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The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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Did you see ...?

Adults Learning

The April issue¹ has a number of interesting articles, including:

- Cerys Furlong “It’s a matter of principle”, looking at the Welsh assembly Government’s commitment to social justice, and how this is not yet being translated into further and higher education policy [pp9-11]
- Danny Dorling “Tall tales and ripping yarns”, a brief introduction to his new book² on injustice and inequality [pp16-19]³.

Literacy Today

The March issue includes a range of interesting articles and brief reports, eg:

- Graham Meadows “Storylines: a fresh approach to literacy”, which argues for the importance of storytelling as a way of promoting literacy [pp11-12]
- “Whole book literacy teaching”, an introduction to a new literacy programme from publishers Heinemann [pp33-34]
- Bharath Chandrasekaran *et al* “Dyslexia and background noise”, which reports important research into the effects that noise may have on dyslexic children and adults [p35].

Tackling social exclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Diversify toolkit

The Museums Association has just revised and expanded its toolkit⁴, and it is also available online.

“This toolkit provides practical guidance and advice to any organisation interested in diversifying its staffing profile. Although it draws on the

¹ *Adults Learning* 21 (8) April 2010. Further information from:

<http://www.niace.org.uk/publications/adults-learning/adults-learning-back-issues>.

² Danny Dorling. *Injustice: why social inequality persists*. Policy Press, 2010 (ISBN: 9781847424266). I am currently reviewing this for the Policy Press website, and will include an assessment of it in a future Newsletter.

³ This article is available to download as a pdf (289.69 kb) from:

<http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/AL-Apr10-sample-article-dorling.pdf#>.

⁴ *Diversify toolkit*. Museums Association, no date (2010?). Available to download as a pdf (2820 kb) from: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=98529>.

Diversify scheme, managed by the MA, it is relevant across the cultural sector.” [p5]

It includes lots of case studies and practical examples (eg of monitoring forms, etc), and covers the following broad topics:

- Embedding diversity and equality in your organisation (including what an organisation that values diversity looks like)
- The legalities (eg Race Relations Act 1976, the Equality Bill, Equality Impact Assessments)
- Preparing your organisation (eg having the right structures in place)
- Implementing positive-action training
- Recruitment
- Partnership agreements
- Training contracts
- Exit strategies
- Professional development
- Guidance on answering complaints
- Useful contacts.

This is a very useful brief guide to equality and diversity issues – recommended.

Tackling social exclusion – Other Agencies

Exploring the roots of BNP support

This is a major new research report⁵ from ippr. It uses the work that they have been developing on ‘resilience’:

“Resilience is usually thought of in terms of security (for example, response to terror attacks) or the environment (for example, in relation to climate change). But it is clear that other kinds of shocks also affect British society, shocks such as the financial crisis, rising unemployment and the MPs’ expenses scandal. ippr has been examining how our society, economy and political systems can cope with these shocks, and whether or not they are able to respond, recover and adapt.” [p4]

Further, ippr are looking at ‘social resilience’:

“We define social resilience as the ability of communities to withstand and adapt in response to shocks. Our research suggests that there are four ‘domains’ to social resilience: (i) economic, (ii) political, (iii) community, and (iv) individual. Strength in each of these areas means

⁵ *Exploring the roots of BNP support: an ippr briefing paper*. ippr, 2010. Available to download as a pdf from: <http://www.ippr.org/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=743> (you will need to register onsite first).

that a community has access to the resources it needs to help respond to disruption and stress.” [p4]

Using these techniques, ippr argue:

“Our findings suggest that areas that have higher levels of recent immigration than others are not more likely to vote for the BNP. In fact, the more immigration an area has experienced, the lower its support for the far right. It seems that direct contact with migrants dissuades people from supporting the BNP. For example, of the 10 local authorities in which the BNP gained most support in the 2009 European elections, nine had lower than average immigration (with Barking and Dagenham the only anomaly).

Rather, the evidence points to political and socio-economic exclusion as drivers of BNP support. In particular, areas with low average levels of qualifications (which can mean people struggle in today’s flexible, knowledge-based economy), low levels of social cohesion, and low levels of voter turnout (indicating political disenchantment) are the ones that show more BNP support.” [p2]

A really important piece of work, both in terms of re-looking at immigration and also in putting political and socio-economic exclusion centre-stage.

Altogether now? The role and limits of civil society associations in connecting a diverse society

This brief report⁶ summarises the key points from a series of seminars organised in 2008-2009 by NCVO and the Carnegie UK Trust Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland on bridging social capital.⁷

The report begins with a short re-cap of the definitions of the three kinds of social capital:

“There are many definitions of social capital. It is often used to refer to the social networks and norms (such as values and trust) that bind people together. It is seen as a resource which helps people achieve individual and collective goals.

A distinction is made between three types of social capital:

⁶ *Altogether now? The role and limits of civil society associations in connecting a diverse society*. NCVO/Carnegie UK Trust, 2009. Available to download as a pdf (910 kb) from: http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/default/files/UploadedFiles/NCVO/Publications/Publications_Catalogue/Sector_Research/Altogether_Now_FINAL.pdf.

⁷ Source: *Engage*, Spring 2010. For further information, see: <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/about-engage>.

- Bonding social capital which refers to the ties between people who are similar, and relates to common identity.
- Bridging social capital which refers to the ties between people who are different from one other, and relates to diversity.
- Linking social capital which refers to the ties with those in authority, and relates to power.” [p1]

At the same time, the report helpfully acknowledges that:

“Social capital is a much contested concept. It is criticised for a number of reasons:

- It is nothing new and is just a policy buzzword;
- It can be viewed purely as a good thing and a remedy to many of society’s ills;
- It simplifies the complexity of social ties and networks;
- It stops people taking into account key structural factors such as social class.” [p2]

It then looks at the current emphasis on building bridges (which has particularly been the case since the London bombings and with the rapid pace of demographic change in the UK) and how this has developed into engagement and empowerment. (If you are interested in bridge-building social capital, you might also like to look at a recent report⁸ from IVAR, which looks at grassroots activities.)

