

**PUBLIC AWARENESS
AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA:
AN ITALIAN SURVEY
ON THE 6 BILLION DAY**

edited by *Maura Misiti*

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INTRODUCTION¹

by Maura Misiti

After a brief overview of the complex relationship between the media and public opinion we focus our attention on some of the problems attendant on that relationship. The field of observation will be the relationship between public opinion and demographic information, and then we will consider how the information is transmitted by the media. Questions of evaluation, of how to measure the effects of the media on the attitudes and behaviour of their audiences, of individuals and social groups are still open. Those who study communication from various angles and academic disciplines are carrying on a lively debate which has not arrived at hard and fast conclusions. It is also impossible to close discussion at the moment because communication technology is evolving so fast and is reaching a wider segment of the public, while the media, both technically advanced and traditional, are fast reaching global proportions. There is therefore a great deal of literature on the subject and it offers many hypotheses and interpretations².

From studies on population we have acquired knowledge about the relationship between attitudes, perceptions and values in demographic behaviour (Leete, 1999; Moors and Palomba, 1995, 1998). We have also learned more about the relationship between demographic transition and the post-modern evolution of society. In addition the diffusion of knowledge about population issues (Baccaini and Van Peer, 1999; Menniti *et al.*, 1997) has been studied among specific segments of the population, as has the gap between ideals and real behaviour with regard to the fertility rate (Moors and Palomba, 1995; 1998; Bonifazi *et al.*, 1998, Futuribles, 1995). There is one question particularly, which we would like to emphasize: most people have a very scarce and uneven knowledge about demographic problems, because our society has not developed a solid demographic culture able to communicate and support knowledge in this field. This is true, even though the attitudes, strategies and choices connected to these facts touch the lives of all of us. In addition, the sources of information available to the general public are generic articles and programs distributed by the media. Only scholars and students have access to more articulate information.

¹ I want to thank Loredana Cerbara, Iole Grechi, Alessandra Tinto and Simona Carbone for their help in elaborating and analysing textual data and IRP survey data, in particular Loredana Cerbara for the precious collaboration in interpreting statistical outputs. I thank also Enrico Menduni for giving me wise advice and for his availability in reading the first version of the paper. This work is an update and deep revised version of a key note paper presented at the Annual Seminar 2000 of European Observatory on Family Matters, Sevilla september 2000

² The relationship between public opinion and the media intuitively seems very simple. It quickly becomes complicated however when we try to conceptualise it or force it into a rigorous and clear relation. First of all, we are talking about two categories which are familiar to most people, but which are rather vaguely defined. We therefore have to attempt a definition, however approximate. We will use public opinion to mean the opinions expressed in sample surveys carried out on specific groups of people. This is in any case the meaning of the phrase in current use, and one which reduces the social complexity for us. In addition, this extremely synthetic definition of public opinion is particularly appropriate for an analysis of the relationship between public opinion and the media because it offers a means for representing “a generalized public, spectator and actor in a mass society in the full space of rapid change”. The term “media” will be used for the full gamut of communication systems. The most important of these are printed matter (books, newspapers, magazines), and television/radio, followed by new means such as multimedia, computers, internet. This second category compound and intersect information available by traditional means. In our presentation of the results of our survey, we will limit our comments to daily newspapers and magazines on the one hand, and to television on the other.

There are two types of problems related to this state of general knowledge. The first concerns the communication of information which is complete and correct, while the other concerns the form in which the information is communicated. Another way of saying this is that we need to consider both the contents and the language of an article or a broadcast. A third question concerns how the information is received and understood. We want to understand what effects the information transmitted by the media has on those who read it or hear it. We want to see how individual values are formed, evolve and develop. We want to know how these values operate in the family and in the social context. Finally, we want to understand how the process of compromise between the individual and society is affected by the incessant stimuli of communications systems.

The results of a survey carried out by IRP occasioned by the birth of the earth's 6 billionth inhabitant are used in this paper to discuss a few specific concerns, which are only a part of all the problems raised by our research. We intend to evaluate the impact of the media on knowledge about the event, to discuss the ways in which people put the information to use, their learning strategies, and finally to identify the characteristics of the various segments of the population which participated in the survey.

The last part of this paper concerns the other side of the coin. We wanted to know what information is communicated, how the media treat demographic information, what emphasis they add, the balance given to articles and broadcasts, how deeply questions are probed. A textual analysis of press articles on "day 6 billion" completes this paper, with the hope that in a small way it will clarify the mechanisms which inform the complex relationship between public opinion and the media.

I: Public opinion and demographic problems

The demographic changes in western countries over the past 20 – 25 years, described as *the second demographic transition* (van de Kaa, 1988), have contributed to a new demographic regime characterized by a stable fertility rate below replacement level, by a large ageing population, and, in the longer term, by the decline of population size. It is generally agreed that the demographic changes taking place are to a large extent the result of social changes. At the root of these changes is a progressive shift in values and social rules towards greater individualism, with increasing emphasis on individual rights and self-fulfilment (Lesthaeghe, 1992). Naturally, although the demographic trends and their causes are similar throughout Europe, there are differences between European countries, so we cannot talk about demographic uniformity. In fact, numerous surveys demonstrate that demographic models differ among countries, as does the way in which they are distributed. This is true also above all for the norms and values which underpin these models (Palomba and Moors, 1998; de Moor, 1995).

As is to be expected, the researchers have held discussions on these changes, and governments periodically express their opinions, usually because some crisis caused by population problems rallies them to do so. Very rarely however does anyone ask the average person what he or she thinks about them. National surveys, often coordinated across Europe, now allow us to compare public opinion with government policies or with the opinion of scholars, and this comparison offers us a new prospective for studying and analysing demographic phenomena.

The results of the PPA (Population Policy Acceptance) survey allow us to know and compare what ordinary people think about present and future population trends, about how the composition of the population will change, and about foreigners in their country. Very briefly, those who worked on the survey agree that there is a close relationship between a country's own demographic history, its government policies, and the opinions expressed by those interviewed. It is not surprising therefore that countries like

France with a long tradition of public intervention on population matters, consider the natural birth rate of 4 per thousand too low and would like it to be higher, while countries like Italy, Spain and Austria, which experienced population policies under totalitarian regimes, approve a birth rate under 1 per thousand (Bonifazi and Kamaràs, 1998).

The important demographic changes which have affected all of Europe have not yet produced a uniform reaction, a single government policy, or a common public opinion. National differences remain related to the recent past of the single countries. In order to explain the persistence of these differences, we must remember that there are important diversities of culture, history, and tradition, not only between countries, but also within single countries. European unification is still far too recent to effect these sectors, especially because the process of unification has been much more concerned with economic unity than with social or cultural integration.

The European Value Survey (EVS) carried out in European countries in 1981 and 1990, investigated the fundamental values of European culture and followed their evolution in time. The idea was to use opinion surveys to identify a European system of values. This approach uses both psychological and sociological perspectives and considers individuals' desires and attitudes towards important present-day problems of institutions and norms. What interests demographers is the connection between cultural models, their evolution in time, their relationship to behaviour, particularly behaviour connected to fertility – marriage, relations within the couple, parenting – that is to say the very stuff of demographic studies.

Analysis of the results has given rise to a great deal of literature, which I can only give very brief account of here, especially since many different interpretations have been offered. I want to point out that one of the elements that emerges from an analysis of the data is discontinuity – the relationship between values, opinions, and behaviour. This lack of consistency seems particularly relevant when we talk about values related to the family, marriage, childbearing, and the sphere of sexual relations. L. Roussel commented on the results of the two surveys aimed at identifying uniformity, similarities and divergences among European countries. He suggests that there is a long term trend towards uniformity with regard to general patterns of family behaviour, but also notes that it is impossible to know what direction it will take, what model will dominate, or to predict behaviour (Roussel, 1995). Other studies on the same data confirm that there is inconsistency between the values individuals express and those which define the social norm. An example comes from Mediterranean countries where divorce and cohabitation are infrequent, but individuals take very permissive positions on sexual freedom that are distant from a European mean and from the opinions expressed in Northern Europe. Simons brought different analytical instruments and a different point of view to bear on the same surveys. He believes that at a national level “the cultural determinants of non-conformist sexual behaviour were not the same as the determinants of fertility, that ideas about forms of partnership could vary independently of ideas about parenthood, and, that, although there had been a shift towards pragmatism, fundamentalist ideas about childbearing remained influential in most countries” (Simons, 1999).

So there is still much discussion about the mechanisms which connect opinions, values, and behaviour. Research has not been able to clarify completely how changes in values and traditions affect behaviour. It has proved difficult to define a theory or a model to resolve the question of how values influence social behaviour, especially because it is also influenced by economic circumstances and interpersonal relationships (Tchernia, 1995; Roussel, 1995).

The problem becomes even more complicated if we introduce another variable: the mechanisms which bring about a change in values. We are used to explaining change in terms of socio-economic variables, but how important are cultural factors? How important is mass communication for interpersonal relation-

ships in the family? In general, the function of mass communications and the media in the transmission of values and life styles, and in the formation of opinions is a very relevant question which opens up new areas for analysis and interpretation, but which at the same time compounds the difficulties.

II: Opinions, knowledge, sources of knowledge, and information

Until recently population was considered a 'political' objective, and even today demographic policies do not seem to be based on exact knowledge (Palomba e Righi 1993, Adamson et al., 2000). Recent European surveys among high school students show that young people know very little about demographic facts, nor do they have the information they would need for a critical interpretation of demographic data (Baccaini and van PEER, 1999; Menniti *et al.*, 1997, Rossi, 1995). For fifteen years IRP has been carrying out scientific research into what Italians know and what they think about various areas connected to population. On some questions, like the decline of fertility and the general dynamics of population, ordinary people have access to quite good information, while on other more emotionally involving questions, like the presence of foreigners and the decline in population in Italy, they are influenced by ideological bias which suggests a lack of knowledge (Bonifazi *et al.*, 1998, Palomba, 1987, Palomba R. 1991).

Virtually the only source of information and knowledge that people have about demographic issues is mass media. Even the political decision-makers show that they lack regular access to scientific information, in so far as their policies are not informed by correct and complete data regarding important questions like ageing, immigration, and more generally the dynamics of demographic change. Newspapers, radio, and television have become the most important sources of information on these questions, even though by definition journalists have to be concerned with news rather than information. And of course, even when the news is accurately reported, it has to be interesting, captivating, and closely enough connected to specific events to justify the space it occupies. Certainly the Italian media have become quite interested in demographic issues, particularly on highly visible questions like the arrival of numbers of immigrants in Italy, the impending pension crisis, and the progressive decline in fertility. It is therefore important to see whether this increase in coverage is synonymous with an increase in effective communication.

However, behaviour in the couple, in the family, and as parents are questions which do not require a particular approach or scientific support, since these situations are part of our daily lives. They are the daily bread of magazines and radio and television programs, whether information programs, or soap operas, serials, and the columns of women's magazines, which share many of the interests of those who study population questions. Later on we will see if or how the messages broadcast are received, transformed, and assimilated by the consumers of every single medium. The convergence of interest between researchers and popular programs has received very little attention, but it can contribute important information. During the last 40 years, women's magazines have certainly helped to change behaviour patterns in the family and to introduce new attitudes towards parenting in Italy. They have communicated new values and behaviour to a vast female audience. They have helped to disseminate these values which were informed by laws inspired by feminist and youth movements. (Palomba, 1994).

Mass media can play a role in conveying messages about family planning. This is a new role, which rightly belongs to this field of enquiry. This is well shown by the Westoff experience in developing countries (Westoff, 1999). Even the private sector produces radio and television soap operas designed "to motivate individuals to adopt new attitudes and behaviours that foster reproductive and sexual health, gender equality, and environmental protection" (Population Communication International, 2001).

Studies on the recent demographic transition in Brazil point up the strategic role played by television

institutions - most of them private companies - produce radio and television soap operas, in particular by the famous telenovelas, in disseminating, reinforcing, and institutionalising new patterns of value orientation and behavioural norms related to family size and preferences and to fertility control (Faria and Porter, 1999).

We find then a diversified gamma of roles and effects exercised by the various media: from journalistic information to messages directed at influencing life styles to still more profound and emotional messages. Each mean of communication has its particular specific target in the information market, with messages calibrated for the chosen audience and transmitted in the specific language of the medium.

III: The role of the media as a source of knowledge and information

Among those important changes which characterize our period, the change in communications is certainly very significant, not only because transformations and innovations are happening so rapidly in this sector, but especially because its social impact is so great. Given the global scale mass communication has assumed, this impact has been and will be very great in the west, but also in other societies, distant from our own. Developments in the media during the last part of the 20th century have profoundly changed the way we communicate and interact socially. Means of communication create new ways of acting and interacting socially, new types of relationships, and new ways of presenting ourselves. We are passing from face to face dialogue to asymmetrical mass media communication (Thompson, 1995). The most recent theories no longer hold with the common-place belief that the viewing public is totally passive and unable to make critical evaluations. This model was recently re-proposed in Italy during the debate about the political influence of television, and is still widely believed to be accurate. During the course of the 20th century, the critical definition of the public as passive and irrational has been refined and developed by a school of thought which includes Adorno, Horkeimer, and Popper (Ortoleva, 2000).

Sociology of the media, psychology, semiotics, anthropology, and ethnology have all contributed to a field now crowded with theories. Models of the effect of communications have been proposed and administrative research on quantitative data and audience analysis has also made its contribution. Very briefly, the tendency now is to reject the idea of a linear relationship between transmission and reception. In fact the recipient of the message is more and more seen as playing an active role. Viewing is, first and foremost for 'cultural studies scholars', an active and social process. Television audiences actively and creatively construct their own meanings rather than passively absorbing pre-packaged meanings imposed upon them (Ang, 1991). Viewers' active interaction with television texts turns reception into a site of struggle and not simply a site of domination.

To simplify a complex and much discussed idea, we could agree with J. B. Thompson that the interaction between the media and the public always includes a creative process of interpretation by which the recipients make sense of the message, using the resources available to them. This process can have effects in the short or in the long term, and may be intentional or unconscious. In addition, every mean of communication acts in a different way, and I will return to this point in a minute. It is also important to consider the combined effects of different types of communication working together.

IV: Which media

Communication systems proliferated at an astonishing speed in the 20th century, and this trend has become significant and irreversible with the introduction of electronic technologies. The press historical-

ly was the first widespread mean of communication, followed by cinema, radio and the television broadcasting. Today we have all sorts of new media (broadband cable TV, the pay TV, mobile phones, the Internet). Our whole system of information is continually being forced to reorganize towards a greater integration of the various types of communication.

Characteristically, both television networks and researchers have tried to define and categorize the viewing audience. This type of study has slowly moved into the area of marketing, and its analytic techniques have become more sophisticated. This process has been due in part to the end of a public monopoly in European television and the subsequent commercialisation of the sector, which has resulted in increased competitiveness. We should be aware that with the arrival of the new media, it has become more difficult still to classify audiences, whatever we may think of the mass-media concept of audience. In fact, we can imagine that in the future individuals will choose the numbers and types of programs they watch. (Andò, 1999). This personalization will invest both new and traditional means of communication. We therefore have to consider the audience no longer in terms of a single type of communication, but in terms of many offers.

Television viewing always seems to cause an increase in the consumption of other media, in a sort of “circular process”. So the various media are no longer in competition, but actually reinforce each other. The more people watch or read the more they develop interests which can only be satisfied by other types of cultural consumption. (Sorice, 2000).

If we look at the Italian situation, for example, recent data from ISTAT show that there are various “multimedia diets” (Andò, 1999) even though the cultural development here with pronounced differences along geographic fault lines, is not typical of Europe as a whole. We can imagine a “consumption pyramid” with 5% of the population which does not use communication systems at all, 25% which relies exclusively on television, 30% which uses two different systems (TV/radio or TV/printed matter), and 40% which uses at least three types of media (TV, films or radio or TV, printed matter and radio) and up to 3 traditional types of media plus new technologies (Morcellini, 1988).

Although audiences are complex and diversified, it is still possible to identify the outstanding characteristics of the users of the main media like television and newspapers, which continue to dominate the market, even in the presence of new technologies.

The press

Daily newspapers were the first easily reproduced form of mass communication, and until the arrival of the radio and then television, they dominated the field. The neat division between the ‘popular press’ and the daily newspapers of the élite typical of English speaking countries is less clear-cut Italy. Here the great daily newspapers have historically been addressed to a public which in theory is universal (“public opinion”), but in practice is highly selective on the basis of level of education (Ortoleva, 2000).

In these countries politically oriented newspapers, with their mixture of propaganda and education, have played a parallel role. In Italy, the function of the penny press in English speaking countries has partly been absorbed by “gossip” magazines, one of the specialized types of magazines aimed at a particular audience of consumers. If we look at the graphic designs used by the press, we can easily understand that it is divided for men and women. The daily newspapers generally cater to

men, while magazines are aimed at women. ISTAT surveys give us a profile of the average male reader, who has a high school or university degree and is middle-aged. This consumer base has not changed much over the years, so although the number of readers is going down in Italy, this hard core remains.

The television

The wide distribution of television and its broadcasting system have defined a new type of public (audience) and use, and have also brought about a specific organization of messages, “the flow” (Williams, 1974). The advent of television altered the way in which cultural contents (information, entertainment, education) are structured. Consequently it has become necessary to calculate the audience available for any given program, using sophisticated instruments to identify the target audience. In the US and Europe radio and television were not immediately available in all countries and to all sectors of society, but they spread extremely rapidly. Television in particular reached the vast majority of households in these countries within ten years. It quickly became the central and symbolic medium for entire national cultures (Ortoleva, 2000).

The most typical group among all those possible is made up of people whose only source of information is television. This is the TV hard core made up of the elderly, housewives (always referred to in audience analyses because they watch a lot of television), people with little formal education, and the poor.

From the early days of broadcasting this group has had a unique relationship to television. They are the audience of soap operas, TV films, and entertainment programs. Their fidelity to specific programs has been eroded by competition, and in addition members of this group are becoming less stereotypical and more interested in constructing their own personal TV flows. This type of “traditional” TV is in a moment of transition. It is unable to attract the young (15-24 years old), whom television is in danger of losing to other alternative cultural attractions. The older segment of the viewing audience of the “traditional” TV is also dwindling, as competition among networks renders programs more similar and more mediocre.

In this situation it is difficult to understand what impact television has on the formation of public opinion, personal values and behaviour, considering how changeable audiences have become. On the other hand there is no doubt that television continues to have an enormous potential for influencing opinion. In the 1960s television played an essential role in the construction of an Italian identity, by spreading a national language, making cultural phenomena known, and promoting reading and writing (Morcellini, 2000). Later, but still in a monopoly position, it served an educational function in line with the dominant Roman Catholic culture. Throughout western Europe the advent of competing television networks and the fixation on ratings spelled an end to the pedagogical principles which originally characterized public television. This situation means that broadcasting companies prefer to offer stereotypical programs with a broad appeal rather than riskier innovative programs with less appeal. Entertainment programs dominate all other types, in order to keep the public tuned in. Finally television has to reflect the average values of society, according to the Lop principle (Least Objectionable Program) (Menduni, 1996). If this is the logic that governs television programming, especially in Italy, then the images broadcast by television with reference to sexual behaviour, the family, and parenthood are shared, socially accepted models. At this time then, the role of traditional (non-specialized) television is neither very stimulating nor innovative. In other words, television tends to reassure its audience and validate their existing values and behaviour. New forms of television (satellite, pay TV, broadband cable TV) which are aimed at particular consumer niches, and are therefore less tied to average values, open new possibilities for television. Communication advertising also tends to be more flexible and open to new ideas, although its aims are always commercial.

Chapter 1

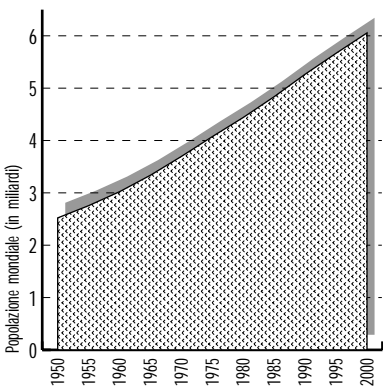
ABOUT THE BIRTH OF 6 BILLIONTH WORLD INHABITANT

by Rossella Palomba, Adele Menniti and Maura Misiti

How many people are we?

The world population has risen from 2,5 billion in 1950 to 6 billion today

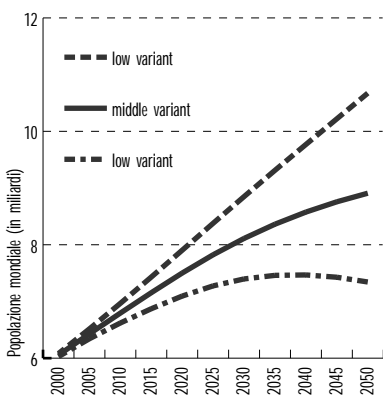
World population, 1950-2000



How many people will we become?

The UN forecast for 2050 a world population of between 7.3 to 10.6 billion, middle variant 8.9.

