

Changing world

The fourth annual ESDS International Conference took place on 1 December 2008 at the Institute of Materials in London. Themed on the changing world, the conference brought together users and producers of international data to discuss the hottest issues in the international data world.

Keith Cole, Director of Mimas and Head of ESDS International, opened the conference with a presentation on the role of the ESDS International data service within the UK's burgeoning international data community.

Data providers speaking at the event included Joachim Doll from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), who demonstrated the new look statistics portal 'OECD.stat', Valentina Kalk from the World Bank, who introduced the newly available African Development Indicators, and Lawrence Jeff Johnson of the International Labour Organisation, who reported on the addition to the Millennium Development Goals of the new 'Target 1B – to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people'. Yutong Li from the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) described developments and progress in data communication covering the current data environment, salient macro-economic statistics and the recent financial crises and the IMF's future dataset dissemination strategy.

Alison Park from the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) spoke about cross-national attitudinal research comparing and contrasting two highly regarded survey datasets, the International Social Survey Programme and the European Social Survey, and Michel Francoeur of the International Energy Agency highlighted the importance of sound energy statistics and energy balances as a foundation to understanding the energy market and formulating policy analysis and objectives, concluding his talk with a quote from Lord Kelvin: "If you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it".

Users of the ESDS International data service were given the opportunity to showcase their work either during the lunchtime poster session or in the academic presentation session. The day concluded with a session in which Ed Beale and Ian Townsend from the House of Commons Library provided an insight into the work of researchers at the House of Commons Library. Describing the Library's role as a research and information service for both MPs and the public, they used a case study

of Kenya to illustrate how researchers use macro-economic data to create a socio-economic profile of a country.

The event was filmed and will be available for viewing on the ESDS International web site.

www.esds.ac.uk/international/news/conf2008.asp ●

ESDS International adds a new case study

ESDS International has added to its selection of 'Case studies of international data use' with a new study, 'Home Bias in Foreign Direct Investment'.

Presented as a poster at the ESDS International 2008 Annual Conference, the subject of this research is 'home bias in corporate decision making in an international context'. The author states that there is a strong preference for corporate managers to invest in surrounding countries and places of social and cultural familiarity and investigates whether this tendency to invest in the familiar is also present in foreign direct investments. The case study uses the IMF's International Financial Statistics, the World Bank's World Development Indicators and the OECD's International Development Statistics, all obtained from ESDS International.

As well as highlighting the diverse use of international data in research and teaching, these case studies allow ESDS International users to showcase their work and enable others in the international data community to see interesting examples of current research.

www.esds.ac.uk/international/casestudies/ ●



Photo by: thinkpanama, Creative Commons, Flickr

ESDS International launches United Nations Millennium Development Goals e-learning materials

In February this year ESDS International launched a set of e-learning materials based around a key socio-economic data topic – the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

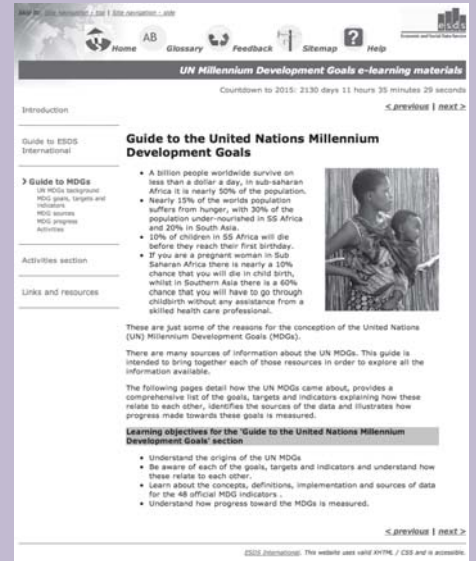
Designed to help learners explore the UN MDGs, the materials will also guide users through using the international data service, providing an increased understanding of the data available at ESDS International and the potential of that data for use in their own research or teaching. The materials comprise four main sections:

- Guide to ESDS International - a comprehensive overview of the international data service
- Guide to the MDGs - describes the

background to the MDGs, the relationship between the goals, targets and indicators, identifies the data sources and how progress towards the goals is measured

- Activities section - provides step-by-step activities available as e-tutorials enabling learners to, for example, search the ESDS International data portfolio or carry out a simple data visualisation task
- Links and resources - contains links to relevant UN MDG related interfaces

The materials are freely available to all, though are aimed primarily at UK further and higher education learners. Intended to be used either for self study or within taught courses, it is hoped the materials will help to develop a new generation of statistical data users with the ability to contribute to global debate on international issues such as poverty, climate change and globalisation.



www.esds.ac.uk/international/elearning/intnmdg/

Guidance on managing and sharing data

The UK Data Archive would like to announce the release of its new suite of web pages providing guidance on data management and sharing.

