

Conference summary

During 3-5 March the Radical Statistics Group organised its annual conference at Hathersage, a beautiful tiny hilly village in Derbyshire, UK. The conference venue as well as delegate accommodation were arranged in the Hathersage Youth Hostel. Academics, researchers and policy-makers interested in statistics or their application in various fields, were gathered to disseminate their experiences in a quiet friendly environment.

About 45 participants attended the conference. It was a great opportunity to meet scholars across UK. Participants also continued their discussion over dinners at lovely restaurants in Hathersage - the Little John and the Scotsman Pack. The main daylong conference was scheduled to be on Saturday March 4. In his welcome speech, Troika member Geoffrey Rendle explained the importance of radical statistics over the past few years. He also indicated the importance of expanding its activities in a wider spectrum to attract attentions of others mainly scholars, elites and politicians. Having given his brief introduction and welcome speech, the floor was then opened for discussion for audience and suggestions were taken to gear up the activities of the organisation.

Four papers were presented at the conference: two in the morning and two other in the afternoon. Ray Thomas presented first paper on 'Government spin and statistics' in which he was trying to highlight the mishandling of statistics particularly in measuring statistics for unemployment in the UK. He expressed his concern about government office statistics and suggested an independent Office for National Statistics would be better able to deal with problem areas such as economic statistics, migration statistics and labour market statistics.

The second paper was presented on Radical Statistics by Jamie Goodwin-White and Ludi Simpson. They have focused on some statistics related to human population which are being influenced by ideological, personal or political bias. Such statistics make it difficult to understand actual social changes in society. They then proposed some principles of radical demography. They also tried to examine the proper policy direction, on the basis of statistics, used by the migration watch UK as a case study. However, it is evident that population dynamics in future largely depends on the present policy actions and thus illustrates the importance of studying radical demography.

Jay Ginn presented her paper on 'Must poverty be politicised?' in which she attempted to compare poverty inequality among older people in the UK and other selected EU countries by evaluating data collected from the Eurostat and the British household survey. Jay indicated that a higher degree of income inequality exists among older people for their age, gender, marital status and social class. Her analysis clearly brings important messages about economic hardship of elderly people in society.

Among others, one important conclusion is that the government should pursue policies that reduce pensioner poverty.

The final paper was presented by Paul Marchant entitled 'Do the claims for spending billions on crime reduction initiatives stand up?' Paul spoke on problematic issues in assessing the effectiveness of crime reduction interventions in general and in particular the claim that lighting reduces crime. He examined a meta-analysis commissioned by the Home Office and found a number of difficulties with the methods used, sufficient to undermine the claim. He considered that statistical issues in crime research are poorly handled and need greater scrutiny.

Having completed the formal conference presentation and discussion, the AGM session began and members participated in the general discussion. The next conference is to be held in London. On the day after the conference, remaining delegates enjoyed a long walk in Hathersage and Hope Valley. Participants enjoyed their weekend in many ways.

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