World population, 2000-2050

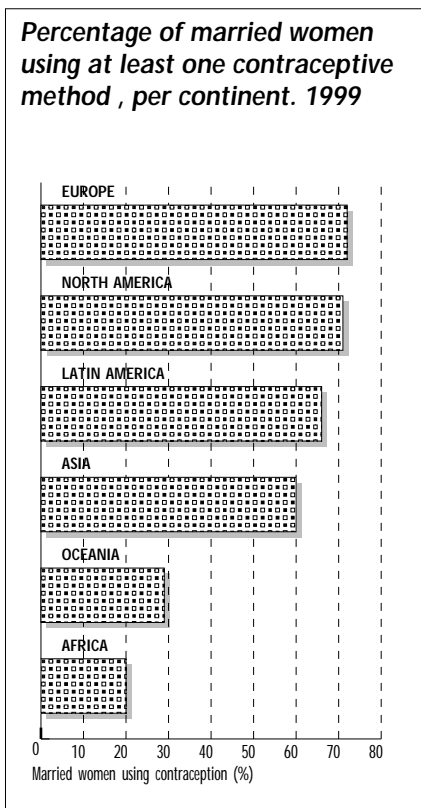
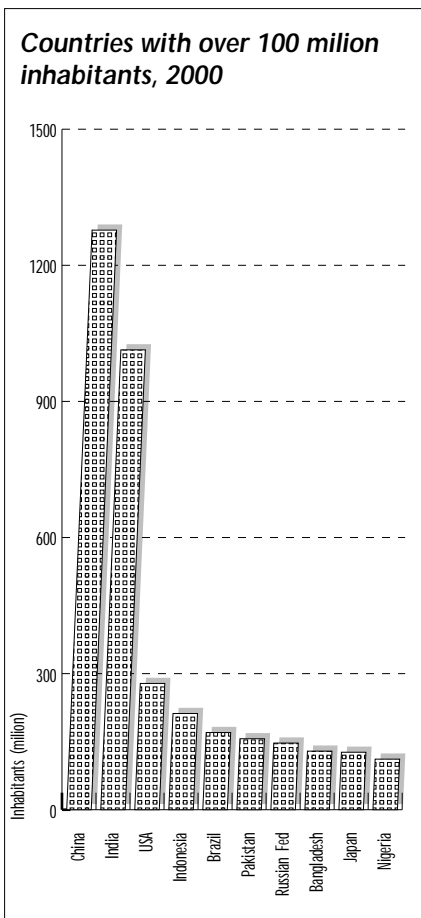


The 12th of October 1999 was the symbolic birthday of the world's 6 billionth inhabitant. Recently UNFPA published its Report on population called "Six Billion: it's time to choose"¹, which amply explains why the world population has grown so large. As usual when a demographic event of this magnitude occurs, we were naturally curious to know to whether Italians knew about it and what they thought about it, not least because adequate understanding of the phenomena should encourage a more responsible attitude, based on concrete facts. Demographic events are not "private" affairs, but rather involve every world inhabitant in daily life (marriages, births, deaths, migrations, etc.) because the behaviour of each one of us influences world population trends and the future of our planet.

Population increase and the growing pressure to migrate from developing countries have consequences for our own society, so it is important that basic information about demographic phenomena become general knowledge for an ever widening circle of people in our country. Information plays a crucial role in forming the opinions, stereotypes, and ideologies at the heart of individual and group behaviour, and yet in the great debates taking place today on social issues, Italians often appear misinformed. This is true although these debates include issues like: the causes and consequences of an aging population, changes in family structure, and immigration, all problems due to remain with us, since Italy seems destined to become increasingly a country of different cultures, ethnic groups and religions.

L'Istituto di Ricerche sulla Popolazione (*the Institute for Population Research*) (IRP) has been studying attitudes, opinions, and perceptions about demographic trends for almost twenty years. We use surveys which measure the quantity and quality of demographic information acquired by Italians. These studies have shown that what individuals know varies according to the particular argument. For example, while many people know something about the most important family trends (decrease in family size and number of marriages)

¹ The Italian edition of the UNFPA report was published by AIDOS, which distributes it free of charge.



and migrations (an increase in the number of foreigners), fewer know the population of Italy or the percentage of immigrants in our society. Although it is less important to know the precise data on an issue than to perceive it correctly, still lack of correct information can become the basis for emotional responses which may prove quite dangerous. A good example of this type of misinformation regards estimates of the number of immigrants present in Italy. In one IRP survey 19% of the people questioned estimated that there were more than 3 million immigrants in Italy. This response bespeaks an ideological projection, rather than an objective evaluation, and indeed, 61% of those interviewed held that there were in any case “too many” immigrants. This is why we decided to administer a “fact test” to the people interviewed in the present survey, in order to identify lacuna in their knowledge. Then with a second survey after 12 October 1999, we wanted to find out how they acquired demographic information. It was not our intention to pass or fail Italians on their demographic knowledge. Rather we wanted to evaluate different levels of knowledge regarding demographic phenomena, and especially to show the connection between what people know about population trends and the way they act.

We think it is important for people in our country to become curious about population data, to increase their own cultural base and to better understand the social transformations informed by population trends.

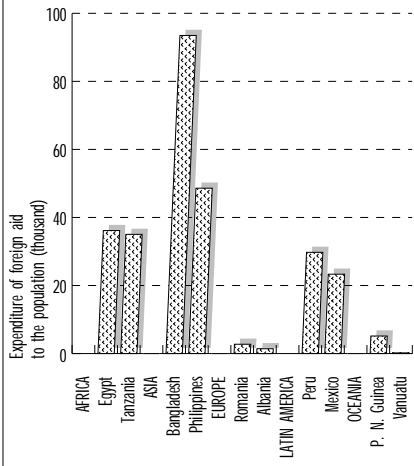
We wanted to answer several questions: How do Italians respond to changes in the world population? What do they know about the demographic transformations which are deeply affecting relationships between the northern and southern hemispheres, rich and poor countries? How do they react to the changes affecting them and in which they participate?

In the days immediately preceding publication of the UNFPA Report on the world population of 6 billion on 22 September 1999, IRP conducted a survey on 1000 Italians about the main population trends in the world, in Europe, and in Italy. The second survey made at the end of October 1999 may help us discover how far ordinary people are interested in these questions and exactly what information, filtered though the media, actually contributes to their attitudes.

In this brief report we will present the results of our surveys, with explicit reference to the real population trends considered in the survey, so that we can compare what Italians know about population with the actual situation itself². All population data presented in this work are taken from the UNFPA report or from the UN Population Yearbooks.

² Letizia Valdoni of IRP prepared the tables and graphs in this chapter and the following.

Two countries receiving the largest amount of foreign aid to the population, 1999



Survey on "6 Billion: What Italians Think"

Dates: 15-21 September 1999 and 20-26 October 1999
Number interviewed: 1000 for each survey
Type of interview: CATI telephone interviews
The sample: people 20 – 65 years old

Type of sample: proportional to the actual population of our country, representing:

- 3 geographical regions
- men and women
- age groups 20-34; 35-49; 50-65

People interviewed in first survey

Men	481
Women	519
20-34 year olds	376
35-49 year olds	311
50-65 year olds	313
employed	652
homemakers	216
others	132
NORTH	456
CENTRE	197
SOUTH	347

People interviewed in second survey

Men	481
Women	519
20-34 year olds	376
35-49 year olds	305
50-65 year olds	319
employed	697
homemakers	193
others	110
NORTH	456
CENTRE	197
SOUTH	347

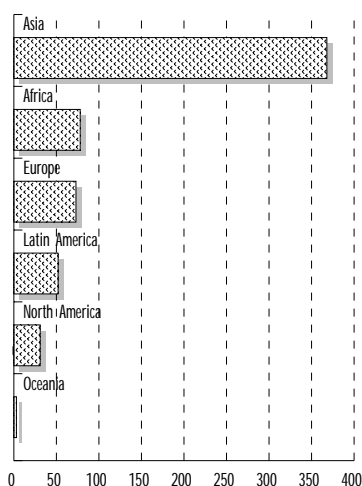
The number of questions in the first survey: 21, in the second: 24
Company ATESIA S. p. A., Telecom Group Italy.

Chapter 2

WHAT ITALIANS KNOW ABOUT POPULATION: THE FIRST SURVEY

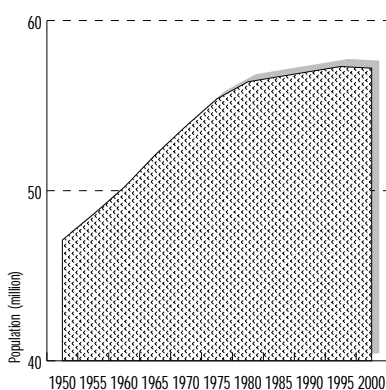
by Rossella Palomba, Adele Menniti and Maura Misiti

Continents per number of inhabitants, 1999



The demographic ratio of Europe and North America is declining. In 2050, 98% of the world population will live in less developed regions

Italian population 1950-2000 (thousands)



2.1 The world population

Less than half of the people interviewed were able to answer a direct question concerning the number of people in the world, and less than 11% answered the question correctly (Graph 2.1)⁵. Disinformation on this question was similar in all socio-demographic categories, although men and the better educated fared a little better (16% and 28% respectively). Homemakers were the least well informed category; in fact only 3% answered correctly.

Those who were unable to answer were given a second chance. They were invited to choose between four possible choices for the world population (2, 6, 10, 25 billion), and about 2 thirds over estimated the figure at 10 or 25 billion. Even with this second opportunity to answer, 10% felt unable to give any answer at all.

59% of those interviewed knew that Asia is the most populous continent, but 13% indicated Africa, 10% South America, and 5% Europe (Graph 2.2). More than half of those interviewed knew that China has the most people, but only 25% knew that India is number two. Previous surveys revealed that some people relate population growth to economic power, and this type of confusion was confirmed in the present survey. In fact, 9% of those interviewed indicated the United States as the most populous country, while 13% place it second. Japan was indicated as most populous by 4% and 10% put it second (Graphs 2.3 and 2.4).

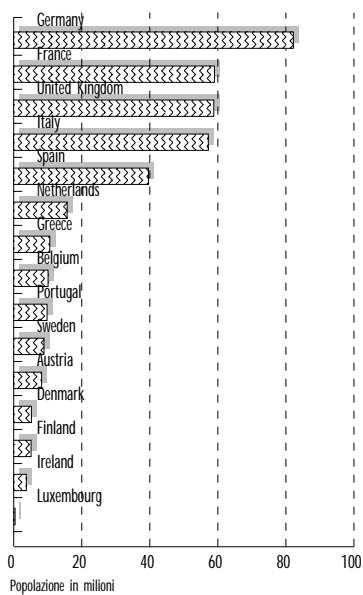
Actually, China, with 1,266 billion people, and India, with 998 million, taken together account for nearly 2 fifths of the world population, while the United States, with less than 280 million, is far outdistanced.

2.2 The european and italian populations

Only 3% of those interviewed knew the population of the European Union (Graph 2.5). We might explain this low level of information by saying that many people are uncertain about the number of mem-

⁵ All graphs and tables referred to in the text report the results of the IRP survey included at the end of each chapter.

European Union population, 2000



The inhabitants of EU total 375 million since Austria, Finland and Sweden joined

ber states, this however hardly explains why 60% of those interviewed were unable to answer the question. More people were able to identify the most populous country in the European Union as Germany (33%), although 14% thought it was France, and 11% gave Italy as an answer. (Graph 2.6). We should note that 30% of those interviewed did not answer at all.

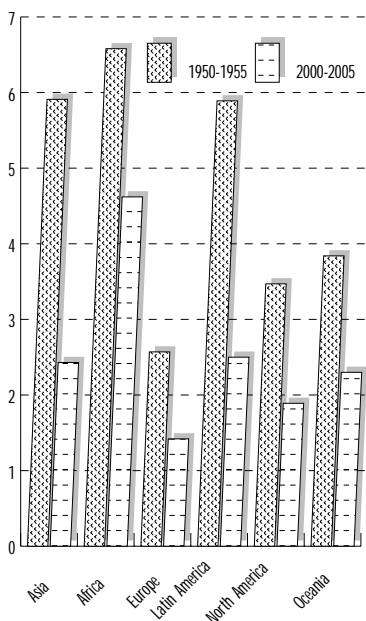
Many people were unable to answer questions about Italy correctly. For example, only slightly more than one in four knew that the population of Italy is between 55 million and 59 million, and even when we extend the range to 51 to 70 million, less than 50% of those interviewed answered correctly. Once again a high 35% felt unable to answer at all (Graph 2.7).

2.3 World population growth

Many Italians know that the number of people on Earth is increasing and is going to further increase over the next 50 years. Almost half the people interviewed said that the world population has more than doubled during the last 50 years, and that the rate of increase had slowed down (Tables 3.1 and 3.2). These are in fact the trends which characterise population growth on our planet: in 1950 there were 2.5 billion people on the Earth, 3 billion in 1960, and 6 billion today. The rate of increase has slowed down, from 2.4% in 1950-60, to 1.3% during the last decade. If the growth rate had remained at the 1950s level, we would now be more than 7.5 billion. Italians then seem to have a better grasp of general world population trends than they do of hard data. A question regarding the number of people added to the population every year, less than 10% gave the correct answer, 80 million, while 50% felt unable to give any answer.

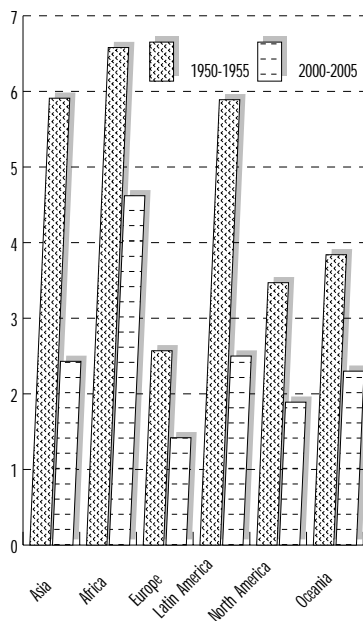
On the basis of this study, it is clear that Italians give more accurate answers about population change when the questions concern general trends rather than quantitative figures. Another factor which clearly emerges from this survey is that many Italians feel completely at a loss with regard to these arguments. The people we interviewed do not seem in the least curious about population data, nor do they know very much about population change, although they were very cooperative. And yet never before has the “population question” played so important a role in our country. Dramatic changes in national and international population trends have undoubtedly contributed to making it a vital question, as have the effects of those trends on social policies, international cooperation and development.

Fertility in the world



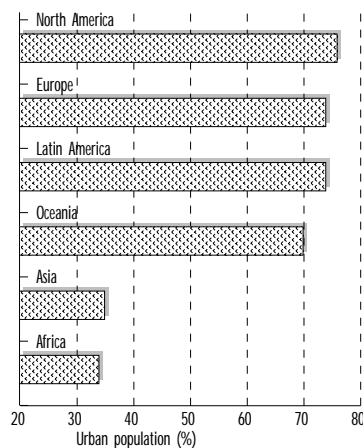
The mean number of children per woman has decreased everywhere in the world. Africa continues to be the most fertile continent.

Life expectancy at birth in the world, 1950-1955, 2000-2005



Medical progress has led to a 50 % drop in the death rate. Meanwhile life expectancy at birth has risen everywhere.

Inhabitants of large towns 1995 (% of population in each continent)



Population flows towards towns has quickened in the last 40 years, particularly in the less developed areas

2.4 The problems

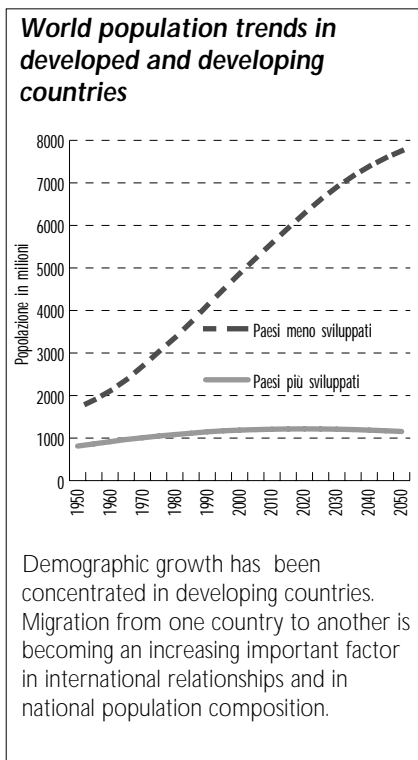
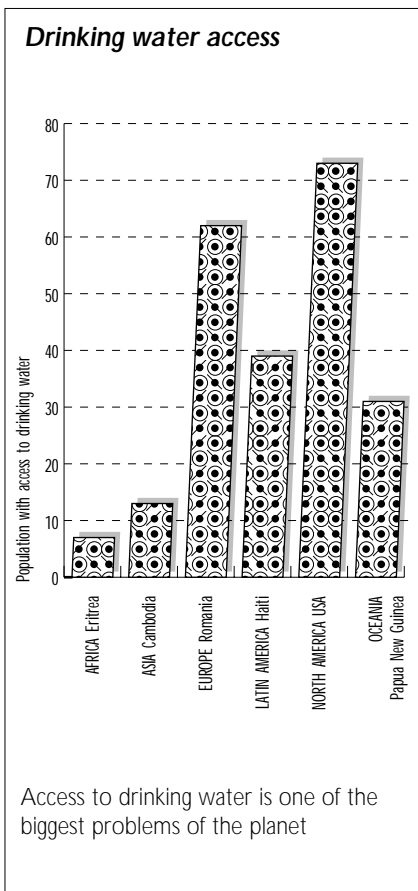
The decrease in the fertility rate which has represented an important factor in population change over the past 15 years is due to continue. The United Nations predicts a world population of 7 billion by 2025, and of 9 billion by the middle of the next century.

Are there just too many of us? Seventy-five per cent of those interviewed consider population increase a problem, although it has slowed down. Men are the most concerned (81%) and the residents of Northern Italy (80% NorthWest, 78% NorthEast) (Table 4.1). Those interviewed identified two types of problems connected to population growth. The first is an environmental question connected to consumption of resources and degradation of the environment. They see an increase in the population as contributing to world hunger (43%), pollution (14%), over crowding in habitable areas (16%), and consumption of water resources (7%). The second type of problem concerns the social consequences of population increase. Those interviewed felt that population increase will raise unemployment levels (35%, 47% in the South), increase poverty (10%), contribute to the gap between rich and poor countries (16%). Strictly demographic questions, such as aging of the population or immigration received less attention. Only 1.1 of those interviewed felt that this population growth might translate into further aging of the population, while 6% thought that it could have an impact on international migration (Graph 4.1).

2.5 The solutions

Where there are problems, we have to find solutions, especially political solutions, connected to government intervention on a world level, through world organisations or conferences. Italians believe that it is right, lawful and desirable to redress large world demographic imbalances, connected to sharp population increases in developing countries. 89% think that the governments of industrialised countries should address these problems, and 90% ask international organisations like the UN, the FAO, and the World Bank to act. So Italians are favourable towards international political action, and very few failed to respond to this question.

Those interviewed were encouraged to give an opinion about provisions at the heart of political debates on how to reduce the population imbalance between rich and poor countries. In particular, they were asked what developed countries should do, offering them two extreme alternatives. Did they want to programs to encourage higher birth rates in developed countries, or would it be better to encourage



immigration from poor countries, in fact creating multi-cultural societies. Neither suggestion received enthusiastic support, around 20% in both cases. This figure is especially low, if you consider that the people interviewed were “encouraged” to answer. 26% were opposed to both solutions, and 17% proposed other solutions (Graph 5.1). Therefore, although Italians clearly expect government action, it is also clear that they do not envision a merely numerical balance.

Another question they were “encouraged” to answer regarded action which large international organisations should undertake to slow population growth in developing countries. The interviewers proposed two solutions. The first “demographic” solution proposed to “encourage better birth control”, while the second more social solution proposed to “increase schooling and development”. As we might have predicted, 59% favoured the second option, while 16% agreed with the first, and 21% agreed with both choices. Only 2% proposed other solutions, and 1.1% were against both proposals. (Graph 5.2).

There can be no doubt that plenty of scope exists for our government to enact policies of co-operation and solidarity, to provide support and even to make investments in developing countries and that Italians expect it to do so as one way of solving world population problems. In the mind of the public, moreover, the population problem is not something that can be examined or tackled as an isolated issue but instead (and the UNFPA Report for 1999 stresses this point) steps should be taken to identify and solve the problematic relations that exist between population behaviour and economic, social, environmental and training/educational factors. Of course, scientific institutions, academics and the media should also do their best to provide Italians with accurate information about major demographic trends throughout the world, as well as in Europe and their own country. This might stop opinions degenerating into prejudices, ensure that the attitudes of ordinary people are founded as much as possible on correct notions, and instead of fuelling alarmist tendencies help to make the public more aware of the population issue, its dynamics and the consequences for society.

Ageing

Europe is the continent with the highest ageing ratio in the world.

A gradual ageing of the world population will occur over the next decades.

