

Radical Statistics February 2017

Edinburgh Conference Report

The Radical Statistics conference this last year was held in Edinburgh and included a set of thought provoking presentations and workshops all addressing the conference theme of Statistics of Brexit. Arguments and perspectives within the EU referendum debate that relied on statistics across a range of areas from law to migration were discussed and critiqued in a lively atmosphere. In this summary our focus is on the workshops and discussion: extended versions of the four keynote papers appear either in this journal or are published elsewhere.

The first session included keynote papers from Jane Falkingham (Director of the Centre for Population Change – University of Southampton) and Michael Dougan (Professor of Law – Liverpool University). Jane provided a demographic perspective on the use of statistics on migration and reflections on the implications of Brexit for EU migration to and from the UK. Jane's talk pointed out the tendency for statistics on migration to ignore non-EU migration or the characteristics and contributions of EU migrants to the UK economy and society. For further details on the work of Centre for Population change on migration and Brexit see http://www.cpc.ac.uk/research_programme/migration_and_mobility/. Michael Dougan's presentation focussed on the statistical claims around the proportion of EU laws to which the UK is subjected. Michael demonstrated serious flaws in such the use of such statistics as illustrated in further detail in his paper within this issue of the journal.

The conference then split into workshops in which Alan Marshall (University of Edinburgh) and Albert Sabater (University of St Andrews) gave short presentations and led subsequent discussions on the themes of race hate crime statistics and the implications of changes in citizenship status following the EU referendum. Alan's presentation reviewed the data on race crime statistics including survey data (Crime Survey of England and Wales), Crown Prosecution Statistics and internet-based measures of hate crime (for example, the [Worrying signs](#) website). A focus of the presentation and discussion

was the strengths and weaknesses of the current statistics on race hate crime and the data and techniques required to better understand trends and spiked in race hate crime statistics in response to particular events. Changes in citizenship status have become a prominent issue following the EU referendum in the UK due to the considerable number of EU citizens without UK passports whose legal status is likely to change after Brexit. Albert's presentation provided an overview of the recent trends on British citizenship applications/grants since 2007, and included information on trends before and after the EU referendum by EU citizens resident in the UK. Further, the presentation included three key considerations about this topic: the burden of processing many applications, the bureaucratic pestering and the linkages with integration, belonging and crime.

In the afternoon session, Brian Cathcart (professor of journalism at Kingston University London) and Jan Eichorn (lecturer in Social Policy at the University of Edinburgh) gave their keynote presentations on the respective themes of trust in the media and perspectives on Brexit from outside the UK as informed by surveys of public opinion conducted in different European countries. Brian reflected on trust in the media in the context of Brexit. He argued that the data on trust in the media in the UK suggests that trust is low compared to other countries, other profession and institutions (within the UK) and has declined over the past twenty years. His argument can be read in more detail in the paper in the previous issue of this journal. Jan's paper focussed on results from in-depth survey research that he carried out in the lead up to the referendum in six EU member states. The results show that several assumptions held about people's views on the UK and propositions made at EU level were not accurate, but, most importantly in the aftermath of Brexit, that there is great divergence in attitudes between different parts of the EU. An extended version of his paper is available at: <https://esharp.eu/debates/the-uk-and-europe/brexit-a-view-from-the-continent>.

The final workshops focussed on a discussion of internal migration statistics in the context of Brexit (led by Glenna Nightingale, David McCollum, Annemarie Ernsten all at University of St Andrews & Will Shankley – University of Manchester) while Bozena Wielgoszewska and Helen Packwood (University of St Andrews) led a discussion around the use of statistics in Brexit media coverage. The “Brexit Statistics in

media coverage” workshop took an interactive form, with the view to facilitate debates on how various statistics were presented in different media outlets during the Brexit campaign. The participants were asked to complete three tasks, which were designed to prompt the discussion. For example, one task was based on the Guardian article available at <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2016/jun/03/brexit-how-can-the-same-statistics-be-read-so-differently>. Participants were presented with two contradictory views on issues related to: cost of membership, trade, sovereignty, business support for Brexit, immigration, and farming with each view supported by a statistic. The discussion focussed on the reason for the divergence and the validity of each claim and its underpinning statistic. A key conclusion from the workshop was that the new internet technologies, such as targeted advertising or selective ‘following’, can create echo chambers. These not only can make discussions more difficult, but also can hamper or eliminate the possibility of a dialogue, as some media users may not be exposed to alternative views.

The conference closed with a roundtable discussion chaired by Nissa Finney (University of St Andrews) with reflections on many of the topics covered during the day and the Annual General Meeting. Next year the conference moves back to London where its theme will be 21st Century Inequality in the UK. Further detail are available at:

<http://www.radstats.org.uk/conference/london2018/>

Alan Marshall on behalf of the conference organising team Nissa Finney, Glenna Nightingale, Helen Packwood, Albert Sabater, Bozena Wielgoszewska.