It then looks at two approaches: the focus on difference and on commonalities, and contrasts the approach recommended by the Commission on Integration and Social Cohesion, which urged a search for commonalities; and some evidence coming out of Northern Ireland, that this approach was not completely successful. The report concludes:

“Undoubtedly, exploring both differences and commonalities are not mutual exclusively and both contribute to the development of a more cohesive society.” [p3]

The report then explores bonding and bridging in greater depth; and, finally, questions the automatic assumption that it is the role of civil society to create bridging social capital – as it says:

“Civil society associations are well placed to build bridges, but bridging is a shared responsibility and many other actors have a role to play. There are numerous places such as schools and workplaces, where people interact with one another that can promote a better

⁸ Margaret Harris and Patricia Young. *Bridging community divides: the impact of grassroots bridge building activities*. IVAR, 2009 (ISBN: 978-0-9561725-0-1). Available to download as a pdf (268.87 kb) from: http://www.ivar.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/ivar_bbreport.pdf. (Also cited in *Engage*, Spring 2010.)

understanding of diversity and difference. The way Manchester Council is implementing its intergenerational programme exemplifies this well ... Public services are particularly important; if people feel there is equal and fair access to local services, they will start thinking they live in and belong to the same place ... Debates on diversity and social cohesion are hard to separate from the wider social justice and equality debate. The risk of tensions and conflict is higher if people suffer discrimination and marginalisation from social, economic and political opportunities.” [p6]

The report concludes:

“Civil society has always brought people together in associational life in a number of different contexts and for a diversity of needs, causes and interests. The first step in associational life is always bonding whether that be around an interest such as football, a place or an identity or all three combined. We must not lose sight of this dynamic in associational life and the added value this brings to many individuals, groups and communities.

The seminar series also showed that bridging can be incidental and/or fun; it goes beyond explicitly addressing identity and difference. Civil society associations bring different individuals and groups together around social activities which appeal to a greater number of people. Sporting and cultural activities can be key tools for encouraging bridging interactions.

The drivers of change in society ... suggest that the imagination, skills, methods and processes that civil society associations use to build bridges will be in greater demand in the future. External parties including government and funders can and should encourage civil society associations to explore how they can contribute to bridging. However, ensuring that such initiatives do not undermine the voluntary dimension of civil society (or the missions of associations) will continue to be a key challenge for all those who wish to see more bridging.” [p7]

This is a useful brief resource for re-evaluating our role in building social capital.

Broader issues – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Delivering through people: the Local Government Workforce Strategy 2010

The LGA Group launched this revised version of the Strategy⁹ on 28 April.

“The Strategy, first developed in 2003, has been updated to reflect the changes in the context and:

- sets out the priority actions the LGA Group is taking nationally to tackle councils' critical shared workforce challenges
- provides a framework for councils to review what actions they are taking locally to tackle their most important workforce challenges.”¹⁰

The revised Strategy:

“... retains the five strategic priorities from the 2007 Local Government Workforce Strategy, with some small changes to reflect the changed context.

Organisational development

Addressing the workforce dimensions of organisational transformation to deliver citizen-focused and value for money services, in partnership.

Leadership development

Building visionary, ambitious and effective leadership to make the best use of political and managerial roles, in a partnership context.

Skills development

With partners, developing employees' skills and knowledge, in an innovative, high performance, multi-agency context.

Recruitment and retention

With partners, taking action to: recruit and retain the right workforce; address key future occupational skill shortages; promote jobs and careers; identify, develop and motivate talent and address diversity issues.

Pay and rewards

Implementing effective approaches to reward the workforce while controlling employment costs to reflect budget and efficiency requirements, as well as new ways of working and innovative working patterns. Encouraging a total reward approach to promote high performance.” [p5]

The Strategy is a useful summary of current local authority staffing issues, and, in looking critically at some of the outstanding challenges [see below], also sets some of the agenda for the near future.

The challenges include:

⁹ *Delivering through people: the Local Government Workforce Strategy 2010*. LGA Group, 2010. Available to download as a pdf (593 kb) from:

<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/18895188>.

¹⁰ Taken from: <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=18835564>.

- “only an average of 3 per cent of the top 5 per cent of earners in councils have a disability, and an average of only 2 per cent come from black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) groups
 - only 25 per cent of councils are taking action to increase the percentage of people from BAME groups in senior management positions, although another 15 per cent are planning to do this.”
[p10]
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Abbreviations and acronyms

BNP = British National Party

ippr = Institute for Public Policy Research

IVAR = Institute for Voluntary Action research

LGA = Local Government Association

LGA Group – see below

NCVO = National Council for Voluntary Organisations

LGA Group

The LGA is part of a wider LGA Group that is made up of:

- Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)¹¹
- Local Government Employers (LGE)¹²
- Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS)¹³
- Local Partnerships¹⁴
- The Leadership Centre for Local Government¹⁵.

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¹¹ See: <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=1>.

¹² See: <http://www.lge.gov.uk/lge/core/page.do?pagelid=1>.

¹³ See: <http://www.lacors.gov.uk/lacors/home.aspx>.

¹⁴ See: <http://www.localpartnerships.org.uk/>.

¹⁵ See: <http://www.localleadership.gov.uk/>.