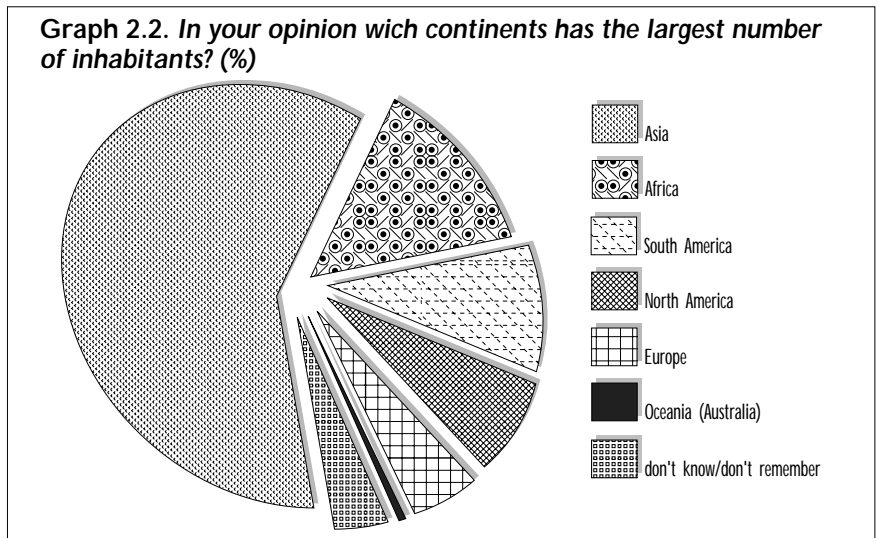
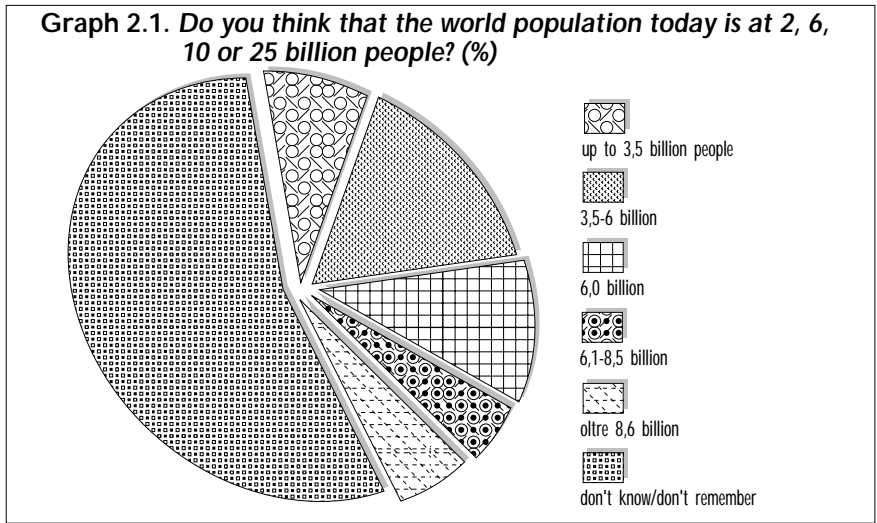
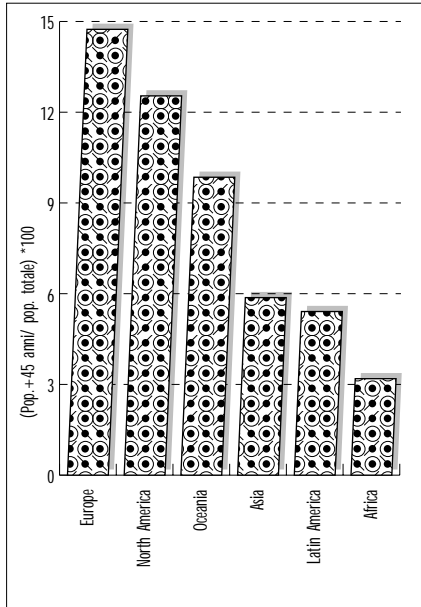


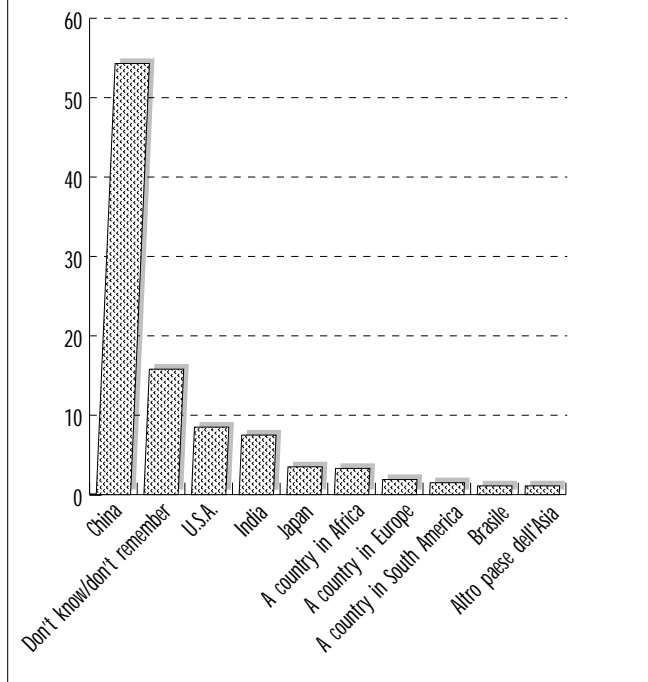
Table 2.1: During the last 50 years, do you think that the world population has increased, decreased, or remained the same?

Increased	78
Remained the same	8
Decreased	13
Don't know/don't remember	1
Total	100

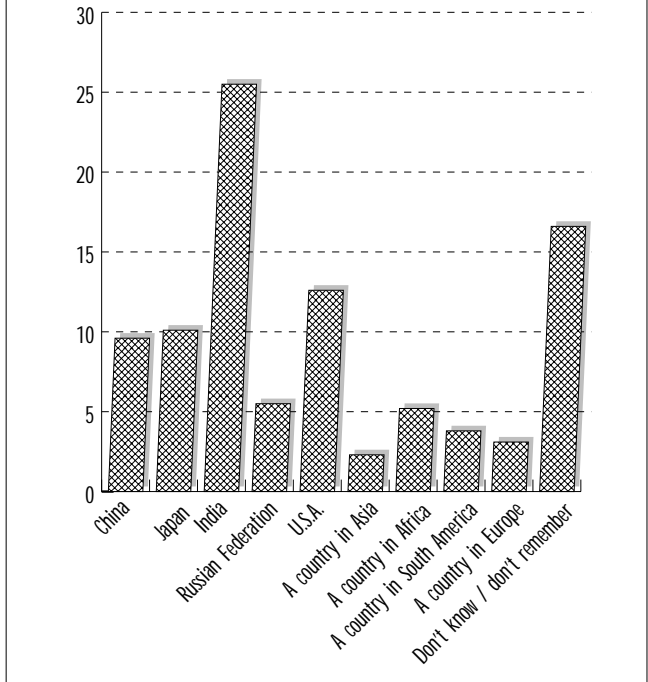
Table 2.2: The world population today is more than double what it was 50 years ago or less than double what it was 50 years ago?

More than double what it was 50 years ago	45
Less than double what it was 50 years ago	50
Don't know/Don't remember	5
Total	100

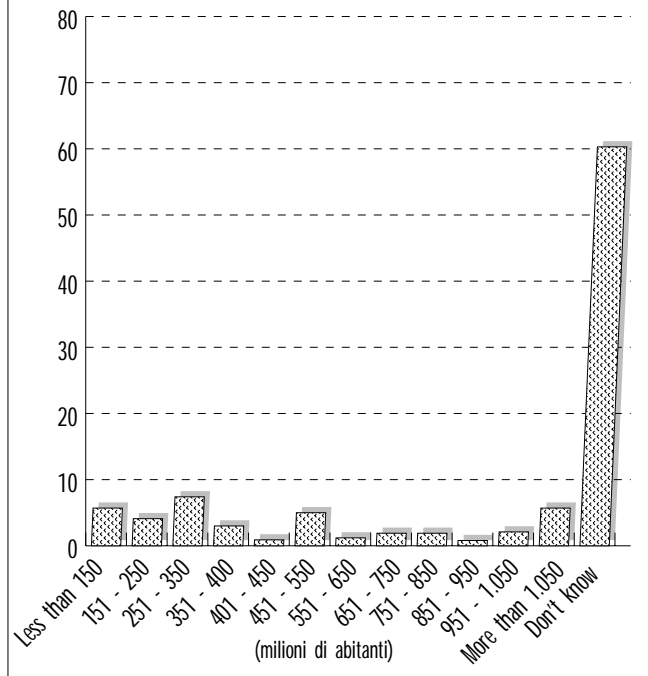
Graph 2.3: Which country has the largest number of inhabitants in the world ? (%)



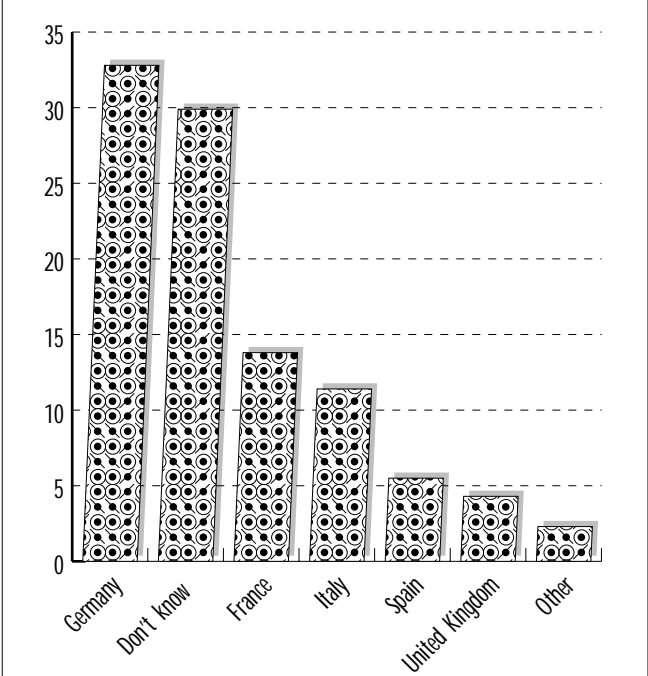
Graph 2.4: The second country that has the largest number of inhabitants in the world (%)



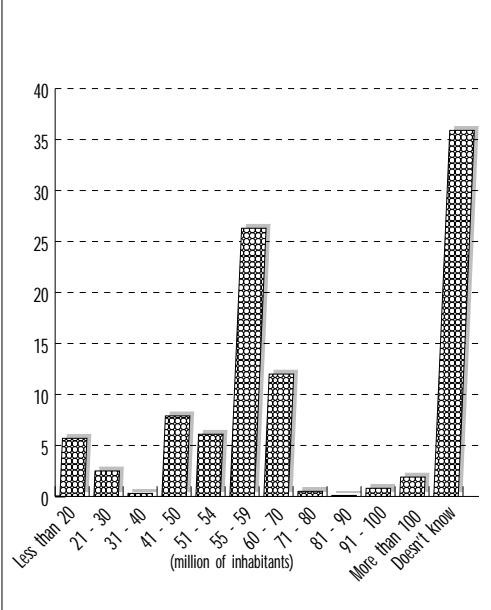
Graph 2.5: How many people there are in the European Union? (%)



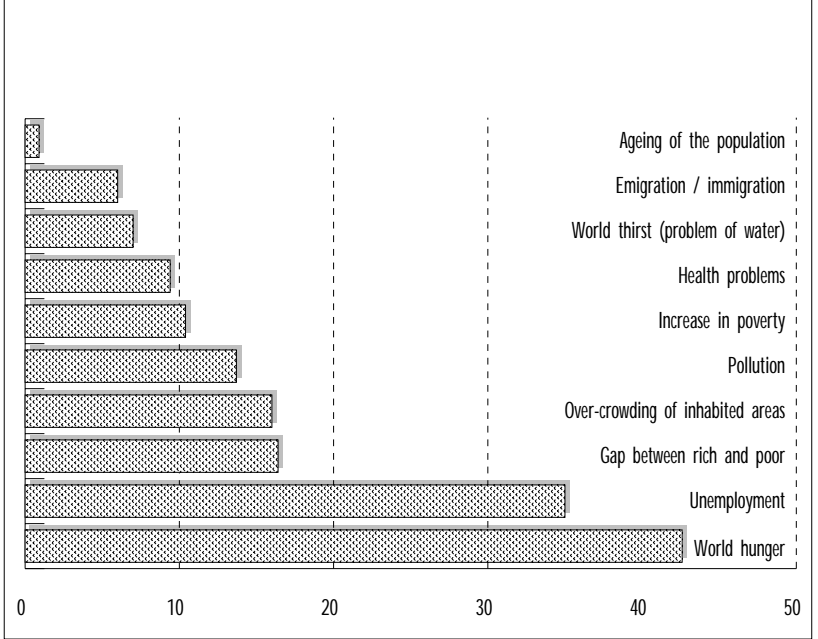
Graph 2.6: Which European Country has the largest number of inhabitants? (%)



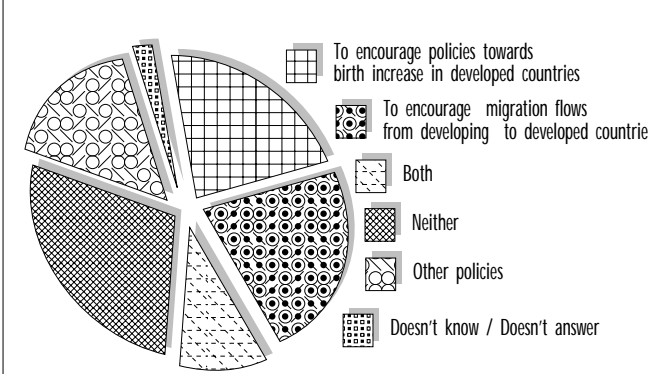
Graph 2.7: How many people there are in Italy? (%)



Graph 2.8: Main issues related to world population increase



Graph 2.9: Do you like better an increase of the birth rate in developed countries or an increase of migration flows from developing to developed countries? (%)



Graph 2.10: Regarding developing countries do you like better policies towards improvement of education and development or policies to support family planning? (%)

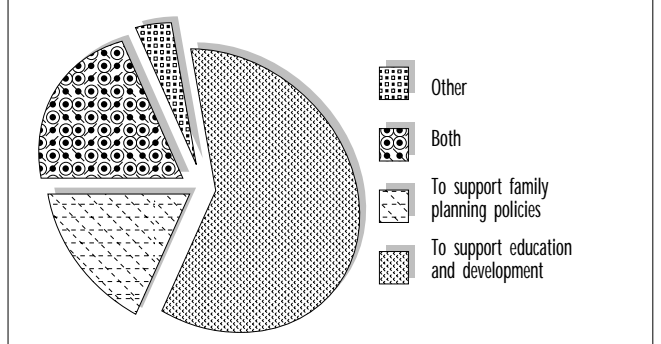


Table 2.3. Do you think that world population growth is a problem? (% by area)

	north	centre	south	Italy
yes	79	74	71	75
no	18	23	27	22
don't know	3	3	3	3

Chapter 3

MEASURING MEDIA IMPACT: THE SECOND SURVEY

by Maura Misiti and Loredana Cerbara

In the period around 12 October media coverage of “the birth of the world’s 6 billionth inhabitant” was high all over the world, especially since this event coincided with presentation of the UNFPA Report, and in Italy with publication of the IRP Survey results.

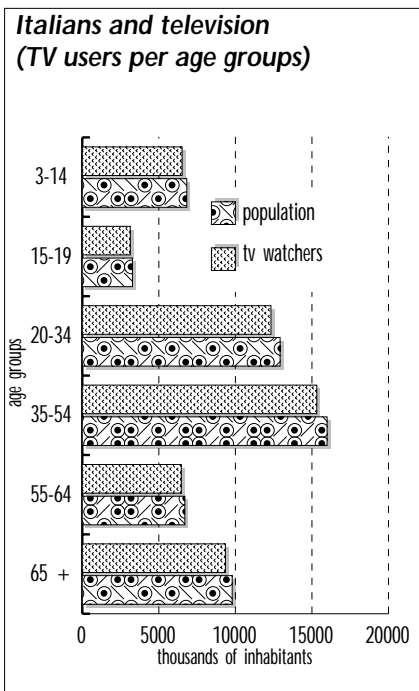
By comparing the number of correct answers to the question about the world population before and after the information about *day-6 billion* appeared on television and on newspapers, we were able to evaluate the impact of the media broadcasts. In this report we will consider only some of the results of our survey, specifically those concerning how well the information was understood. We then relate these data to the particular sources of information, various attitudes and behaviour of the people interviewed, and to some other characteristics which help us understand why some people find it easier to remember certain types of information. Various surveys (Baccaini and Van Peer, 1999; Menniti *et al.*, 1997; Moors and Palomba, 1995; 1998; Bonifazi *et al.*, 1998; Adamson *et al.*, 2000) show that, on the average, people do not know much about demographic facts, and that only a small well-educated segment of the population is relatively well informed. As a consequence, only a small minority (11%) of Italians answered the question correctly. Therefore our data are fairly representative of how well informed people are about basic facts on any given day. Newspapers and broadcasting networks gave ample space to the news. All the Italian newscasts broadcast the information and commented on it. The following table contains data regarding

Both paper press, radio and television enhanced very much these news: every Italian newscast has communicated and examined carefully about it.

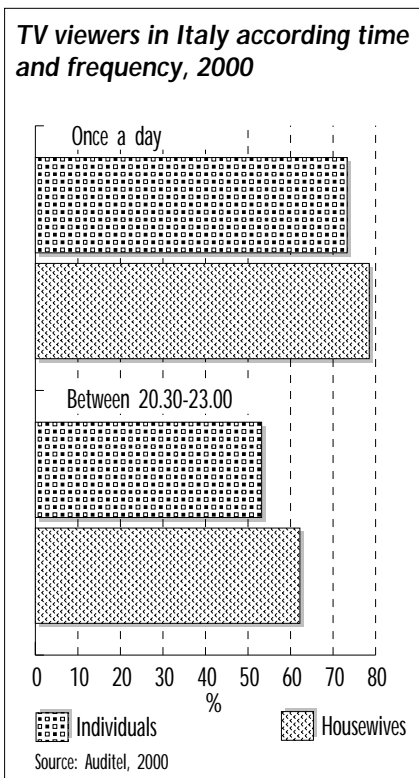
“Prime time” newscasts around 12 October

Date	Time	Channel	Title	Duration (")
09/10/99	8:18 pm	Mediaset TG5	6 Billion People on Earth	128
11/10/99	8:28 pm	Mediaset TG4	UN says baby born tomorrow in Belgrade brings world population to 6 billion	117
12/10/99	8:31 pm	RAI/TG1	6 billionth inhabitant of the world born in Sarajevo	47
12/10/99	8:53 pm	RAI/TG2	Earth's 6 billionth inhabitant born	30
12/10/99	7:27 pm	RAI/TG3	6 billion people in the world according to demographic estimate	21
12/10/99	7:20 pm	Mediaset TG5	A baby born in Sarajevo brings the world's inhabitants to 6 billion	125
12/10/99	7:27 pm	Mediaset TG4	Interviews on the future of the world	99

(Source: CARES, 1999)



Italians and TV
 In Italy, 95.7% of inhabitants watch TV regularly. Only 24% of this watch for more than three hours per day. While figures tend to be homogeneous for young population, among the elderly women tend to watch more TV (44,9%) than men (41,4%).



prime time news casts around 12 October. Data regarding newspapers and magazines appears in paragraph 4.

3.1.1 World Population

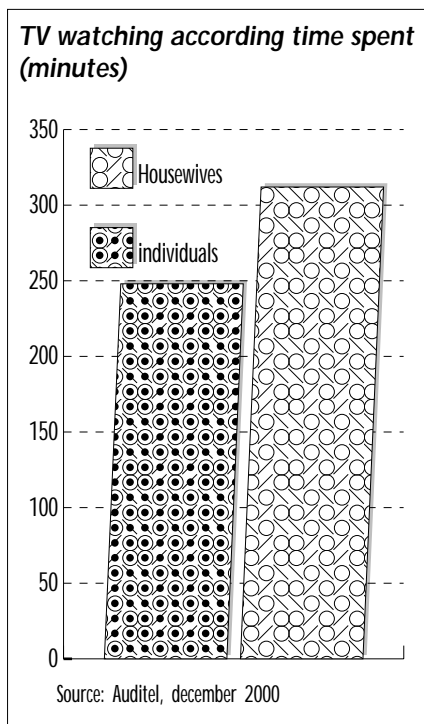
Day 6 Billion did have an effect, as Graph 1 shows, and the number of correct answers increased by 12%. In fact, in the earlier survey only 11% of those interviewed gave the correct answer of 6 billion for the world population, while in the second survey more than twice as many people answered correctly (23%). Those who did not know or chose not to answer were given a loaded choice which included the correct answer of “6 billion”. Despite that clue, most of those who answered the question in this form chose 10 Billion (34.6%), or even 25 billion (26%), while only 20.2% answered correctly.

Here media reports served to focus attention on the correct figure, in the case of people who already had some figure in their head, to correct wrong figures, but did little the 55% majority who did not know or else did not remember the size of the world population. This is an interesting observation, because it illustrates that learning is often selective, creating a positive effect on those ready to receive the information, but without effect on those who are not interested in memorising certain information. We will return to this question when we look at the synergetic effect of different sources of information working together.

The media do not seem to have affected answers to the questions which required a deeper knowledge about world population trends. In deed, the number of correct answers to these questions actually decreased, although only slightly. In the earlier survey almost half of those questioned believed that the world population had not doubled in the last 50 years, in the present survey, 49.8% answered correctly that it had more than doubled.

On a quantitative question on which country has the largest population, 57.7% answered correctly that it is China (Graph 2). Once again, television and the press do not seem to have influenced the number of correct answers, though they may account for the lower number of those interviewed who refused to answer at all, which was down by 5% from the first survey.

The role of information has been to cue the right number to those who already had some notion of their own or, put differently, to correct existing information, but it has had no effect at all on those (the 55% majority) who didn't know or had forgotten the size of the world population. It is an interesting phenomenon because it reveals a selective learning mechanism that operates on those who are somehow already aware but does nothing to stimulate the ignorant or



Identikit of the TV addict
 96.6% housewives watch TV but those who watch most are the retired, 37% of whom usually watch for at least 3 hours.
 (Source: ISTAT, 1997)

uninterested in memorising the information. We will come back to this point later when we examine the synergetic effect of different sources of information.

The media appear to have had no effect at all on answers to questions designed to elicit deeper knowledge of world population dynamics since the number of correct answers actually decreases, if only by a small amount. On the other hand, whereas in the earlier survey almost half those interviewed did not think the world population had doubled in the past 50 years, on this occasion 50% rightly believe it is now more than twice the previous figure.