The pages provide data creators, data managers and data curators with best practice strategies and methods for creating, preparing and storing shareable datasets. Advice has been divided into a number of key areas or modules providing detailed information on each topic. These are:

- sharing data - why and how?
- consent, confidentiality and ethics

- copyright
- data documentation and metadata
- data formats and software
- data storage, back-up, and security

In addition to these web pages, bespoke advice and training are provided by UKDA staff throughout the lifespan of a research project - from the initial award application, through the data creation phase to the end of the active research phase and to the final storage and dissemination of data. A comprehensive frequently asked questions web page is also available.

www.data-archive.ac.uk/sharing/

Working with RECs

In its continued efforts to promote data sharing, the UK Data Archive (UKDA) surveyed Research Ethics Committees (RECs) within UK universities in December 2008 to seek information on how they deal with the tensions between data protection and data sharing. The UKDA is keen to work with university RECs to help review and keep up to date their guidelines and ensure that they provide accurate and sufficient information to researchers about their obligations for data sharing.

As a result of the RECs survey, in February 2009, UKDA was invited to give a talk about data sharing issues at the UK Universities Research Ethics Forum, an umbrella of RECs from across UK universities that meet quarterly to discuss topical issues. The audience comprised 25 members of various RECs, mainly focusing on social science research. They were interested in data storage, security and methods of access, data copyright, and negotiation of consent.

The UKDA has recently revised its guidance on consent and confidentiality and has held a series of training workshops on this topic. UKDA will be producing a tailored information sheet for RECs that builds on the current web-based information.

www.data-archive.ac.uk/sharing/consentrecs.asp



ESDS Awayday

How should ESDS go forward over the next few years to ensure that it continues to provide the right service for its users? How might ESDS make better use of emerging technologies to provide students and researchers with what they need?

These were some of the biggest questions considered at the most recent ESDS Awayday, on 28 January 2009. Staff from all ESDS services, together with Audrey Brown,

chair of the ESDS Advisory Committee, gathered at the London headquarters of JISC who - alongside ESRC - are the main funders of ESDS. Delegates gained from the chance to discuss the big issues face to face and there was clear agreement that more needs to be done to understand the future needs of ESDS users. Another recurring theme throughout the day was the need for ESDS to do more to demonstrate its impact and the benefits of its services. The annual Awayday not only provides an excellent opportunity for ESDS staff from across the three sites and many sections of ESDS to get together and exchange views, but also provides an opportunity to 'take stock', as well as to identify priorities for the year ahead. ●

ESDS drive to recruit more librarian facilitators

On 13 February 2009, 50 librarians from across the country braved the weather to attend an ESDS workshop at the Royal Statistical Society.

This event, entitled 'ESDS – what's in it for Librarians?', was aimed at librarians across different sectors (academic, government and public sector) and disciplines. As its name suggests, the day provided an opportunity for librarians to learn more about the ESDS. Equally important was the opportunity for the ESDS to find out from librarians about how the ESDS can help them in their role as facilitators of social science research and study. The day was thus divided between talks in the morning and a group discussion/feedback session in the afternoon.

Keynote speaker Jude England of the British Library spoke of how the role of the librarian is evolving in light of new researcher needs and expectations, and discussed some of the strategic links and collaborations the British Library is forging with the research community and other data services and providers to meet these needs. Stuart Macdonald of EDINA and Edinburgh University Data Library went on to describe his work as a social sciences data librarian emphasising the local needs of users.

The feedback session produced a lively and informative discussion on how ESDS can improve its services to researchers and librarians alike, which will inform the ESDS's future plans. Participants were encouraged to join the Social Science Data Resources (SSDR) site representatives network, whose members act as first port-of-call for

information on the ESDS at their institution. The ESDS is always looking to expand this network. Information about how to join is available on the SSDR site representative web site.

SSDR site representatives:
www.esds.ac.uk/support/sr.asp

Conference: www.esds.ac.uk/news/eventdetail.asp?id=2125 ●



Latest collections available for researchers

The following brief descriptions highlight a selection of newly released datasets:

SN 6110 People's Trust: a Survey-Based Experiment, 2007

The aims of this study were firstly to measure trust and trustworthiness in a representative sample of the British population and secondly to investigate which individual attributes may affect them.

SN 6111 Doing Embryo Ethics: Safety and Efficacy in Research and Practice, 2004-2007

This qualitative project explored the social and discursive construction of ethics in research laboratories and clinics working with human embryos. The dataset contains semi-structured interviews with clinicians, scientists, and related professionals.

SN 6097 Mathematical Images and Identities: Education, Entertainment and Social Justice, 2006-2007

This mixed methods study investigated how popular cultural images of mathematics and mathematicians were used, the relationships that learners constructed with the subject and their gendered/classed/ethnic identities as mathematicians or non-mathematicians.

SN 6096 Exploring Data, Second Edition: Teaching Datasets, 1958-2005

This series of datasets cover a range of research topics in the social sciences but with a focus on education, employment, health, social participation, attitudes to government and democracy and social mobility.

