic career – at the High School of Economics and the University of Łódź - and even after he had retired, Professor Rosset maintained close contacts with demographers from Eastern and Western Europe and was held in high esteem by his colleagues. Some of them were greatly honoured to be called his disciples. As a visiting professor he gave lectures at the Vienna University and universities of Belgrade, Berlin, Bucharest, Florence, Moscow, Prague, Pescu, Rome and Sofia.

In 1978 Edward Rosset received an honorary doctorate from the University of Łódź in recognition of his remarkable scientific achievements and work for his alma mater.

Numerous medals awarded to Edward Rosset throughout his long life are the best evidence of the appreciation he was given by both academic circles and the authorities. The Professor himself highly valued the Officer's Cross of Revival of Poland which he received in 1929 to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Poland's independence.

In the interwar period he was also honoured with Rother awards: Defender of Poland 1918-1921, Medal for Long-term Service (1928), Medal of Tenth Anniversary of Poland's Independence (1928) and the Estonian Officer's Cross of the Red Cross. After the war he was awarded with: The Golden Cross of Merit (twice: 1946, 1955), the Order of the Work Flag I Class (1976) and the Commander's Cross with the Star of the Order of Revival of Poland (1986).

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