As to which country has the largest population, the majority of interviewees (58%) again rightly answered China (Graph 3.2). Press and television coverage again appears to have made no difference to the number of correct answers but it has reduced the number of 'don't knows' by 5% compared to the earlier survey.

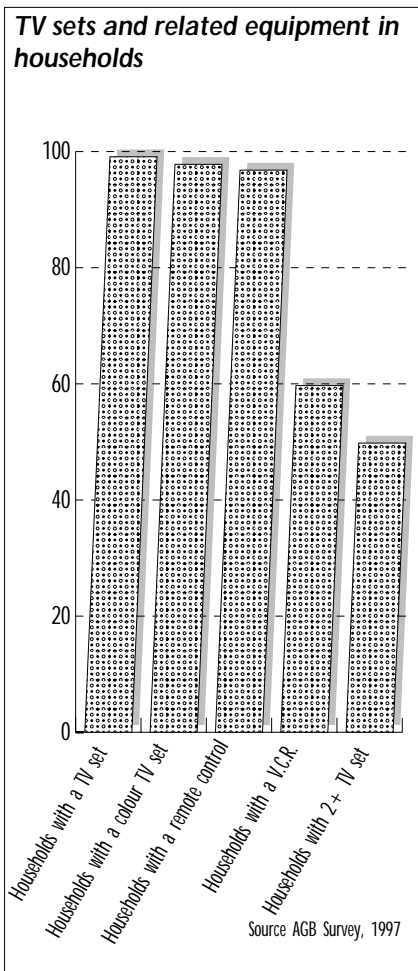
3.1.2 The Italian Population.

Turning now to the answers to the question about the population of Italy, two points stand out: first, that a large percentage of people were unable to answer (4 out of 10) and, second, that only 17% correctly stated that Italy has a population of 56-57 million. Since this information has received far less coverage than the news of the birth of the 6 billionth person, we must assume it is the fruit of pre-existing knowledge and that the effect of the media is entirely marginal. The graph comparing the results of the two surveys does not suggest any improvement in knowledge here, if anything greater hesitation in replying (Graph 3.3).

From these observations we can conclude that the media do catalyse and distribute information, even specialised information like that under discussion, but that this influence is superficial and temporary. It might allow more people to answer our questions, for example, but not improve the number of correct answers. The media would seem to act at a superficial level without touching the deeper cognitive levels. Later on, we will look at the sources of information and learning modes, to see how the different media act selectively on the learning process and the memorisation of information.

3.2 The sources

Television and the press are the principal sources of basic demographic information about the birth of the 6 billionth person on the Earth. Even if we reduce this information to its simplest numerical fact, it is rife with significance for our understanding of the present and the future. Schools played an insignificant role in making this



Popularity of TV

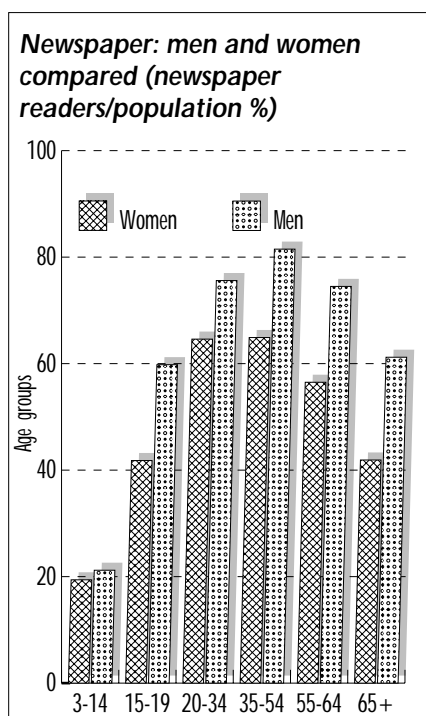
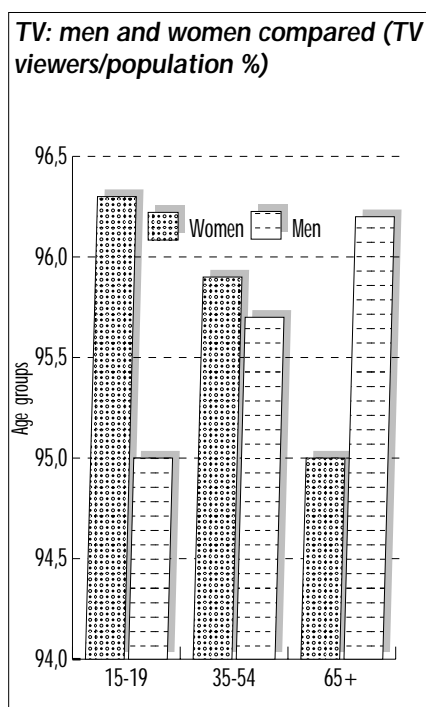
All Italians watch TV, so every household has a television set, usually a colour one and with a remote control. Half of households have at least two television sets and more than 50% have a V.C.R.

information known, but the Eopei survey (baccaini....) led us to expect this result, as did the Internet survey, limited to specific segments of the population (Graph 3.4).

Information about the 6 billionth person on television obviously occurred mainly in news broadcasts and journalistic programmes (78% and 15%). It was also mentioned, perhaps more superficially, in other types of programmes, including entertainment programmes (8%). We should notice that a goodly percentage (10%) of this group could not remember which programme had mentioned the event, and this is typical of this type of viewing.

Daily newspapers, with their large distribution, are the major source of printed information (85%), while magazines are a more limited audience (35%). In our sample, the people who got information about the population (both Italian and world) from newspapers were by and large men (65%), mostly better educated. We have already noted that daily newspaper are more important than magazines, but we can also analyse the types of the newspapers used as sources, according to the characteristics of their readers. Men clearly account for most newspaper readers, more so in the case of independent and politically aligned newspapers, less so for local newspapers (Graph 3.5). Instead more women than men read scholarly journals, general news magazines, especially women's magazines, and magazines aligned with the Catholic church. The profile of readers of the three main sources of information on the population regarding the 6 billionth person (Graph 3.6) shows that their level of education determines very strongly the type of information used.

How is the news (heard or read) incorporated into existing information to produce a more complex and tailor-made attitude? One of our questions tried to associate the bare fact with problems often linked to demographic issues (Graph 3.7); the (spontaneous) answers ranged from stereotypes and/or simplifications such as "world hunger" (27%) to more elaborate views, probably the outcome of complex thought processes, such as "imbalance between rich and poor countries" (13%). Further down the list, we come to concern about over-population ("there are too many of us"), to a more unemotional consideration of the problem of world population growth and finally to a link with the rise in poverty. Although problems more specifically connected with the West - such as ageing (2.6%) and unemployment (2.4%) - are raised, they figure less large, as does the relationship to family-planning policies or the economic support for less developed countries. Although answers do tend to focus on world hunger, pointing to a somewhat superficial reading of the problem, we must view as positive the fact that we received such a broad range of answers, even those that suggested the news had



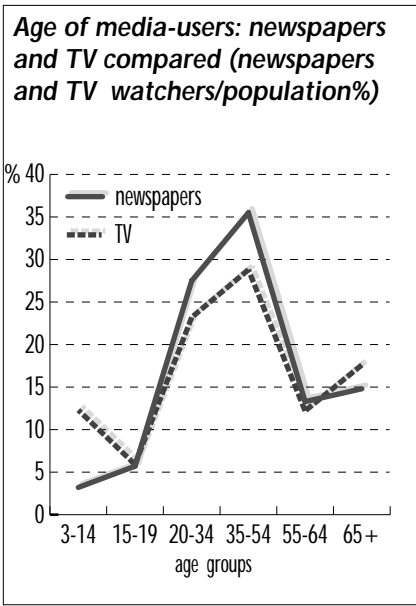
TV and newspapers: gender and age differences
 There are no gender age differences where TV is concerned. The majority of newspaper readers fall in the 35-54 year old group although there is a 16.6 per cent gap between men (81.5%) and women (64.9%) in this group. Sex and age differences still last for newspapers!

prompted at least some deductions if not actual meditation. That so many people expressed strong interest in the news (87% "very" or "fairly" interesting) emphasises a need for a greater information in regard. The majority of the interviewees confirmed this opinion and suggested that television and the press would be the most appropriate means. Thus, there would appear to be a latent demand, an unfilled space for information on such issues, or maybe more generally for information of a scientific nature.

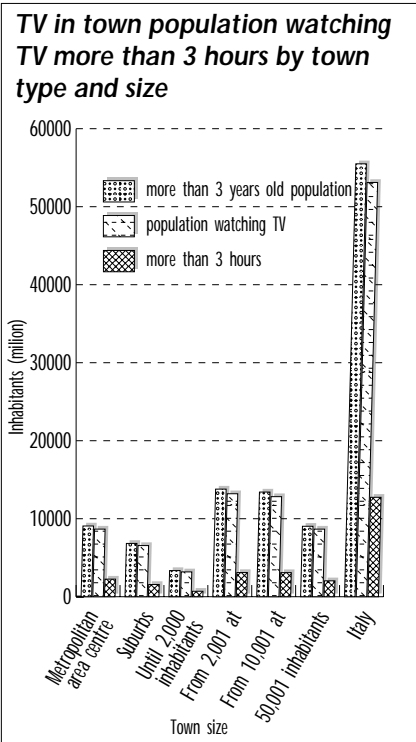
Our interest focuses on the process by which the news is learnt, and more especially on the profile of media users (television and press), and this is where we will now attempt to examine the synergy observed earlier, i.e. the mechanism whereby the contemporary user tends increasingly to overlap and combine different sources of information and re-process them in his/her own context. Our survey reveals that the majority of the population (62%) neither heard nor read the news of the 6 billionth person and the percentage answering 'don't know' was very close to 55%. Of the remainder, 18% heard the news on the TV alone, 13.5% from both sources, and 6.4% from newspapers alone. The structural profile of these 4 sub-groups is very interesting, and particularly so for establishing the potential targets of information and communication campaigns to improve demographic culture or specific policies. The first group ("neither TV nor papers") contains a majority of poorly educated people, young people, women, residents in Southern Italy. Those who learnt the news "from the TV alone" are young (20-24 years old), with an average to high level of education, living mainly in Southern Italy, but with no specific gender connotation. By contrast, the gender factor is very important among those who read the news in the newspapers or combined both sources: men form the largest number of both groups, combined with a majority of university graduates and 35-to-50 year olds. The only difference between these two groups of users relates to geographical area, more towards the Northeast in the case of newspaper readers and extending to the Centre for the other group (Table 3.1).

3.3 Acknowledged interest

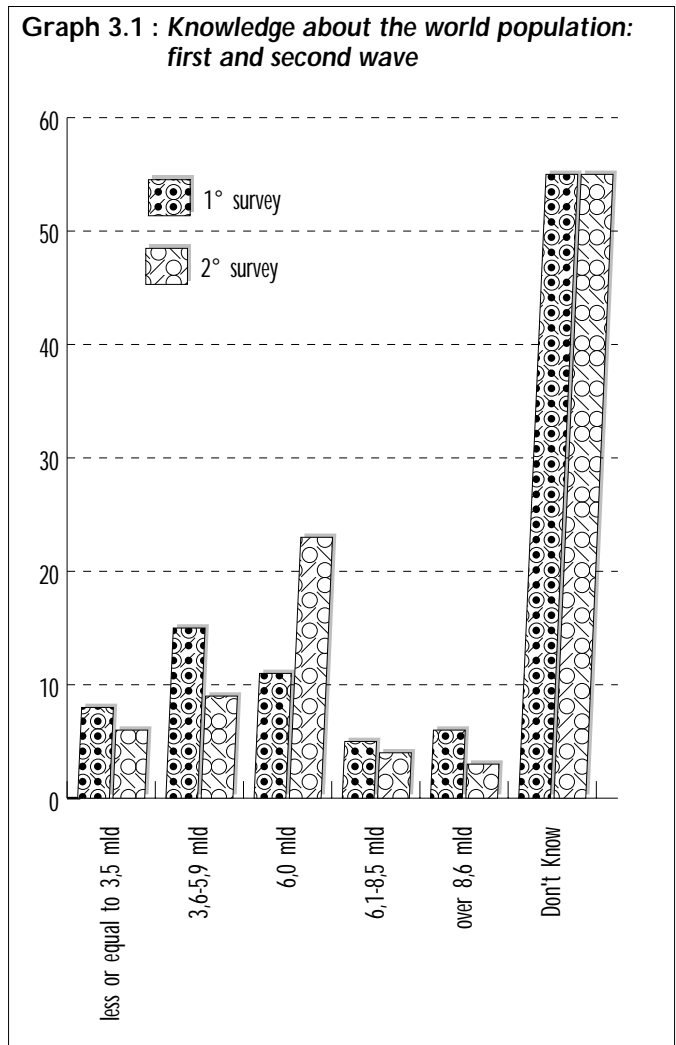
Although more than half of those interviewed said that they had not received the news from any media source, everyone had an opinion about the quality of the information on population. While 38% said they were interested in this type of information, 54% said that the information given out by the media was insufficient. 20% of those interviewed said that they were interested in this type of information but could not find enough information in media sources.



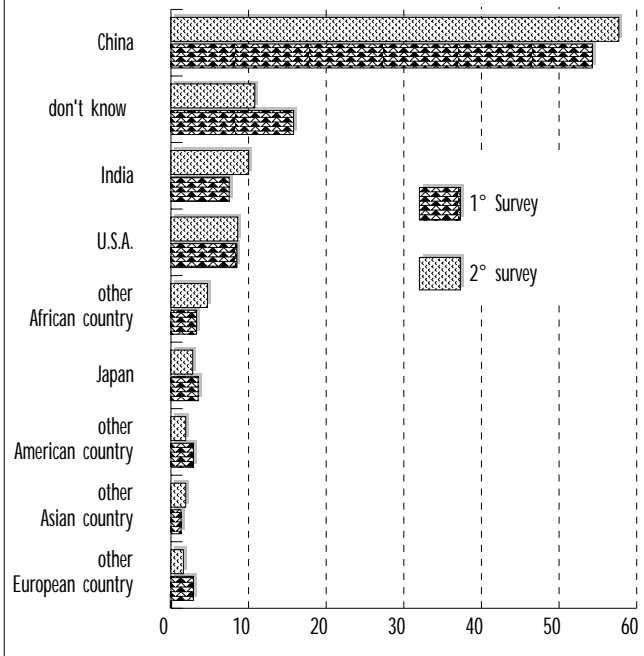
Those who said that they were satisfied with the information garnered from media sources were less than 15% of the total. The great majority (76%) found television the most appropriate channel for this type of information, because it represents media in the collective imagination, accessible to everyone. Only about 10% actually followed the information attentively in television. There is clearly a discrepancy between the interest people claim to have when asked about the subject in general terms and the attention they actually dedicate to it in a specific case, like the one we are discussing. The problem therefore is not simply a matter of stimulating the public to become interested in population questions. We have to predispose the largest possible segment of the public to be receptive to these themes, while now they often are not, because of cultural level, the disinterest of the schools for these questions, a widespread indifference to certain topics, and the inadequate attention of the media, which very often emphasise bizarre but irrelevant details.



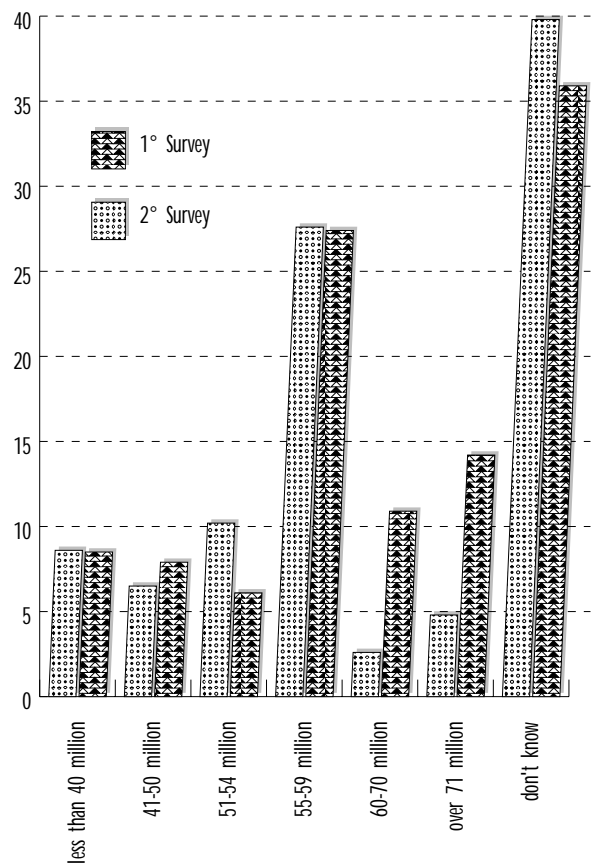
Dwellers in the centres of metropolitan areas and in towns with more than 50,000 inhabitants are the greatest TV viewers. Yet the worst addicts reside both in large than in very small towns, where the greatest number of people living alone are to be found.



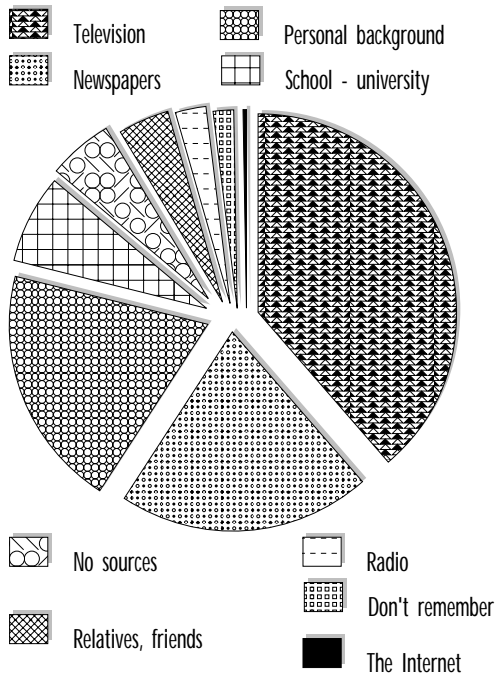
Graph 3.2: Which country has the largest population in the world?: first and second wave (%)



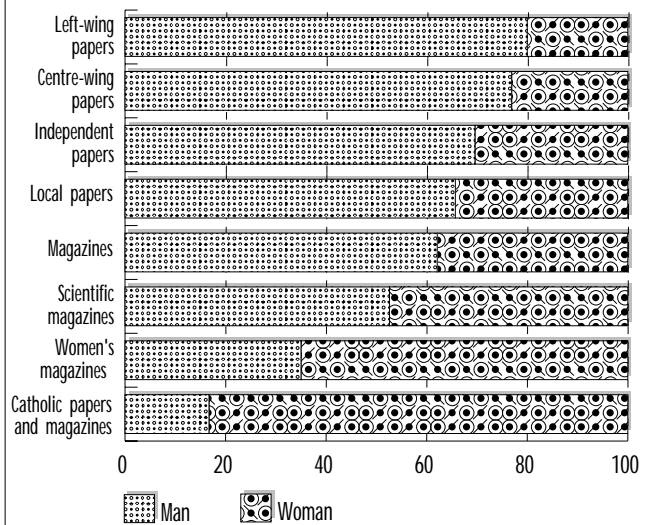
Graph 3.3: Knowledge about Italian population: first and second wave (%)



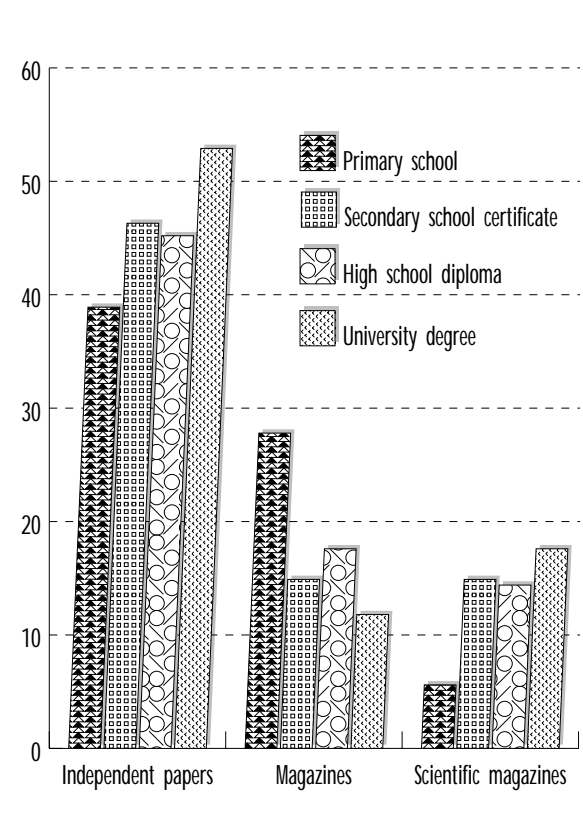
Graph 3.4: Sources of information about the world population (in percentages)



Graph 3.5: Main source of information by sex of reader



Graph 3.6. Some sources of information by educational level of reader



Graph 3.7. Main issues related to world population

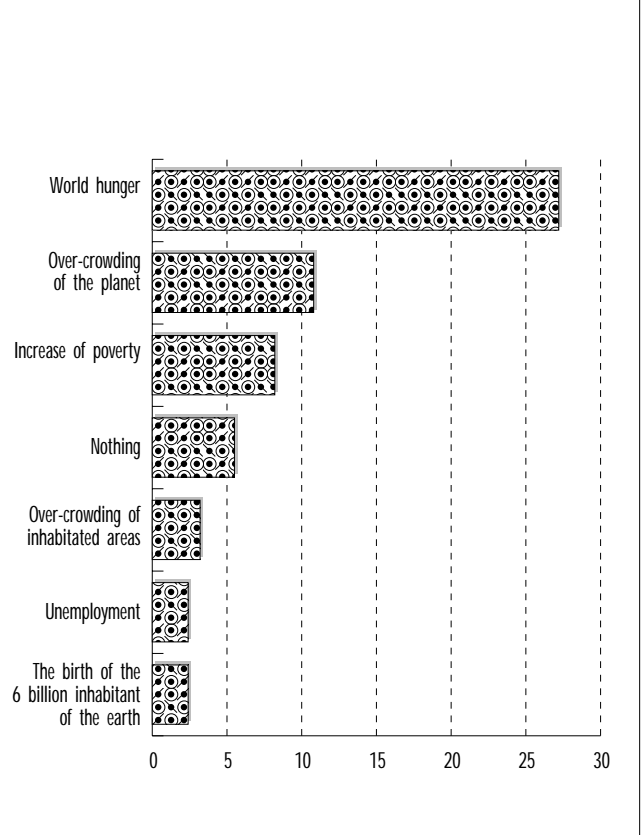


Table 3.1. Users of sources of information on world population by some characteristics (%)

TV AND NEWSPAPERS

Men	9	North-West	4	Primary school	1
Women	4	North-East	4	Secondary school certificate	3
20-34 years old	5	Centre	3	High school diploma	7
35-50 years old	5	South	3	University Degree	3
51-56 years old	3				

TV ONLY

Men	9	North-West	5	Primary school	2
Women	9	North-East	4	Secondary school certificate	5
20-34 years old	8	Centre	4	High school diploma	9
35-50 years old	6	South	6	University Degree	2
51-56 years old	4				

NEWSPAPERS ONLY

Men	4	North-West	2	Primary school	1
Women	2	North-East	1	Secondary school certificate	1
20-34 years old	2	Centre	1	High school diploma	3
35-50 years old	3	South	2	University Degree	2
51-56 years old	2				

NO TV, NO NEWSPAPERS

Men	26	North-West	16	Primary school	15
Women	37	North-East	10	Secondary school certificate	9
20-34 years old	23	Centre	12	High school diploma	23
35-50 years old	20	South	24	University Degree	3
51-56 years old	19				

Chapter 4

PROFILES AND PATH OF KNOWLEDGE

by Maura Misiti and Loredana Cerbara

4.1 Answer tree technique

Besides routine analysis based on the frequency of responses, we can extend our study of the data derived from opinion surveys by the use of answer trees. This is a technique which uses particular algorithms to subdivide data, thus allowing us to identify those people interviewed who share certain pre-selected characteristics (Kass, 1980). As we will see later, the technique calls for us to choose a variable from among those we are most interested in, called *the target variable*, and a set of variables that we believe determinant for interpreting the results of the objective variable, called predictors. The algorithm produces a result in the shape of a tree, where the nodes represent the possible subdivisions determined by the predictor variables of the people from homogeneous groups interviewed. The leaves of the tree contain the data on the objective variable within the group which is represented by the leaf itself. The tree allows us to identify the most interesting profiles rapidly. We will not mention all the possible applications that answer trees might have for our data, in order to save time, but there are at least two very interesting results.

