

Abstract of PhD Thesis

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PhD Title:

An ontology of ethnicity based upon personal names: with implications for neighbourhood profiling

Abstract:

Understanding of the nature and detailed composition of ethnic groups remains key to a vast swathe of social science and human natural science. Yet ethnic origin is not easy to define, much less measure, and ascribing ethnic origins is one of the most contested and unstable research concepts of the last decade - not only in the social sciences, but also in human biology and medicine. As a result, much research remains hamstrung by the quality and availability of ethnicity classifications, constraining the meaningful subdivision of populations.

This PhD thesis develops an alternative ontology of ethnicity, using personal names to ascribe population ethnicity, at very fine geographical levels, and using a very detailed typology of over 150 ethnic groups optimised for the UK population. The outcome is an improved methodology for classifying population registers, as well as small areas, into cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups. This in turn makes possible the creation of much more detailed, frequently updatable representations of the ethnic kaleidoscope of UK cities, and can be further applied to other countries.

The thesis includes a review of the literature on ethnicity measurement and name analysis, and their applications in health and geographical research. It presents the development of the new name to ethnicity classification methodology using both a heuristic and an integrated and automated approach. It is based on the UK Electoral Roll as well as several health registers in London. Furthermore, a validation of the proposed name-based classification using different datasets is offered, as well as examples of applications in public health, population estimates by small area, and residential segregation. The main study area is London, UK and the Borough of Camden in particular.