

The winner of the XVIth Stein Rokkan Prize for Comparative Social Science Research (2011) is

James W. McGuire
who has written

Wealth, Health, and Democracy in East Asia and Latin America,
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

The importance of scientific works depends on the importance of the questions they pose. James McGuire asks a major question both in scientific and in political terms: What explains variation in levels of mortality across developing countries, and what can governments do to reduce the level of mortality? In dealing with these questions, McGuire focuses on the development of infant mortality. 'To live the life one chooses, one has to be alive' as the author aptly puts it (p.15).

Basically there are two answers to this question. The first answer – wealthier is healthier -- is prima facie the most plausible and empirically well founded: achievement of higher levels of economic development is a precondition for effective social policy. Therefore policy efforts should assign priority to promoting economic growth. According to the second answer, however, the investment in relatively cheap policies such as basic health care, education of young mothers, family planning, sanitation and clean water will have a more substantial effect and can be achieved more easily than major increases in gross domestic product.

In *Wealth, Health, and Democracy in East Asia and Latin America*, McGuire demonstrates that the provision of comparatively low cost social services is a more effective way to lower premature mortality levels than reliance on economic growth. Perhaps even more importantly, he shows that democracy favours the provision and utilization of these services. In this context, the beneficial effect of democracy increases over-proportionately with the duration of a stable democratic regime.

The book is based on a skilful combination of a large-N quantitative study of 104 developing countries in 1990 and a qualitative study of four Latin American and four East-Asian countries between 1960 and 2005. The quantitative and qualitative studies are systematically linked to each other, and both represent the outcome of a major long-term research effort.

The prize committee was impressed by this work not only because of the sophisticated methodology, the broad data base, the intimate knowledge of cases and the innovative and significant findings. It also stressed that this outstanding work speaks to four literatures at the same time: demography, social policy, democratization studies and development studies.

In addition the committee explicitly recognizes a book that has taken a long time to develop. There may be excellent reasons to focus research activity in such a way that

it can be summarized in articles, which are published in a highly competitive process in refereed journals. Major scientific progress may also be achieved by another route, however, one that obliges researchers to focus time and passion on a larger project without necessarily gaining the short-term rewards of journal publication. Sometimes such large projects result in books that are milestones of scientific discovery, and McGuire's book is a prime example of such a milestone.

With *Health, Wealth, and Democracy*, James W. McGuire proves a worthy winner of the Stein Rokkan prize, and at the same times offers a convincing argument to continue writing monographs in the social sciences.