4.2 Knowledge about the world population: how italians answered

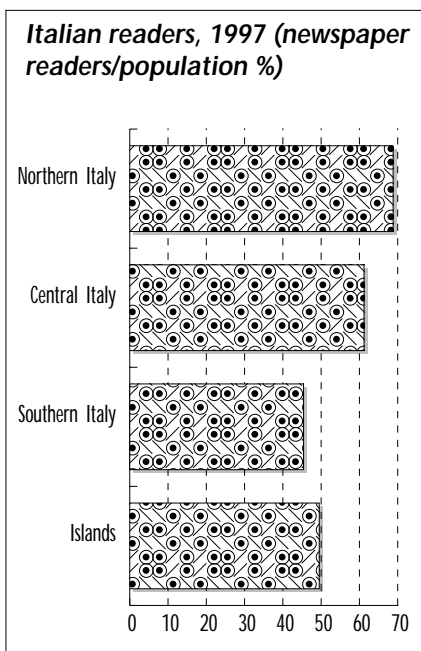
The first application we describe, carried out on the data from the first survey, had as its variable an indicator which allowed us to distinguish between people who were able to indicate the number of people on the Earth, those who answered incorrectly, and those who did not respond to this question. The following variables were then applied:

- sex;
- schooling, divided into 6 groups: did not complete elementary school, completed elementary school, middle school diploma, high-school diploma, university degree, did not wish to answer;
- geographic area.

Newspapers and professions

The principal newspaper readers are high level professional people (managers, businessmen, free-lance professionals), while less than half of housewives (48.7%) read newspapers.

(Source: ISTAT, 1997)



Daily papers not so... daily!
 More than half the Italian population (61.1%) read a newspaper at least once a week, but only 44.4% are regular reader (5+ times). The profile of a regular reader is a male, 35-44 years-old, university graduate and from north-west Italy.

Among male graduates, 70.4% read at least 5 times a week, as against 42% female graduates.
 (Source: ISTAT, 1997)

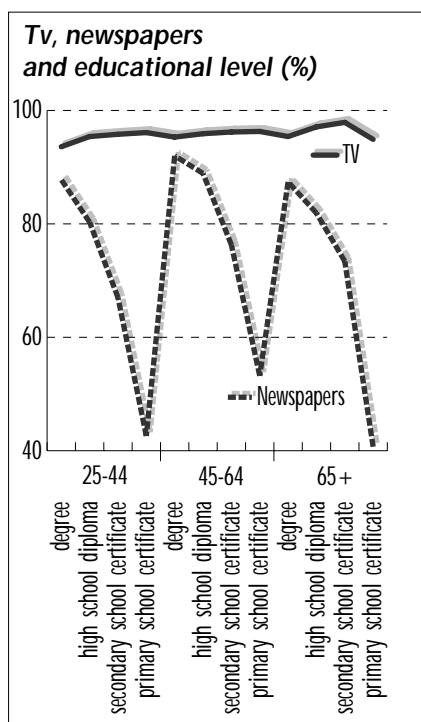


Figure 4.1 clearly indicates that the difference between the sexes is significant. In fact, at the first division of our data tree, the sex variable separates those who answered into two groups: the men, who tended to answer the population question, though they made more errors than the women, and the women, who mostly (70%) refused to answer the question at all. At the second level of the tree, we find a division based on schooling. As the level of schooling goes up, the percentage of answers also goes up, with some differences according to sex, and the percentage of right answers also goes up. Geographic area plays a role only at the last level, and only among men with a high-school diploma. In the South there were fewer answers and more wrong answers than elsewhere. The structure of this profile, which reflects social status, as well as gender, has some valence in the following results, even when this is not immediately obvious. Indeed, we emphasise other characteristics, in what follows, and so the question of socio-economic status will only enter into the analysis indirectly.

4.3 The profile of the newspaper readers and TV viewers

The second application uses a target variable constructed ad hoc which allows us to distinguish between those who answered the question about the size of the world population correctly, and those who answered incorrectly, or who did not answer at all. The predictors chosen are the following:

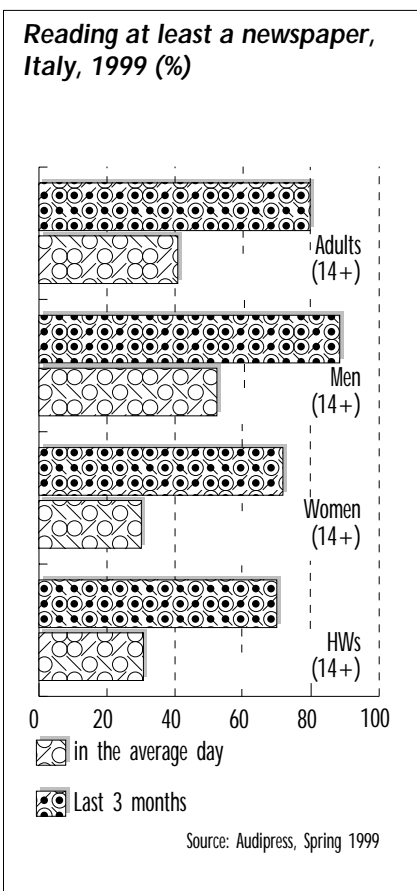
- a variable indicator that permits us to identify the people interviewed who claim that they got their information regarding the size of the world population from newspapers or magazines;
- a variable indicator that permits us to identify the people interviewed who claim that they got their information regarding the size of the world population from television;
- the level of education of the people interviewed.

Naturally the first two variables are not mutually exclusive, since it is possible that some of the people interviewed got information about the world population from more than one source, and indeed this did happen. See Figure 4.2 for the results, which are quite interesting.

The predictors on the source of information are among the most important variables in so far as they give us a profile of the answers in a certain set. In fact, the first and second level subdivisions are determined by these answers, and immediately group the people interviewed according to whether they got their information from 1) printed sources, 2) television, 3) both, or 4) no source. These groups are very different from a structural point of view. The leaf represent-

"Distinction-less TV"

The educational level is very important when analysing different groups of newspaper readers, but is totally irrelevant in the case of TV.



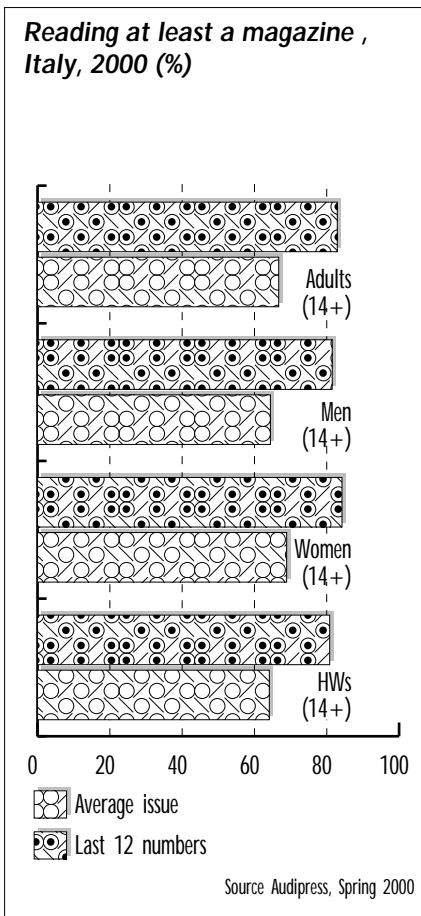
ing those people who had more than one source of information has a much higher percentage of right answers than the overall average of right answers (70% against 23%). The two leaves that represent people with one of the two sources of information considered have very similar answer profiles, in line with the overall average, as long as no one in these two groups refuses to answer the question. Finally, the leaf that represents those people who claim that their information does not come from either of the two sources has a very high percentage of no answers, as might be expected. Level of education is a useful predictor only at the last level, and only for those people who claim that they only heard about the world population on television. Among these people, the percentage of error was very high for those with few years of schooling.

These easy-to-read results do not contradict the hypothesis already stated in the previous paragraph, which says that today information comes about as the result of different components acting simultaneously. This technique tells us what kind of impact a particular source of information makes, and how accurate the information itself is. People who are interested in a particular piece of information will tend to turn to various sources and in the end will be able to form quite an accurate opinion. On the other hand, people who do not delve more deeply into a particular piece of information, will continue to harbor ideas similar to the general average opinion. The group of people most interested is largely made up of rather well educated men, while the group of people who got their information exclusively from television has more women than men. Among those people who had no information at all about the question there is a particularly large group of elderly women, especially from South Italy, which indicates the low level of education and the general backwardness so prevalent among that social group.

4.4 The relationship between knowledge and willingness to act

Figure 4.3 illustrates the results of the third answer tree which I want to discuss. The target variable is the same as in the preceding tree, while the predictors were chosen so as to verify the relation between knowledge, willingness to act, and perception of the demographic phenomena which are the object of this study. The following predictors were chosen:

- a variable which specifies the actions taken by the people interviewed in order to face the problems resulting from world population growth;
- a variable to identify the general problem connected to world population growth which the person interviewed felt most



strongly about.

At the very lowest level of the tree a small group separates from the trunk. This is the small percentage of people interviewed who have considered adoption in the past. Characteristically a much higher percentage of people in this group gave the correct answer to the question on world population than was true for the interviewees as a whole. The left-hand side of the tree includes those people who have undertaken some specific commitment. They responded correctly to the question on world population in approximately the same percentage as the overall group. Even among this group however, we can distinguish between a less committed group whose information about the world population is not very precise, and a much more committed group. This second group identifies the imbalance between rich and poor countries as one of today's most important problems, and is made up of informed, involved individuals, who refer to a specific problem and do not share common prejudices.

The number of people in this last group who correctly answer the question about the world population is naturally much higher than the overall average. We can therefore confirm that there is a close relationship between knowledge, committed action, and the perception of problems and phenomena connected to the population problem. More aware and accurate answers correspond to committed action and an awareness of related problems, based on appropriate information. In this sense we come back to the question of how correct our information is, since these results demonstrate that awareness of the extent and gravity of the question can only develop as a result of correct information. It is likewise true that people need correct information before they can decide what actions to take in order to better the world and lessen the gap between rich and poor.

Figure 4.1: Profile of Italians regarding the world population before 12 October

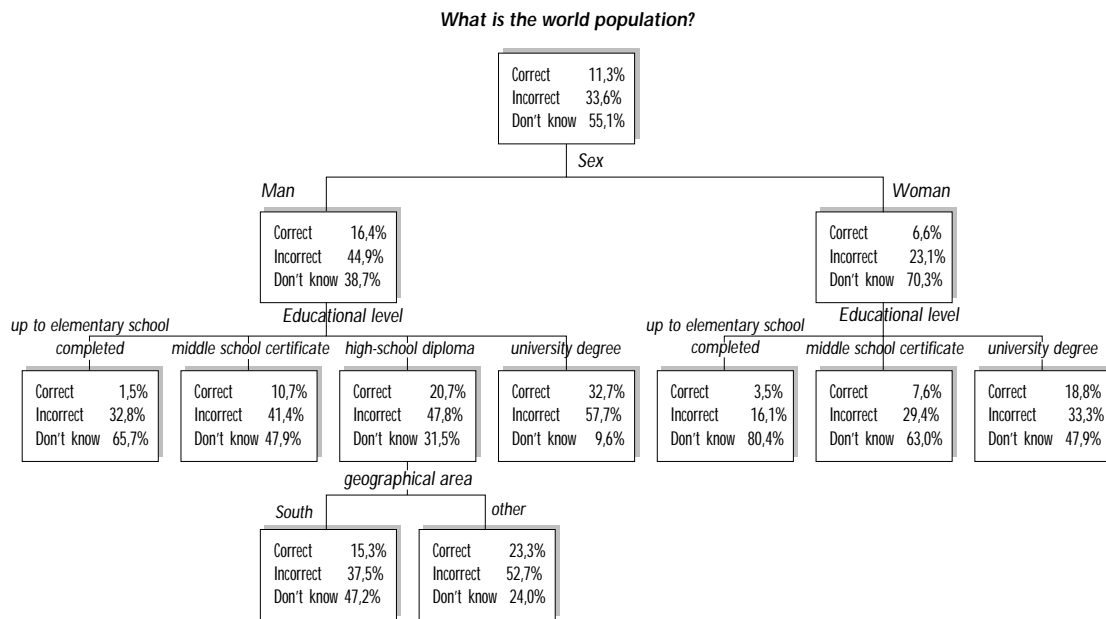


Figure 4.2: Profile of Italians regarding the world population after 12 October: Knowledge about World Population and Sources

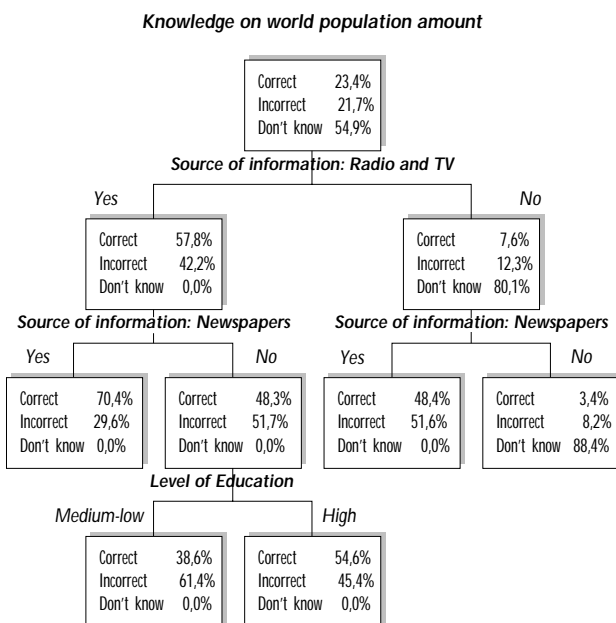
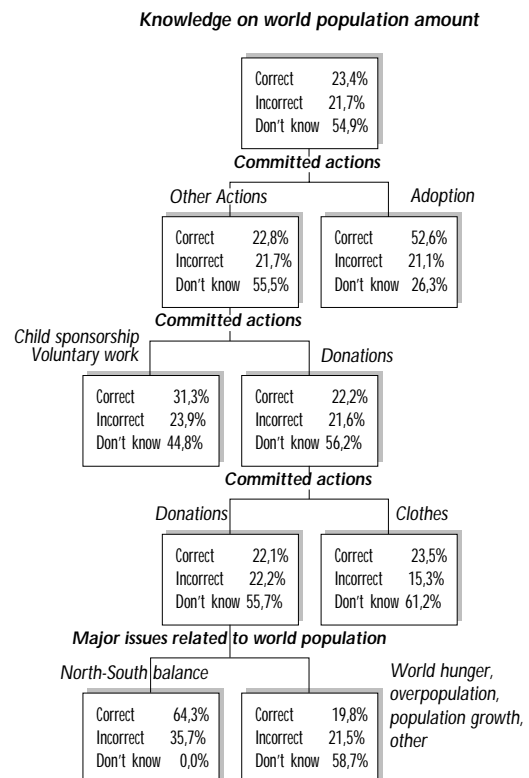


Figure 4.3: Profile of Italians regarding the world population after 12 October: Knowledge about World Population and Commitments



Chapter 5

ANALYSING MEDIA INFORMATION

by Maura Misiti

5.1. What information

Avvenire

La data fissata per una nascita "storica" diventa l'occasione di una nuova campagna anti-natalista.

E venne il giorno del "6 miliardi"

L'Onu vuole inserire "contraccezione e aborto tra i diritti umani".
(12/10)

Corriere della sera

Nasce un bimbo, in 6 miliardi sulla terra

*Il "benvenuto" Onu a Sarajevo. In India un parto ogni due secondi.
L'Italia il Paese più vecchio.*
(12/10)

Il secolo XIX

*L'esplosione demografica mondiale riguarda però i Paesi del terzo mondo.
In Italia fra quarant'anni un abitante su tre sarà anziano.*

E' nato baby sei miliardi

Scelto simbolicamente un bimbo di Sarajevo.
(12/10)

In view of the success of the study carried out earlier by this Institute to analyse the nature of information on the population (Misiti, 1999; Misiti and Iezzi, 2000), we again employed textual-analysis techniques to the articles and newscasts appearing in the days immediately before and after 12 October. The fact that the two events (presentation of the UNFPA Report on world population to the press, and the press conference illustrating the results of the first part of the *IRP* survey) coincided gave rise to numerous articles in a wide variety of newspapers and periodicals and broad television-news coverage, allowing us to apply these textual-analysis techniques.

The analysis used the text of the articles classified into homogeneous groups (Table 5.1). Local newspapers were divided by geographical location of issue. All the categories of titles play an active role in the analysis: women's magazines contained only one article but the number of "occurrences"¹ was almost the same as that of the right-wing newspapers and the wealth of vocabulary was considerable (58%)².

This part of the study had a number of cognitive aims: from identifying the basic structure of the approach to news taken by the titles examined to highlighting differences and similarities of treatment of the information between groups of newspapers, to identifying specific features and characteristic language of each group of newspapers, to comparing contemporary language.

Each of these results was obtained using a specific technique of statistical analysis: analysis of correspondences, cluster analysis,

¹An *occurrence* is every word appearing in a text, a *vocabulary of the corpus* includes all the different words, the *size of the corpus* is the whole body of *occurrences*, a *graphical form* is every continuous sequence of characters delimited by two 'separators' as blanks or punctuation marks, the *width of vocabulary* is the total number of different words, the *wealth of vocabulary* measures the linguistic variety of a text as a ratio of the vocabulary to text size

²The frequency threshold applied in the analysis is 6 (as suggested by the TALTAC software). The proper nouns of person found in the text have been automatically excluded from the analysis, since their occurrences were beyond this threshold.

Il Messaggero

Un bambino che domani nascerà a Sarajevo scelto come simbolo del nuovo traguardo vertiginoso negli ultimi 14 anni, una nascita ogni 4 secondi. Una crescita destinata a generare scenari apocalittici.

6 Miliardi

Baby boom, e la Terra diventa stretta.
(11/10)

L'Unità

In Italia il trend delle nascite non risale ma nei paesi dell'Africa e dell'Asia il boom demografico non accenna ad arrestarsi.

Il popolo del mondo supera i sei miliardi

Nasce oggi il bimbo simbolo dell'evento.
(12/10)

L'Unità

Auguri, Baby sei miliardi. Ne hai bisogno

Per i calcoli Onu la bimba (o bimbo) nasce oggi a Sarajevo.
(12/10)

Il Mattino

Una ricerca del CNR. Martedì saremo in sei miliardi. Ma gli italiani non lo sanno

(10/10)

analysis of specific text forms and phases according to frequency, and comparison with contemporary language by analysis of standard deviations between the body of the press release and the POLIF (a list of lexical units taken from a sample of more than four million occurrences of contemporary language).