SN 6099 'Brain Drain' Debate in the United Kingdom, c.1950-1970

This qualitative project sought to provide an analysis of the 'brain drain' debate of the 1950s and 1960s as a social phenomenon. The dataset comprises 19 oral history interviews with scientists and engineers who emigrated to the United States or Canada, as well as British policymakers involved in any way in the 'brain drain' debate at this time.

SN 6098 Cultures of Consumption and Consumer Involvement in Public Services, 2003-2005

The study includes data on views of public service users about how they experience and evaluate public services, and the choices they make as to how to express their views.

For a full list of recently released datasets see: www.esds.ac.uk/findingData/newdata.asp ●

Workshop on managing complex survey data

On 27 January 2009, the UKDA hosted a successful and well-attended seminar which focused on 'The significance of data management for social survey research'.

The event, organised by the ESDS and the National Centre for e-Social Science research node on Data Management through e-Social Science (DAMES), brought together a number of leading academics whose work focuses on improving the understanding of data management in the social science research process.

Data management - in this context, the handling, manipulation and formatting of data - is a manifestly important aspect of the research process, but, as the opening speaker Paul Lambert made clear, an often overlooked or ill-considered one.

This day provided the opportunity to highlight a number of newly-funded ESRC-

funded resources that are raising these issues higher up the research agenda, matching survey data to external resources, harmonising classification variables across surveys and manipulating survey data securely.

John 'Mac' McDonald from the Institute of Education introduced the ADMIN resource - Administrative data: methods, inference and network. Vernon Gayle from the University of Stirling described two e-science resources for handling data on occupations, educational qualifications and ethnicity - the DAMES and the Grid Enabled Occupational Data Environment (GEODE) projects.

Jack Kneeshaw from the UKDA highlighted data manipulation resources available via the ESDS and Matthew Woollard, also from the UKDA, ended the day with a presentation on the forthcoming Secure Data Service. The slides for each of the presentations are available.

www.esds.ac.uk/news/eventdetail.asp?id=2151 ●

Forthcoming Events

24 March 2009: Introductory workshop to MCS3, Institute of Education, London

24 March 2009: JISC Conference 2009, Edinburgh International Conference Centre

16-17 April 2009: Introduction to BHPS using Stata, University of Essex

16 April 2009: Census workshop: health and ethnicity - using Samples of Anonymised Records and ONS Longitudinal Study, City University, London

23-24 April 2009: Informing Public Policy: New Agendas for Social Research, London School of Economics

24 April 2009: Bremen Workshop: Qualitative Longitudinal Research and Qualitative Resources in Europe: Mapping the Field and Exploring Strategies for Development, University of Bremen, Germany

3-8 May 2009: Digital Preservation Management: Short-Term Solutions for Long-Term Problems, Ann Arbor, Michigan

8 May 2009: Combining and mapping census, postcode and other geographical data, University of Stirling

26-29 May 2009: IASSIST/IFDO 2009 Conference, Tampere, Finland

26 June 2009: Census data workshop: migration data, University of Essex, Southend

16-22 August 2009: The 57th Session of the International Statistical Institute, Durban, South Africa

17-21 August 2009: The XXIII European Society for Rural Sociology (ESRS) congress, Finland

12-16 September 2009: Scottish Health Informatics Programme - Training Workshop, University of St Andrews, Scotland

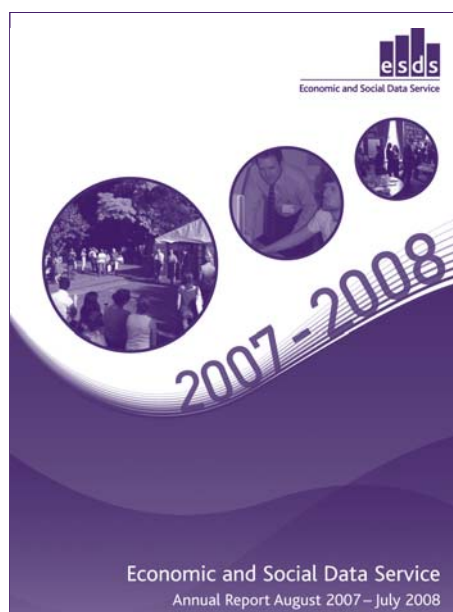
17-19 September 2009: Scottish Health Informatics Programme - Exploiting Existing Data for Health Research - International Conference, University of St Andrews, Scotland ●

Annual Report

The ESDS Annual Report for August 2007 to July 2008 was published in December and is now available.

The Report uses case studies to demonstrate the impact of the ESDS services, such as providing data from which researchers were able to predict aspects of the current financial crisis, and using studies of mother-son relationships to make connections with masculine identities.

The Report gives details of all ESDS activities over the year and demonstrates by statistical analysis the continuing high demand for the service. View the report online in PDF format or contact publicity@esds.ac.uk for a printed copy. ●



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