

Brexit challenges and the role of interdisciplinary studies

Since the momentous decision for Britain to exit the European Union was taken last June, there have been a mixture of what might be considered sentimental responses. The perceived ‘victors’ have celebrated and reassured all and sundry that they had been right all along, while the perceived ‘victims/losers’ have either slunk into various holes to lick their wounds or redouble their strident call for a re-think or even a total disownance of the referendum result. But both of these responses have not come anywhere near the realities that confront policy makers, academics, researchers and even business leaders across the divide. Indeed, it is perhaps safe to conclude that no one really knows what will come in the wake of the final agreement/settlement. Esther Versluis (2017) reached a sage-like conclusion on this issue when she noted in a paper to her European Studies student that:

‘What the impact of the Brexit referendum will be is still very much unknown. It remains to be seen how (and some even argue ‘if’) the United Kingdom will step out of the EU, what the finally negotiated terms and conditions will be, and what impact this will have on the domestic situation in the UK, on the future development of European integration, and even on the worldwide economic situation and international cooperation’. (p.1)

What has not been debated, however, is the fact that there will be new paradigms, new alliances and new structures. With this ‘newness’, we must anticipate new challenges and indeed, new problems. It is in the context of these new challenges that the discipline of inter and multi-disciplinary studies must come into its own once again.

The cross-perspective nature of interdisciplinary studies offers the instrument for analysing and tackling the inevitable problems that will rear their heads in the wake of Brexit. One inevitable repercussion of Brexit is the emergence of another layer of complexity and problematics in transboundary relations. There is no doubt that both the UK and the EU will be seeking effective solutions to the problems that will surely emerge following their break up. Understanding that these problems are not driven by a one-dimensional driver, therefore, suggests that a multi-disciplinary approach might well be the way to tackle them. The problems we anticipate will not only cross geographical borders, but will encompass economic, academic, and even social issues.

Versluis (2017) illustrates this cross disciplinary manifestations and potential solutions to issues that might emerge post-Brexit with the ongoing refugee crisis. She identifies a cost-benefit problem from the economic perspective, a ‘religious and cultural fault-lines on the attitude and behaviour’ from a cultural studies perspective, and the disturbed balance of power between different regions in the world from an international relations perspective. What is evident from Versluis’ analysis is that no one approach can successfully resolve these impending challenges.

One of the strengths of interdisciplinary studies go far beyond any one single one-off co-habitation or alliance. As a result, although Brexit is undoubtedly a challenge for all, including policy makers, businesses, academics and researchers, it does offer an opportunity to leverage the current state and potentially emergent state of event to generate new paradigms from multi-disciplinary sources, behaviours, cognitions and practices. It will offer multidisciplinary scholars several opportunities for creating theoretical, empirical and practical paradigms, which will undoubtedly provide answers and resolutions to the complex challenges that Brexit might produce. Within this web of challenges, multidisciplinary scholars must see opportunities for advancing knowledge and for resolving social problems that are not of any one discipline in their make-up.

The current issue of IJMCS, though not particularly focused on Brexit, contains articles that at least reflect the multiple perceptions and collaborative thinking that underpins both this journal and the notion of multi- and inter-disciplinary studies. Patrick Ainley tackles the issue of social mobility in England through a multidisciplinary lens. This, of course, has the potential of taking on a broader regional dimension in the context of what could happen post Brexit. It is therefore a timely reminder of failed promises and futility of rhetorical posturing. Cankar et al explore the issue of conflicting educational philosophy. Though located in the context of one country, it serves up food for thought in the context of what Brexit might throw at us with the impending division. What might happen with the current educational philosophy that is ‘arguably shared by European countries? What would be the fallout of a change in philosophical drivers of education? Would there still be parity and cross-border knowledge search? Banji explores the linguistic phenomenon of intertextuality and an immediate question is whether we can expect some form of intertextuality in policy, practice and indeed cross-lingual intertextuality in the wake of Brexit. Finally, Walker leads us on a journey in which she examines the strategies that academics have used to weather the storm in the wake of changing and dominant policies. There is no doubt that many will have to weather storms in the wake of Brexit and this might well be a pool to draw from when and if the storm finally arrives.

Though not Brexit-focused, some lessons, or at least insights might emerge from the articles in this issue. Enjoy.

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Editors

Reference

Versluis, E. (2017) (with the help of BA ES alumni) ‘Why study European Studies in times of crisis?’ Paper presented to BA European Studies students, Maastricht University