5.2 Factorial analysis

The overall communication model becomes evident as we read the results of the analysis of correspondences carried out on the texts in question, in particular from an interpretation of the first three factorial axes which emerge from the analysis (41% of the variance explained) (Figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.3). We interpret the first axis, responsible for absorbing most of the variability (28%), as an expression of a particular **approach** to the news. On the positive side of the axis, the words indicate reporting from a European or industrialized countries point of view. In this area of the plot we find words like: <only child>, <parents>, <couple>, <family>, <mortality>, <Kofi Annan> associated with words like <reduction>, <reproductive health>, <Christians>, <work>, <economic>, <spend>, <poorest fifth>, which emphasize the concerns of the developed world (including the United States and Japan) with regard to world population growth. At the opposite end of the axis, we find a more journalistic approach, with human interest stories (<billionth baby>, <12 October>, <hospital>, <light>, <earth>, <born>, <Sarajevo>, <UN>), and comment (typical of news magazines which indeed fall into this area of the factorial plot). We also find scientific words (<model>, <forecast>, <increase>, <demographic growth>), but also typically journalistic emphasis like <bomb> and <demographic explosion>.

The second factorial axis represents the **source** of information, with reference to the two research reports presented at the press conferences in conjunction with the UN date of 12 October. The positive side of the axis represents reference to the IRP survey on the level of knowledge about world population issues among Italians. There are technical terms like <response>, <sample>, <interview>, <demography>, <fertility rate>, <survey>, as well as reference to questions raised, like <retirement pay>, <immigration>, <assistance>. We also find expressions related to Italy as the object of analysis (<Italian population>, <number of inhabitants>), verbs like <consume>, <spend>, <amount to>, <know/not know>) which refer to specific local reception of the information given. Naturally at this end of the axis we find press services which report local Italian news.

On the opposite side of the axis are clear references to the UNFPA report, and is characterized by reference to the UNFPA report, by its

Il Mattino

Secondo i calcoli dell'Agenzia dell'Onu la quota sarà raggiunta martedì.

Che folla sulla Terra: siamo sei miliardi

(10/10)

Corriere Adriatico

Nascerà oggi a Sarajevo.

Presente il segretario Onu Annan.

Ecco "baby" sei miliardi

La situazione in Italia secondo le stime nel 2040 gli abitanti saranno 41 e uno su tre sarà "over 60".

(12/10)

Mondo

Ieri notte sarebbe nato

il seimiliardesimo essere umano.

L'annuncio dato già due settimane fa.

La gara dei 6,000,000,000

Alcuni orologi conta persone erano tarati male.

(13/10)

Il Gazzettino

Eravamo 100 milioni ai tempi di Cristo. Il primo miliardo l'umanità l'ha raggiunto nel 1825, il secondo miliardo nel 1920. Poi lo sviluppo demografico si è fatto più rapido: 3 miliardi nel '60, 4 nel '77, 5 nel 1989. Fino a quando?

Da oggi sei miliardi sulla Terra

E' la data convenzionale di nascita del seimiliardesimo abitante della Terra.

Crescono gli squilibri.

(12/10)

<international> dimension, by reference to <developing countries>, by problems raised in the report like <poverty>, <reproductive health>, <human beings>, by verbs like <give>, <do>, <come>, and by words like <choice>, <campaign>, <organizations>, <conference>, <consequences> characteristic of the UNFPA report.

The journalistic style is sober, with little space given to interpretation. The use of adjectives or emphatic expressions is rare.

The third factor we wanted to account for is the contrast between the **North and South** of the world and the attendant problems as presented in the articles we chose. On one side of the axis we find <India> and <China>, the two demographic giants, opposite the <United States>. Associated with these geopolitical connotations, we find words which express problems connected with population increase in each area: <work>, <child>, <woman>, <birth>, <food>, <north and south>, <access>, <assistance>, <war>, <fertility rate> for the first area, and <spend>, <consume>, <dollars>, <reduction>, <campaign>, <reproductive health>, the expression <too much> and the adjective <poor>.

5.3 Different approaches towards the news

The distribution of groups of newspapers/magazines on the factorial planes chosen show that there are at least three different attitudes towards the news, corresponding to three different types of publication (TVnews broadcast, local papers and press agencies) (Figures 5.3, 5.4, 5.5). On the first factorial plane these three groups are clearly distinguished from other groups situated around the barycentre of the axes. Independent newspapers occupy a specific position for the international slant they brought to the issue. This is the third factor in our analysis. Differences and similarities in the way different groups of newspapers treated the question are taken up in our analysis of the results of classification below.

The factorial analysis helps us to identify the latent linguistic structure used by the press about a specific demographic event. The first thing we notice, is that the issues raised by the journalists and communicated to their readers are, on the whole, complete and correct. These include the global international aspect of the main issue and its connection to broad local issues. The result is not at all provincial, but reflects a European economic and cultural point of view towards the problems of the southern hemisphere. There is some effort to make a connection between particular events and their geographic, social and economic consequences.

The journalistic style with its restrained use of emphatic adjectives or emotional expressions helps to guarantee an approach which is

La Repubblica

Il segretario dell'Onu Kofi Annan a Sarajevo per accogliere il neonato che incarna simbolicamente il superamento del "muro".

La Terra diventa più stretta da domani siamo sei miliardi

Secondo alcuni calcoli il record era già stato raggiunto lo scorso luglio, ma la sostanza del problema non cambia.

Nell'ultimo secolo la popolazione mondiale è più che triplicata. Un boom che rischia di essere fatale.

(11/10)

Il Tempo

Il 12 ottobre scelta dall'Onu data simbolo della fine del boom demografico che dal '60 ha raddoppiato le presenze sul pianeta.

Nato a Sarajevo il "baby sei miliardi"

Tre minuti dopo la mezzanotte un maschietto è venuto alla luce in un ospedale della capitale bosniaca.

(12/10)

La Stampa

Preso come simbolo, con lui salirà il numero della popolazione mondiale.

E' di Sarajevo il "baby sei miliardi"

Nascerà domani, ad accoglierlo Kofi Annan.

(11/10)

Linea

La popolazione del pianeta è arrivata a quota sei miliardi.

Oramai la demografia cresce soltanto nel Terzo Mondo

(12/10)

neither stereotypical nor superficial. The use too of technical words extends the journalistic language to include scientific words which are not easily misunderstood or manipulated.

Since we included many different publications, we felt it was important to analyse the way groups of newspapers and magazines treated demographic information. We grouped publications by type and cultural or political orientation. We wanted to find out whether there are differences, biases, or interpretations which translate into a different use of information or a specific type of language. We used two techniques of textual analysis, the analysis of characteristic language and classificatory analysis. By combining these types of analysis we were able to observe any differences and also evaluate our groupings.

The first type of application refers to the frequency of the words in each group of newspapers, and we regard as characteristic not only those that are over-used (compared with the vocabulary of the body of the press release) but also those that are under-used. This analysis reveals a marked difference of approach and a strongly specific treatment of the issue addressed on each occasion to the particular target of that group of newspapers and conforming on the whole with the expected type of aggregations. Again, the cluster analysis applied to the results of the factorial analysis justifies the groupings and confirms the differences.

As we have already seen, **Press agencies** focus on the human interest of an event, with emphasis on the local or national side. The language tends to be descriptive and connected to the IRP survey (<Irp>, <know>, <interviewed>, <Italians>, <tomorrow>). News agencies use <son/daughter> and <baby> less than the other groups, since these are specifically linked to the global context of the 6 billionth human being. **Newspapers and magazines with a Roman Catholic orientation** use particular words, which sometimes express this link (<Christians>, <Catholic>, <campaign>, <refugee>), and at other times focus on questions of interest to the Roman Catholic church, like the <debt> of developing countries and <contraception> as corollary to a Catholic reading of the problem of demographic growth. The words <symbolic> visit of <Kofi Annan to Sarajevo>, which most publications use, appear much less often in this group. Words referring to large aggregates like: <population>, <land>, <inhabitants>, <city> do not appear often in this group.

Publications with a leftist orientation prefer to use light-hearted words like <Mr./Miss 6 billionth>, which create appeal, but do not go beyond the surface. However other words like <fertility rate> and <assistance> also appear. **Newspapers of the political center** have an interesting focus. They offer an economic and historical reading of the

Io Donna

Ma quanti siamo sulla Terra?

Il 12 ottobre raggiungeremo i sei miliardi di abitanti. Così dice l'Onu. Ma c'è chi conta 700 milioni di persone in più. Il vero problema, però, è il ritmo di crescita nei prossimi anni.

(9/10)

Il Giornale

In sei miliardi su una Terra sola

Domani la popolazione del pianeta toccherà la quota di seimila milioni. Il neonato del record sarà asiatico o africano. E tra 60 anni saremo 9 miliardi. Crescita demografica nel Terzo mondo. In Europa, Usa e Giappone gli abitanti invece caleranno.

(11/10)

Il Mattino di Padova

E' nato il baby numero "6 miliardi"

In 13 anni gli abitanti della Terra sono aumentati di mille milioni.

(12/10)

Il Mattino di Padova

Da oggi siamo 6,000,000,000

Soltanto 13 anni fa eravamo un miliardo in meno.

(12/10)

La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno

Nel 1960 eravamo 3 miliardi, nel 1987 abbiamo toccato i 5 miliardi. Gli italiani sono in leggera diminuzione.

Sei miliardi al mondo: troppi o no?

E per la prima volta dall'88 cala la popolazione pugliese.

(13/10)

event. The name <Malthus> appears together with <theories>, and we also find expressions like <over-population> and <policy of control>, as well as <disaster> as a evaluative-emotional element. Since the orientation of these publications is towards analysis, they give less space to the human interest aspect and so use words like <6 billionth, baby>, <UNFPA>, and <Italians> less than other types of publications.

Right newspapers stressed the national dimension of the issue since the most used words are <Italians> and <Italian reality>, meanwhile <world> or <Sarajevo> as well <child> are under-represented.

The group of widely distributed **Independent newspaper** with national coverage pointed up the global implications of the problem. They made a connection between population growth and problematic international policies. Words which appeared in these papers more frequently than in the others are: <child> together with the specification <Chinese> and <Indian>, <war>, and the adjective <fatal> which emphasizes the dramatic aspect of the issue.

Women's magazines concentrated on the question of <fertility rate>, on the future implications of population growth by <projections> and compared <Italy> with its demographic "oddity" to countries of the southern hemisphere and their high birth rates and over-population.

As we already saw when we looked at the factorial axes, **News Magazines** took a broad view of the issue. They conveyed the information and offered an analysis, using technical and scientific words like <dynamic>, <demographic>, and <birth rate>. This is an interesting characteristic, due to the type of publication, with their particular attitude to the news as a phenomenon subject to interpretation.

Local Newspapers show a last stable relationship along all axes, which demonstrates the affinity among local newspapers, whatever their geographic area of origin, they all treated the news as a media event "constructed" by the UN. In fact we find frequent use of words describing the visit of <Kofi Annan> to the <hospital> in <Sarajevo>. They gave much less space to problematic aspects of the issue, including any connection to Italy. They described the event, but did not interpret it. **News Broadcasts** have a peculiar journalistic style which tends to toward simple description: the <6 billionth baby> was <born> in a <hospital> in <Sarajevo> at <midnight>. Words which were under-used, or "missing" from newscasts were those needed for an interpretation of the economic and social implications of the event: <water>, <development>, <humanity>, <fertility>, <aging>, as well as those needed for a national (<Italy>) and <world> context.

The results of cluster analysis give us indications which are coherent with the analyses we have already considered. They confirm that

**La Nazione,
Il Resto del Carlino,
Il Giorno**

Il segretario dell'Onu festeggia oggi la nascita-simbolo nella città martire della Bosnia. Cifra esatta? La parola ai demografi Golini e Chaunu.

**Un bebè a Sarajevo,
e siamo sei miliardi**

(12/10)

L'Umanità

Varchiamo oggi un traguardo che pone una serie di interrogativi.

**Siamo dei miliardi
ma siamo in troppi?**

(12/10)

L'Umanità

**Da oggi la terra è un po' affollata.
Sei miliardi di abitanti**

Oggi la nascita del neonato simbolo che avrà la cittadinanza della città martire di Sarajevo.

(12/10)

Giornale di Sicilia

**Con un parto domani a Sarajevo la
popolazione arriva a sei miliardi**

(11/10)

La Repubblica

Gli esperti confermano: "Gravidanze in aumento". I sociologi spiegano: "Così si placano inconsciamente le ansie per il futuro".

**Il Duemila fa un po' paura? Quasi
quasi faccio un figlio**

13/10

some groups of news papers and magazines gave a specific slant to the information. On the other hand they also show that other groups chose to describe the same points and used similar language in doing so. Three of the five clusters selected show a high degree of similarity with three groups of newspapers: press agencies and cluster 2, all the local papers and cluster 5, the newscasts and cluster 4 (see Figures 5.3, 5.4, 5.5). We have already seen how each of these is characterized by particular language, choice of theme, and source of information. Together these elements equal a very clear position on the factorial graphs, that is to say, in relation to the three factorial axes chosen.

5.4 Comparison with contemporary language

The terminology used in the articles was compared with POLIF³, in order to identify the "key words" in the corpus of articles, that is to say, the words in the articles which are used in a specific and unusual way, or more or less frequently than in the language of reference. The two vocabularies were compared using the normalised difference per 1,000,000 occurrences of the same word in the two groups.

The standardised difference measures the specificity of a word, based on the relative difference between normalised frequency of words in the two text groups. This difference allows us to select the discrete words with the greatest differences of use in absolute terms. Differences with a positive value indicate that a word is used more frequently in the articles than in the control text group, while differences with a negative value indicate that a word is used less frequently in the articles than it is in the control text group. A word used frequently in a text group indicates a specialised subject matter, while a word used infrequently indicates an esoteric subject matter. The analysis was carried out on discrete words, since the POLIF list is available in that form. For words occurring in the list common to both groups, in all the variations in which they occur in the group of articles, we calculated the difference with respect to normalised use based on the simple form of the word. Specific terms which are used more frequently in the articles than in contemporary language proved to be related to the subject matter of the articles.

The greatest difference of frequency between specialised and normal word use occurs with the word <demographic>, in all its variations.

Other technical words occurring with a markedly different frequen-

³POLIF is a list of words taken from a sample of more than 4 million occurrences in contemporary language (Bolasco S., Morrone A. (1998), *Le construction d'un lexique fondamental da polyformes selon lent usage in S. Hellet (ed.), JADT 1998. Université Sophie Antipolis de Nice*; pp. 155-66).

cy in contemporary language and the articles include: <birth rate>, <fertility>, <aging>, <mortality rate>, as well as words which refer to problems connected to population growth: <epidemics>, <food>, <water>, <infectious>, <birth-control>, <diseases>, <future>.

The descriptive journalistic approach noted in the preceding analysis is evident here in words like: <UN>, <baby>, <miss>, >mister>, <symbolic>, <midnight>, <event>, <hospital>, used in an unusual way compared to their use in contemporary language.

Words connected to UNFPA and IRP research reports proved to be key words: <demography>, <interviewed>, <survey>, <data>, <sample>, as did also scientific words: <growth>, <increase>.

Words which were found to be less frequent in the articles than in the POLIF list include: <work>, >house>, >society>, >school>, >church>, as well as words connected to the organisation of life in the West: >government>, >politics>, >society>, which are not used in discourse about world population growth.

Table 5.1 Number of articles, occurrences and graphic forms

Newspapers Magazines and Newscasts	Articles (number)	Occurrences (total number of words)	/1000	Graphic Forms (Distinct words)	Vocabulary (%distinct words/occ.s)
Independent papers	8	4195	119,8	1619	38,6
Local papers (north)	7	3432	98,0	1164	33,9
Local papers (centre)	8	3845	109,8	1236	32,1
Local papers (south)	8	3903	111,4	1292	33,1
Left-wing papers	3	1527	43,6	669	43,8
Centre-wing papers	5	2907	83,0	1223	42,1
Right-wing papers	2	824	23,5	446	54,1
Catholic papers and magazines	7	6838	195,2	2346	34,3
Women's magazines	1	609	17,4	353	58,0
Magazines	4	3160	90,2	1288	40,8
Press agencies	5	2425	69,2	954	39,3
Newscast	7	1360	38,8	625	46,0
TOTAL	65	35025	1000,0	6064	17,3

Figure 5.1.1. Factor plot: News source and Approach

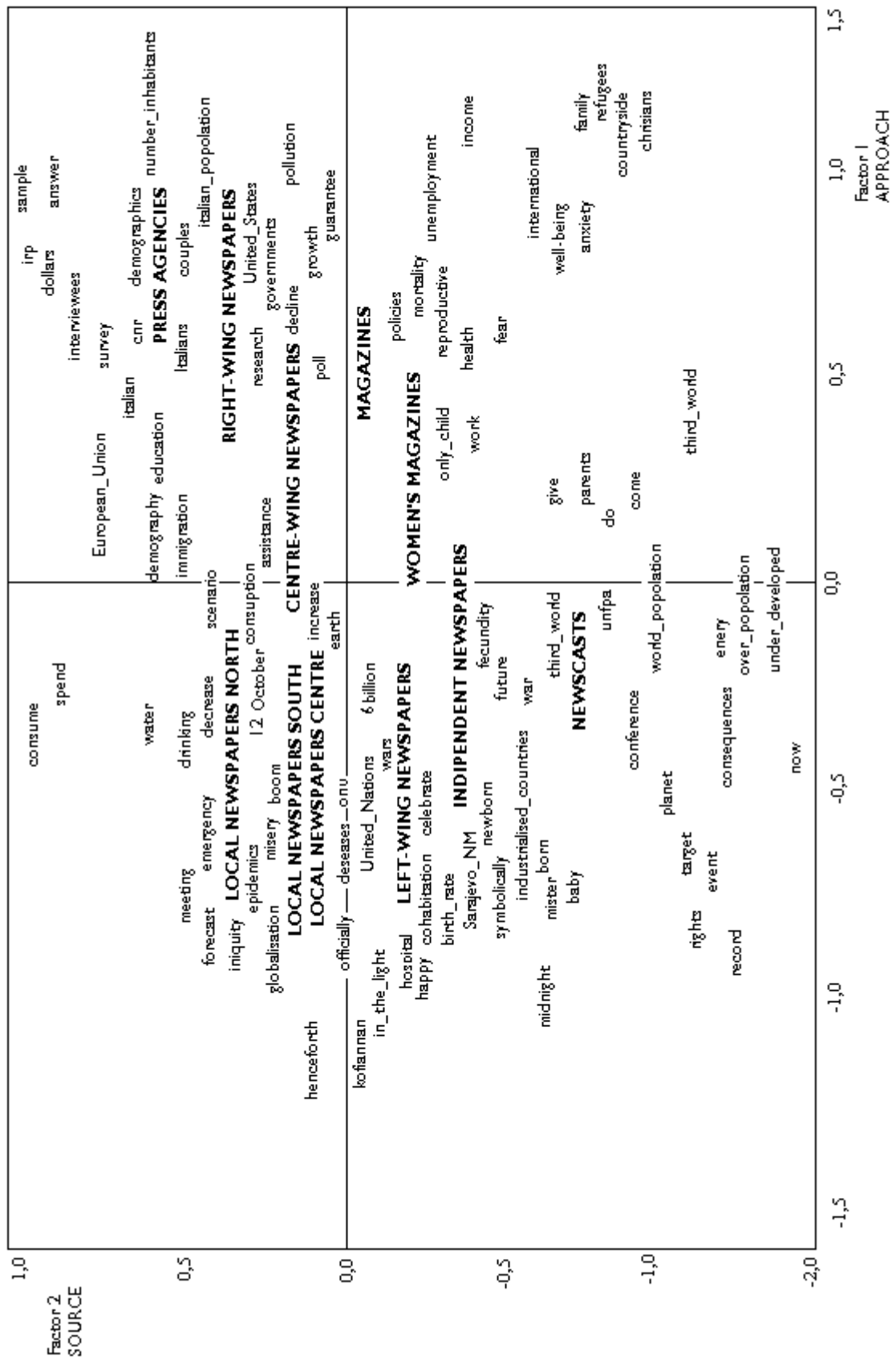
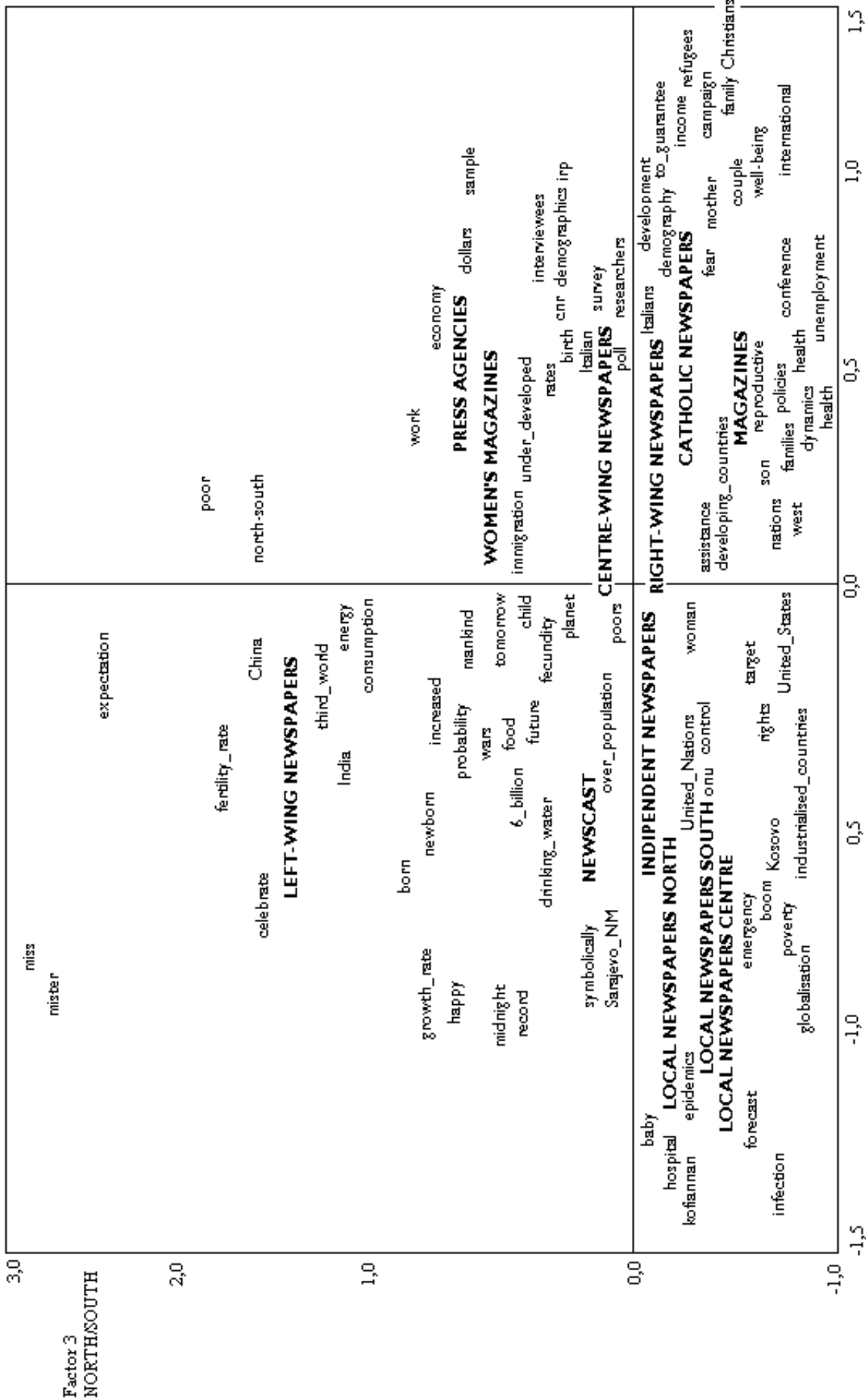


