**Class Reflections for UP 494**

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Session Name: *Population and Population Change*

Write-Up:

This week began with the rumination of what constitutes population and what determines its significance in urban planning and policy conceptualization. It was interesting to observe the myriad of definitions, contexts and geographical hierarchies in which population is conceived in the United States, which is somewhat, but not totally different from the ways in which administrative and geographical conceptions of populations are rampant in India. Looking at the complicated subdivisions of geographies in the Census website made me feel like these boundaries and divisions are like fractals within themselves – each larger division being broken into *n* subdivisions which are further sub-divided into *n* sub-sub-divisions and so on. This also made me reflect on the premise of the policies that would be conceived on such fractal administrative boundaries – ideas at the federal levels would trickle down to the local level, in the exact same fractal constitution. Although I have not reflected further on this kind of an ideology, it might be interesting to understand how fractal geographies and conceptualizations lead to fractal policies and what impact they might have on people’s lives.

As far as the lab [lab 9] was concerned, it felt relatively simple the first time around. Most of the commands and their syntaxes made sense within the larger scheme of the workbook, however memorization of commands is still an issue that I am dealing with. It is very interesting to engineer tables from scratch and understand the very nuanced process of what constitutes tables and how by repeating a single command twice, the very integrity of data is at stake. It was a process of repeated hit and trial, at three different geographies, which were combined to produce one unified output. Also, between importing data through *tidycensus* and a backup excel file, I had to constantly go back and forth because the column names were just numbers – I imagine this has got to do something with data integrity, but I am not sure. Unlike most of the new things I have learnt this semester, R continues to elude and intimidate me, despite my slight bit of a background in coding and my boundless desire to learn coding - things I often do not compliment with routine practice. This is a domain that I am urging myself to overcome and simply cultivate no matter what. I am making progress, albeit extremely slowly.

A very interesting set of animated graphics was shown during the Tuesday lecture. It was a juxtaposition of the population pyramids [age sex structures] of both Egypt and Russia from the past and way into the future. The projections began from 1960 and went on until 2060, and multiple kinks in the graph corresponded with multiple explanations about the political, economic, and socio-historical backdrops of these countries in those simultaneous times. Comparisons between male and female populations led to revelations about wars, conservative government regimes and political fragmentations across history. At a very simple level, when I saw the age-sex structure of Champaign County in juxtaposition with that of Champaign MSA, I could understand how the University fundamentally altered the population pattern within the entire geographical region. It made me wonder how education becomes a catalyst, not just for widespread social transformation, but also for a fundamental niching of economic opportunities, city sizes and population characteristics.