Figure 5.2. Factor plot: North/South gap and news approach



Factor 1
Approach at the new

Figure 5.3. Factor plot: North/South gap and news source

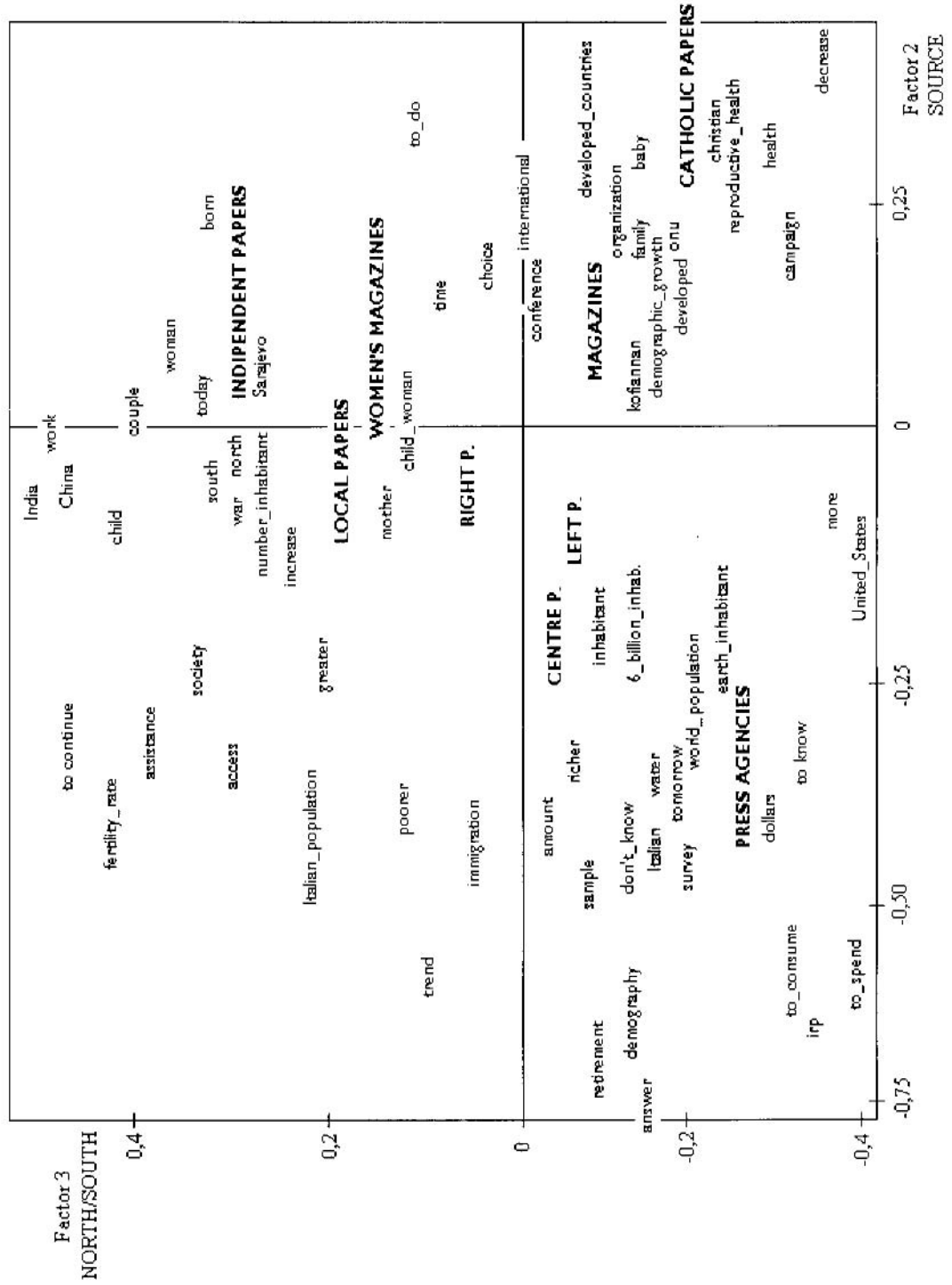


Figure 5.4. Factor plot: Clusters and Papers - Factor 1 and 2

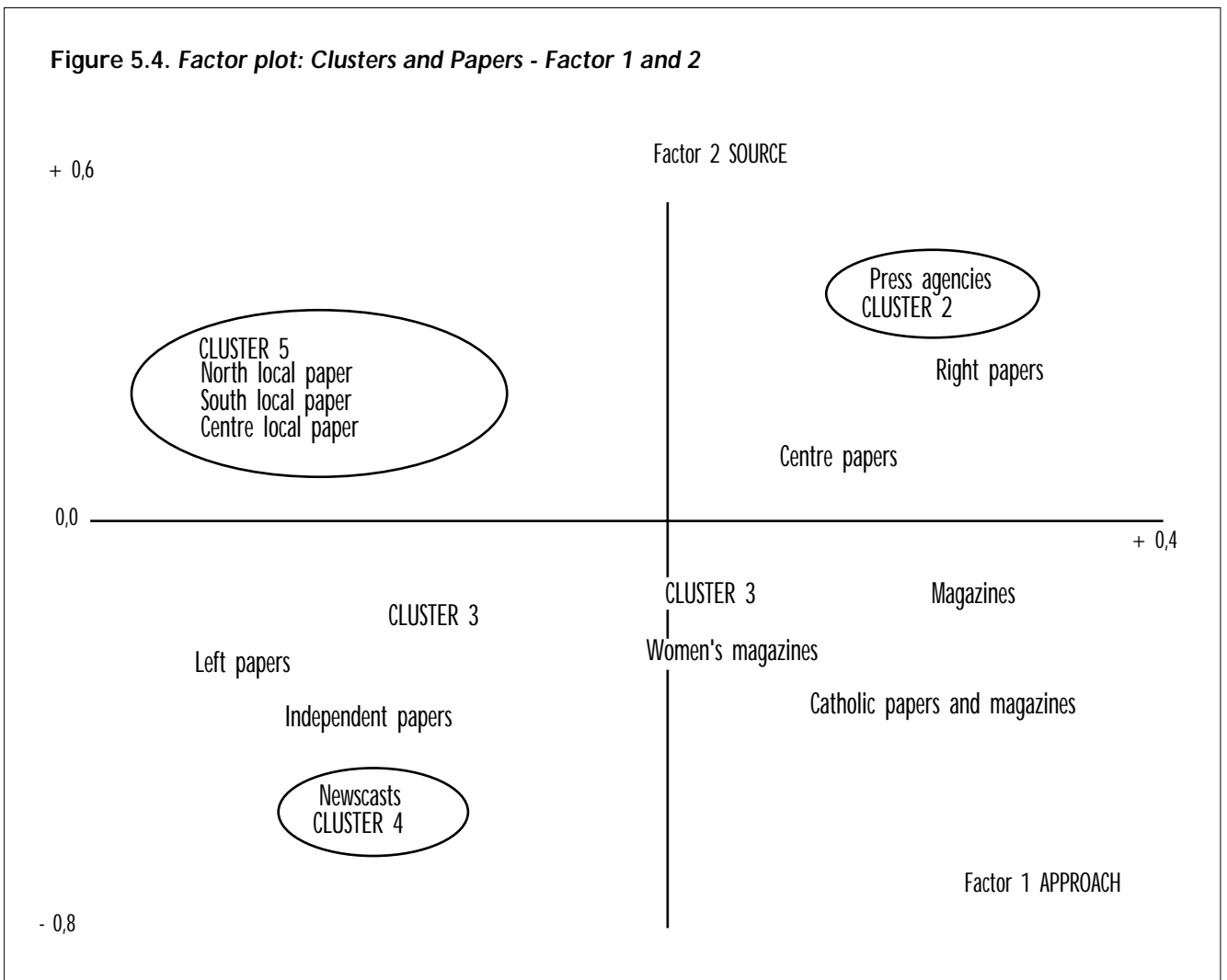


Figure 5.5. Factor plot: Clusters and Papers-Factor 1 and 3

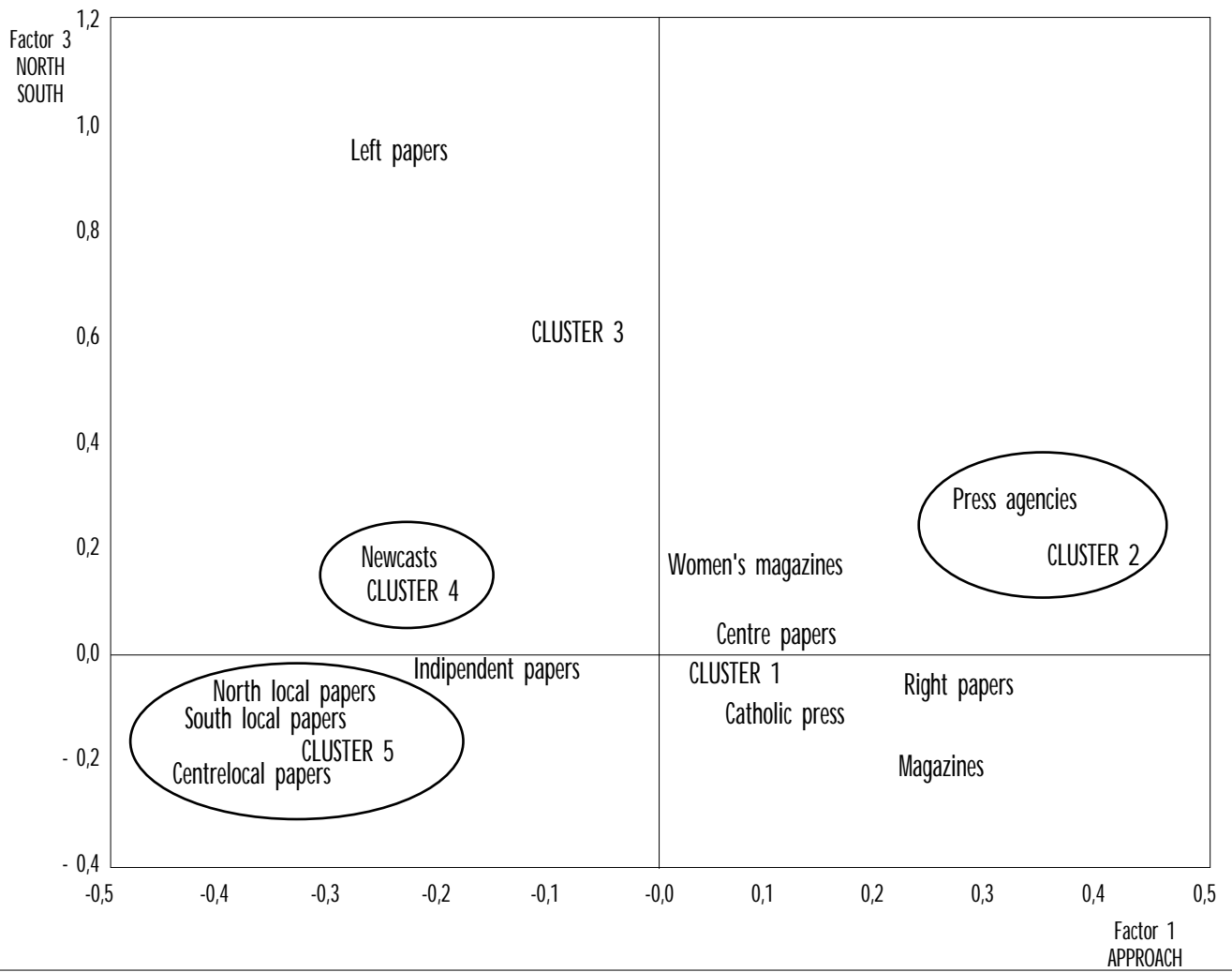
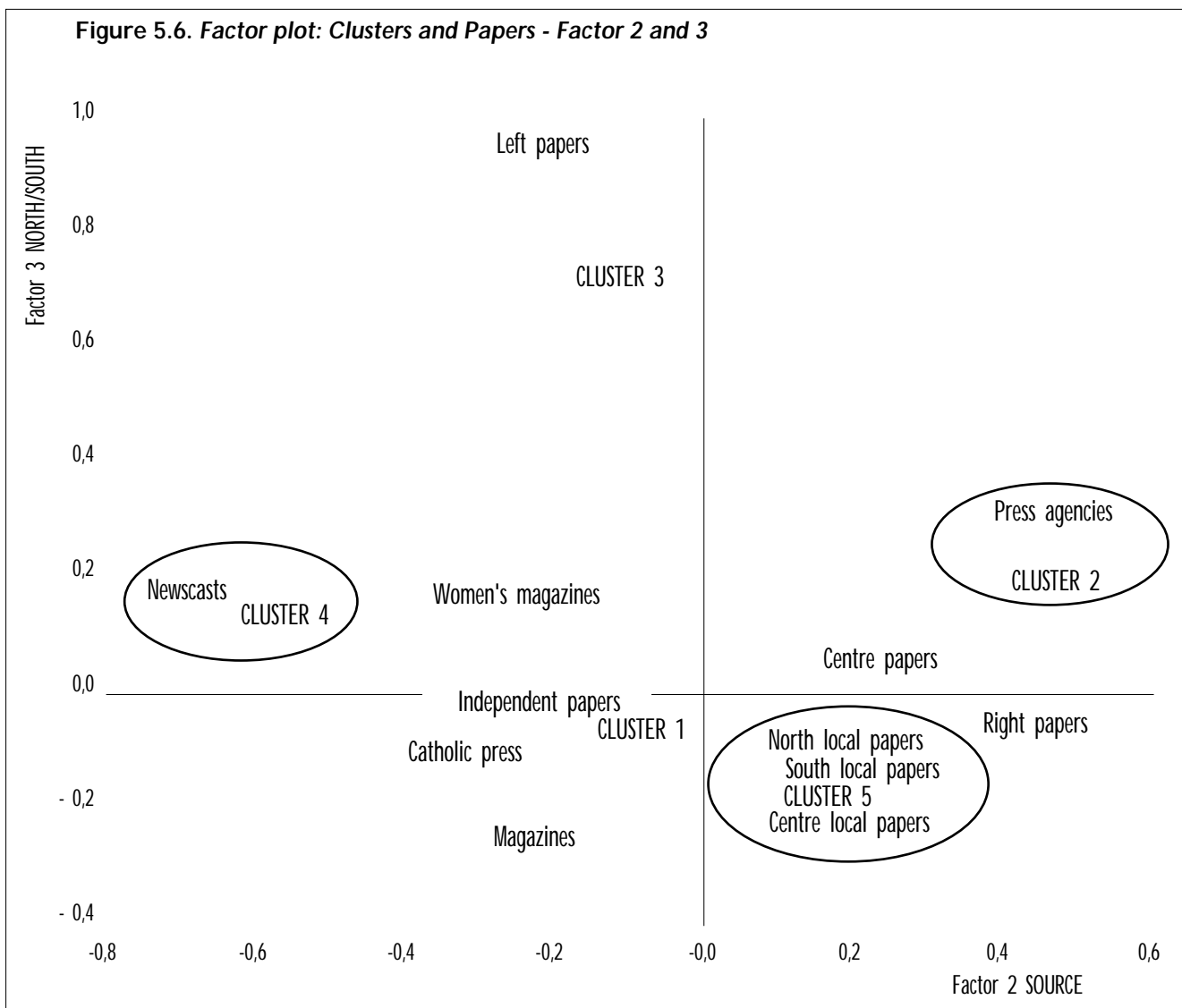


Figure 5.6. Factor plot: Clusters and Papers - Factor 2 and 3



Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

by Maura Misiti

It may be obvious to say that the mass media in general, and television in particular, have a huge cultural significance, since television is the most popular and ubiquitous popular medium, offering a diversity and availability unmatched by the press. The way in which the audiences of mass media and television interpret the world shapes their existence and their participation in society. Television can be considered “the site of convergence that joins the private world of the home with the larger public worlds beyond the front door” (Moore, 1993).

Along with this increased importance we find it also increasingly difficult to identify the effects and to define the audiences. Our job is not only to consider and analyse the changing characteristics of media consumers, in a sector which is itself in constant mutation, but also to consider the global aspect of the communications system (the global village) and the implications of “westernisation” for culture and for non-western populations.⁷

From the point of view of people who do research into population questions, there are several interesting elements here, including the influence of media on family behaviour, and the use of the media to disseminate values, messages, and knowledge. Another way of

¹ Although there is a lot of talk about the progressive “globalization” of communications, there are still important differences between western countries and developing countries. For example, in developing countries (Westoff, 1999; Faria, 1999) substantially linear relationships have been observed between exposure to the media and reproductive behaviour, while western audiences display more complexity in the ways they receive, metabolise, and elaborate the messages and the information broadcast by the media. Undoubtedly, at the root of these differences are differences in the structures and technologies of the communications systems, as well as cultural and educational differences. All of these differences taken together mean that the programs produced and the reception they are given by their audiences differ decidedly from the “evolved” consumer experience of the west. But we can also suppose that the educational function of popular media will tend to evolve toward commercial programming, even more rapidly than was the case in the west. At that point networks will be less interested in educational programs, and will be subject to the same mechanisms we observe in our own television. Actually, the processes of appropriation and personalisation of media messages is already taking place in the “fourth world”. The reactions are complex and articulated, and in order to interpret them we have to go beyond the idea that everything is being homogenised into a sort of westernised culture. We have to understand how non-western viewers are redefining their own cultural identity through their interaction with the media products they consume (S. Pack, 2000).

expressing this last idea would be to say that the media could spread “policies” inherent in the population.

We will need to modify our approach according to what we want to find out. With regard to the first type of problem, we surely have to enlarge our theoretical field of vision and the type of analysis we use, in concert with disciplines that study communications and their effects. If instead we want to use media for specific communications questions, we must understand the mechanisms specific to each type of medium, so that we can gather information about the ways information is received and the impact of communications. These mechanisms will include such things as targeting user/consumers, content analysis, and linguistic analysis. Our experience at IRP and the process we followed in presenting the case study on Italy and the 6 billion day survey indeed goes in this direction.

Obviously it is largely the job of the media to spread information about the world population, but the role of population specialists is also indispensable, since they can see to it that information is detailed and accurate. Their role is particularly important since the school system has so far neglected to foster interest in and sensitivity to these questions. Two types of intervention are needed: on the one hand we need to raise the consciousness of people working in the various media so that they will give this information the emphasis it deserves. They also have to insure that it reaches segments of the population, which have so far been indifferent to the population question, and so have not really become fully aware of it. On the other hand we have to act at the very basis of culture by introducing these issues into the school program.

ISTITUTO DI RICERCHE SULLA POPOLAZIONE
 1° SURVEY "KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WORLD POPULATION"
 Questionnaire and percentages

1. In your opinion, during the last 50 years, has the world population increased, decreased, or remained the same?

- Increased78
- Remained the same8
- Decreased13
- Don't known/Don't remember1

1a. In your opinion, today is, the world population more than double what it was 50 years ago or less than double what it was 50 years ago?

- More than double what it was 50 years ago45
- Less than double what it was 50 years ago50
- Don't known/Don't remember5

2. In your opinion, during the next 50 years, will the world population increase, decreased, or will it remain the same?

- To increase49
- To remain the same20
- To decrease26
- Don't known/Don't remember5

2a. How much will the world population increase in the next 50 years?
 The world population will be more than double what it is now or less than double what it is now?

- More than double what it is now23
- Less than double what it is now72
- Don't known/Don't remember5

2b. In your opinion, what is the rate of increase per year of world population?

- From 1 to 50 million19
- From 51 to 100 million9
- From 101 to 200 million4
- From 201 to 300 million2
- From 301 to 500 million6
- From 501 to 1000 million2
- From 1001 to 2000 million2
- More than 2000 million1
- Don't know/Don't remember55

3. As far as you know, even by hear-say, what is the population today?
How many people are there on the earth?

- Up to 1,5 billion people3
- 1,6 - 2,5 billion2
- 2,6 - 3,5 billion3
- 3,6 - 4,5 billion3
- 4,6 - 5,5 billion9
- 5,6 - 5,9 billion3
- 6,0 billion11
- 6,1 - 6,5 billion1
- 6,6 - 7,5 billion2
- 7,6 - 8,5 billion2
- 8,6 - 9,5 billion1
- 9,6 - 10,5 billion2
- More than 10,5 billion3
- Don't know/Don't remember55

3a. We'd like to have your opinion in any case: do you think
that the world population today is at 2, 6, 10 or 25 billion people?

- 2 billion people2
- 6 billion people16
- 10 billion people32
- 25 billion people32
- Don't know/Don't remember18

4. Which, among the 5 continents, is the most populated one?

- Europe5
- Asia59
- Africa13
- Oceania (Australia)1
- South America10
- North America8
- Don't known/Don't remember4

5. As you may know, it is possible to classify countries according the number of their inhabitants, which is, as far as you know, the world's most populated country?

- Brazil1
- China54
- Germany1
- Japan3
- India8
- U.S.A.9
- Another country of Asia1
- Another country of Africa3
- Another country of America2
- Another country of Europe2
- Don't known/Don't remember16

5a. On the other hand, what is the second most populated country?

- Argentina 1
- Brazil 3
- China10
- Germany 1
- Japan10
- India25
- Mexico 1
- Russia 5
- U.S.A.13
- Another country of Asia 2
- Another country of Africa 5
- Another country of America 4
- Another country of Europe 3
- Don't known/Don't remember17

6. Which is, among these continents, the one where women have more children or, in other words, where the birth-rate is highest?

- Europe3
- Asia29
- Africa51
- Latin America (South America)12
- North America2
- Don't known/Don't remember3

7. Which among these continents, has the lowest life expectancy or, in other words, the one where people live shorter lives?

- Europe7
- Asia13
- Africa66
- Latin America (South America)4
- North America3
- Don't known/Don't remember7

8. Throughout the world, population change in poor countries is very different from that of rich countries. In fact the latest are characterised by a slow population growth, while the former have a much higher growth rate. In the light of these differences, the governments of the richer countries should, in your opinion:

- Encourage a higher birthrate in rich countries21
- Encourage migration flows from poor to rich countries24
- Both10
- Neither26
- Other17
- Don't known/Don't remember2

9. As you may know, less developed countries have a high population growth rate. The governments of these countries should, in your opinion:

- Slow this growth through education and development59
- They should attempt to slow population growth through increased family planning16
- Both21
- Leave things as they are without intervening1
- Other2
- Don't known/Don't remember1

10. Let's talk now about the European Union, composed by 15 member including Italy. Can you tell me how many inhabitants, approximately, does the European Union have?

- Less than 150 million inhabitants6
- 151 - 250 million inhabitants4
- 251 - 350 million inhabitants7
- 351 - 400 million inhabitants3
- 401 - 450 million inhabitants1
- 451 - 550 million inhabitants5
- 551 - 650 million inhabitants1
- 651 - 750 million inhabitants2
- 751 - 850 million inhabitants2
- 851 - 950 million inhabitants1
- 951 - 1.050 million inhabitants2
- More than 1.050 million inhabitants6
- Don't known/Don't remember60

11. Which European Union country, in your opinion, has the highest number of inhabitants?

- France14
- Germany33
- Greece1
- Italy11
- The Netherlands1
- United Kingdom4
- Spain6
- Don't known/Don't remember30

12. Let's talk about Italy: Do you know how many are inhabitants in our country?

- Less than 20 million inhabitants6
- 21 - 30 million2
- 31 - 40 million0
- 41 - 50 million8
- 51 - 54 million6
- 55 - 59 million26
- 60 - 70 million12
- 71 - 80 million1
- 81 - 90 million0
- 91 - 100 million1
- More than 100 million2
- Don't known/Don't remember36

To finish, last question:

13. Does the constant population growth, in your opinion, cause some problems?
In other words, is it a positive or negative fact?

- Yes, cause problems (negative)75
- No, don't cause problems (positive)22
- Don't known/Don't remember3

13a. What are, in your opinion, the main problems connected to the increase in world population (3 answers allowed) ?

- Ageing of the population2
- World hunger43
- World thirst (problem of water)7
- Unemployment35
- Pollution14
- Gap between rich and poor countries16
- Increase of poverty10
- Health problems9
- Emigration/Immigration6
- Over-crowding of inhabitable areas16
- Other19
- Don't known/Don't remember3

A. Sex

B. Age

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Male48 | From 20 to 34 years38 |
| • Female52 | From 35 to 50 years34 |
| | From 51 to 65 years28 |

C. EDUCATIONAL LEVEL (highest level)

- No diploma1
- Elementary school diploma18
- Middle school diploma28
- High school diploma43
- University degree9
- Doesn't wish to answer1

D. PROFESSION

• Businessman/Self-employed professional/Consultant/Executive . . .	6
• Office worker	20
• Shop owner/Artisan	5
• Shop worker/Self-employed/Domestic worker	2
• Farmer/Family farm worker	1
• Teacher/Journalist/Writer	4
• Industrial worker/Farm hand	12
• Housewife	22
• Unemployed or in searcher of first job	5
• Retired	10
• Student	9
• Other	3
• Don't wish an answer	1

E. NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE FAMILY (included interviewee)

• 1 component	5
• 2 components	15
• 3 components	27
• 4 components	36
• 5 components	12
• 6 components	3
• 7 components	1
• Don't wish to answer	1

ISTITUTO DI RICERCHE SULLA POPOLAZIONE
 2° SURVEY "KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WORLD POPULATION"
 Questionnaire and percentages

1. During the last 50 years, do you think that the world population has increased, decreased, or remained the same?

- Increased77
- Remained the same6
- Decreased15
- Don't know/Don't remember2

1a. Do you think that the world population today is more than double what it was 50 years ago or less than double what it was 50 years ago?

- More than double what it was 50 years ago50
- Less than double what it was 50 years ago44
- Don't know/Don't remember6

2. As far as you know, even by hear-say, what is the world population today? How many people are there on the earth?

- Up to 1,5 billion people 2
- 1,6 - 2,5 billion 1
- 2,6 - 3,5 billion 3
- 3,6 - 4,5 billion 2
- 4,6 - 5,5 billion 4
- 5,6 - 5,9 billion 3
- 6,0 billion23
- 6,1 - 6,5 billion 1
- 6,6 - 7,5 billion2
- 7,6 - 8,5 billion 1
- 8,6 - 9,5 billion 0
- 9,6 - 10,5 billion 1
- More than 10,5 billion 2
- Don't know/don't remember55

3. We'd like to have your opinion in any case: do you think that the world population today is at 2, 6, 10 or 25 billion people?

- 2 billion people5
- 6 billion people20
- 10 billion people35
- 25 billion people26
- Doesn't know / Doesn't answer14

4. How did you acquire your information about the world population? (3 answers allowed)

- From newspapers44
- From television69
- From the radio6
- From family, friends, or acquaintances4
- At school or university4
- Personal interest5
- No source, I guessed6

5. In which daily newspaper(s) and/or weekly or monthly magazine(s) did you read articles about the world population? (2 answers allowed)

- Newspaper85
 - Which? (3 answers allowed)
 1. Avvenire1
 2. Corriere della Sera30
 3. Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno2
 4. Giornale5
 5. Giorno2
 6. Indipendente1
 7. Manifesto2
 8. Mattino5
 9. Messaggero8
 10. Milano Finanza1
 11. Piccolo1
 12. Repubblica29
 13. Secolo XIX1
 14. Sole 24 Ore5
 15. Stampa10
 16. Tempo2
 17. Unione Sarda1
 18. Unità1
 19. Another sports paper2
 20. Another newspaper in general24

- Magazine35
 - Which? (3 answers allowed)
 1. Donna Moderna9
 2. Espresso26
 3. Famiglia Cristiana7
 4. Focus14
 5. Gente10
 6. National Geographic3
 7. Oggi13
 8. Panorama29
 9. Another news magazine6
 10. Another scholarly periodical9
 11. Another travel magazine1
 12. Another periodical in general20

5a. Did you read the whole article, or just the headline or title of the article in the periodical you have just named?

- I read the whole article(s) carefully37
- I read the whole article(s) quickly28
- I only read the title30
- Don't remember5

6. In which television or radio program did you hear about the world population? (3 answers allowed)

- News program (television or radio news broadcast)79
- Talk show4
- Cultural program15
- Entertainment program (variety show, musical program)3
- Other programs1
- Don't remember10

7. At what time of day did you see or hear the program? (3 answers allowed)

- Early morning8
- Late morning3
- Lunch time24
- Afternoon10
- Evening71
- Night time4
- Don't remember5

8. In the programs you heard or saw and from the articles you read what fact or figure on the world population particularly struck you? (one answer only)

- The gap between rich and poor countries13
- The increase in poverty8
- World hunger27
- Under-nourished children5
- Ageing of the population3
- Unemployment2
- Emigration / immigration1
- Policies in favor of the development of poor countries1
- Over-crowding of inhabited areas3
- Over-crowding of the earth "There are too many of us"11
- The steady increase in the world population11
- Attempts to limit population growth (contraception)2
- The birth of the 6 billionth inhabitant of the earth2
- Other (specify)6
- Nothing5

(Only if codes 1,2,3 e 4 to question 3)

9. The information in newspapers / on radio and television, these discussions with family and friends interested you a lot, somewhat, very little, or not at all? I was...

- Very interested27
- Somewhat interested59
- Not very interested12
- Not at all interested2

(To everyone)

10. Do you think that the information normally furnished by the mass media on the world population is adequate or inadequate?

- Adequate37
- All right4
- Inadequate54
- I don't know5

11. Which means do you think is best to inform public opinion about world population issues?
(3 answers allowed)

- Television information programs76
- Special television programs9
- Radio information programs1
- Daily newspapers5
- The press in general2
- School / university2
- Internet1
- Other (specify)1
- I don't know3

11a. Apart from are there other ways means for informing public opinion
about world population issues? (3 answers allowed)

- Television information programs10
- Special television programs18
- Radio information programs13
- Special radio programs4
- Daily newspapers39
- The press in general22
- School / university6
- Internet7
- Other2
- I don't know12

12. Let's talk some more about population. As you know, we can classify countries according
to how many people live in them. As far as you know, at present, which country
has the greatest number of inhabitants? (one unprompted answer)

- Brazil1
- China58
- Japan3
- India10
- Nigeria1
- U.S.A.9
- Another Asian country2
- Another African country4
- Another American country1
- Another European country1
- Doesn't know / doesn't answer10

13. How did you find out which country has the largest population?
(3 answers allowed)

- From newspapers26
- From television49
- From the radio3
- From family, friends, acquaintances5
- At school / university9
- Personal interest24
- No source, I guessed7
- Don't remember2

14 Let's talk about Italy now. Can you tell me how many people there are in Italy?

- Less than 20 million inhabitants6
- 21 - 30 million1
- 31 - 40 million1
- 41 - 50 million6
- 51 - 55 million13
- 56 - 57 million17
- 58 - 60 million10
- 61 - 70 million2
- 71 - 80 million0
- 81 - 90 million0
- 91 - 100 million1
- More than 100 million1
- Doesn't know / Doesn't answer40
- Doesn't wish to answer1

15. Where did you get information about the size of Italy's population?
(3 answers allowed)

- From newspapers30
- From television51
- From the radio3
- From family, friends, and acquaintances6
- At school / university10
- Personal interest20
- No source, I guessed8
- Don't remember3

16. Do you think that there are international organizations or associations which help the people in developing countries (3 answers allowed)?

- Yes88
 - Which?
 - 1. The World Bank1
 - 2. Caritas24
 - 3. Churches4
 - 4. The Red Cross16
 - 5. FAO25
 - 6. Doctors without borders4
 - 8. ONU21
 - 9. Non government organizations1
 - 10. UNESCO6
 - 11. UNICEF18
 - 12. Humanitarian associations in general15
 - 13. Volunteer associations in general9
 - 14. Other15
- No6
- I don't know6

17. During the last year have you personally done something to help people living in the third world?

- Yes49
- No51

18. What have you done to help people living in poor countries?

- Sponsored a child8
- Adopted a child1
- Volunteer work6
- Sent money to development agencies, third world aid65
- Sent clothing17
- Other (specify)3

A. Gender

B. Age

- Men48
- Women52
- Da 20 a 34 years38
- Da 35 a 50 years34
- Da 51 a 65 years28

C. LEVEL OF SCHOOLING (highest level)

• No diploma	.2
• Elementary school diploma	.16
• Middle school diploma	.30
• High school diploma	.42
• University degree	.9
• Doesn't wish to answer	.1

D. PROFESSION

• Businessman/Self-employed professional/Consultant/Executive	.6
• Office worker	.17
• Shop owner/Artisan	.3
• Shop worker/Self-employed/Domestic worker	.2
• Farmer/Family farm worker	.1
• Teacher/Journalist/Writer	.5
• Industrial worker/Farm hand	.13
• Housewife	.19
• Unemployed or in search of first job	.8
• Retired	.15
• Student	.7
• Other	.4
• Doesn't wish to answer	.0

E. NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE FAMILY

• 1 person	.6
• 2 people	.21
• 3 people	.25
• 4 people	.31
• 5 people	.13
• 6 people	.3
• 7 people	.1
• Doesn't wish to answer	.1

F. AREA

• Northwest	.27
• Northeast	.18
• Central Italy	.20
• South	.35

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Riassunto

Questo lavoro affronta il tema delle relazioni che intercorrono tra la conoscenza dei fatti demografici ed la loro trasmissione attraverso i media. Il rapporto fra l'informazione demografica ed i media - specialmente in Italia - rappresenta un tema estremamente sensibile se si considera che, fino a poco tempo fa, la popolazione era considerata un obiettivo "politico", dunque suscettibile di manipolazioni o strumentalizzazioni emotive, mentre invece la conoscenza dei fenomeni demografici non sembra poggiarsi su una base conoscitiva solida.

Il percorso seguito in questo lavoro prende spunto dall'analisi dei risultati di una ricerca effettuata dall'IRPPS nel settembre 1999 sulla conoscenza e sulle opinioni sulle tendenze della popolazione mondiale in coincidenza con la nascita del sei miliardesimo abitante della terra annunciata dall'ONU per il 12 ottobre 1999. Le interviste sono state effettuate sia prima che dopo la data del 12 ottobre. All'indagine è stata abbinata la raccolta della rassegna stampa italiana relativa all'evento, al fine di effettuare un'analisi del contenuto dei testi pubblicati dai giornali. La ricerca rispondeva a diversi obiettivi: avere un quadro chiaro della conoscenza delle tendenze demografiche mondiali degli Italiani, di quali fonti sono utilizzate; valutare il ruolo esercitato dalla comunicazione dei media sulle conoscenze e gli atteggiamenti verso i temi di popolazione; ed infine l'obiettivo di analizzare i contenuti dell'informazione trasmessa da giornali e telegiornali.

La prima parte del lavoro è finalizzata alla valutazione dell'impatto dei media sulla conoscenza del fatto, all'individuazione delle modalità con cui la popolazione ha fruito dell'informazione, delle strategie di apprendimento e di approfondimento, alla definizione delle caratteristiche strutturali dei diversi segmenti di popolazione coinvolti nell'indagine attraverso metodi di analisi statistica descrittiva basata sull'osservazione delle frequenze alle risposte, e l'applicazione del metodo degli alberi di classificazione (answer trees). La comparazione tra la quota di risposte corrette alla domanda relativa all'ammontare della popolazione mondiale nelle due successive indagini ci ha dato modo di valutare l'impatto della trasmissione mediatica dell'informazione. Nella prima ondata solo una minoranza di italiani è stata in grado di rispondere correttamente al quesito. Sia la stampa cartacea che quella radio-televisiva hanno dato ampio risalto alla notizia, dunque l'effetto c'è stato, ed ha migliorato la correttezza; il ruolo dell'informazione mediatica è stato quello di sintonizzare sul numero giusto chi già ne aveva in testa uno, mentre non ha agito su coloro che non sapevano o non ricordavano quale fosse la dimensione della popolazione mondiale. Per quanto riguarda il percorso della conoscenza analizzato attraverso la tecnica degli answer trees possiamo dire che i predittori sulla provenienza dell'informazione sono tra le variabili più importanti nella caratterizzazione dei profili di risposta. La seconda parte delle riflessioni che presentiamo riguarda l'altra faccia del problema: che cosa arriva al pubblico dei media, ossia come i media trattano l'informazione di contenuto demografico. Un'analisi testuale della rassegna stampa e dei testi dei telegiornali completa questa presentazione con l'obiettivo di far luce su alcuni meccanismi che stanno alla base del complesso rapporto tra formazione della opinione pubblica e ruolo dei media: la struttura di fondo dell'approccio alla notizia adottato dai giornali, le differenze e le omogeneità di trattamento dell'informazione tra i gruppi di giornali, e la specificità ed il linguaggio caratteristico di ogni gruppo di testate. Ognuno di questi risultati è stato ottenuto attraverso una specifica tecnica di analisi statistica, l'analisi delle corrispondenze, la cluster analysis e l'analisi delle specificità di forme e frasi del testo attraverso le frequenze. Le informazioni ed i messaggi trasmessi ai lettori - sono nel complesso complete e corrette, ma differenti approcci e linguaggi specifici emergono dai diversi gruppi di testate. Dall'angolo visuale dello studioso di popolazione vi sono diversi elementi di interesse, che vanno dall'influenza che i media possono avere sui comportamenti connessi alla sfera familiare, all'utilizzazione dei media per veicolare valori, messaggi e conoscenze, in una parola per divulgare "politiche" inerenti la popolazione. Per quanto riguarda il primo tipo di problemi sembra indubbio che gli studiosi di popolazione debbano allargare la visuale teorica e la strumentazione analitica interagendo con gli studi e le discipline che affrontano i temi della comunicazione e dei suoi effetti. Se invece l'obiettivo è quello di utilizzare i media per specifiche istanze di comunicazione è importante capire e approfondire i meccanismi propri dei diversi medium, dallo studio dei target dei fruitori/consumatori, all'analisi dei contenuti e del linguaggio, per trarre indicazioni sulle modalità di ricezione e l'impatto delle comunicazioni.

Summary

This report attempt to answer to the following questions: how public opinion and demographic information interact? How this information is transmitted by the media?

In Italy most people have a very scarce and uneven knowledge about population issues, because our society has not developed a solid demographic culture, able to communicate knowledge in this field. In addition, the sources of information available to the general public are generic articles and programs distributed by the media. Only scholars and students have access to more articulate information. In the days immediately preceding publication of the UNFPA Report on the world population of 6 billion on 22 September 1999, IRPPS conducted a survey on 1000 Italians about the main population trends in the world, in Europe, and in Italy. A second survey made at the end of October 1999 was undertaken to understand how far general public are interested in these questions and exactly what information, filtered though the media, actually contributes to their attitudes.

The survey had several purposes: to gain a clearer understanding of what Italian public knows about world demographic trends and what sources uses to build demographic knowledge; to assess the role played by media communication on knowledge and attitudes toward population issues and to analyse the contents on the information supplied by newspapers and TV broadcasts.

The first part of the paper concerns the assessment of the impact of the media on knowledge about the event, the analysis of the ways in which people put the information to use, their learning strategies, and the characteristics of the various segments of the population which participated in the survey. To achieve those results, after a descriptive analysis treatment, answer trees technique is applied to identify the "knowledge profiles". The tree allows to identify the most interesting profiles rapidly. A second aim of this work is to know what information is communicated, how the media treat demographic information, the balance given to articles and broadcasts, how deeply questions are probed. The method used in this second part of the paper is the Textual Analysis technique of press articles and texts of TV news broadcasting on "day 6 billion", collected ad hoc. Textual Analysis is a statistical approach to the study of linguistic sources, using methodologies developed from quantitative tools of qualitative analysis. In our case we used different techniques: correspondence analysis, cluster analysis and analysis of the specificity of forms and phrases of a text according to the frequency with which they occur. The analysis of the survey results combined with the textual analysis of collected press/TV texts was aimed at reconstructing certain phases of the communication process: A) Transmission (by measuring coverage of the event) : Newspapers and broadcasting networks gave ample space to the event. The media communication had a positive - but limited - effect on knowledge. B) Impact on knowledge (by identifying different profiles of information users): The newscasts and the newspapers helped focus attention on the correct figure and corrected wrong information for those people who already had some idea about the world population. The media information had no effect however on those people who knew nothing or could remember nothing about the world population C) Analysis of the contents of a text (in order to identify the structure of the message): the factorial analysis identify the latent linguistic structure used by the press about a specific demographic event. The issues raised by the journalists and communicated to their readers are, on the whole, complete and correct. But different approaches and typical language of each newspaper group emerge too. From the point of view of people who do research into population questions, there are several interesting elements emerging from the analysis. We will need to modify our approach according to what we want to find out: A) we surely have to enlarge our theoretical field of vision and the type of analysis we use, in concert with disciplines that study communications and their effects; B) If instead we want to use media for specific communications questions, we must understand the mechanisms specific to each type of medium, so that we can gather information about the ways information is received and the impact of communications. These mechanisms will include such things as targeting user/consumers, content analysis, and linguistic analysis.