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 …?

Museums Journal

The January issue[1] includes a number of interesting articles:

- Geraldine Kendall "Critical thinking not used", which gives a taster of research that is due to be published later in January, and which has found that museums "fail to share or learn from evaluation" [p17]
- Rhian Harris "Class consciousness in the museum", which argues that museums need to do more to "engage with and develop working-class audiences" [p19]
- John Holt "The educators", which looks at how museum education work is being affected by budget cuts and also by changes to the curriculum [pp30-33][2]
- Simon Stephens "Inspired thinking", which looks at the work of the Woodhorn Charitable Trust with locals communities in Northumberland [pp34-37][3].

Tackling social exclusion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Poverty and social exclusion in the UK and EU, 2005-2011

This new article[4],[5] has just been published by the Office for National Statistics; it "examines the extent to which people in the UK were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2011 and how this compares with other EU countries and over time" [p1]

Its key findings include:

- "In 2011, 22.7% of the UK population were considered to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion, equivalent to 14.0 million people. This is lower than the EU average of 24.1%.
- 16.2% of people in the UK were at risk of poverty in 2011, down from 18.7% in 2008. However, this fall is at least partly explained by a real-terms fall in median income, leading to a reduction in the poverty threshold.

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[1] *Museums Journal*, January 2013. Further information at: http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal.
[2] Available at: http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/archive-search/02012013-the-educators.
[3] Available at: http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/archive-search/02012013-inspired-thinking.
[4] *Poverty and social exclusion in the UK and EU, 2005-2011*. ONS, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (167.10 kb) from: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_295020.pdf.
[5] Source: NCB *Policy & Parliamentary Information Digest*, 18 Jan 2013.

- 5.1% of people in the UK were considered to be experiencing severe material deprivation, compared with an EU average of 8.8%. The UK's severe material deprivation rate is broadly unchanged since 2005 when comparable figures were first produced.
- The percentage of people who say they are unable to meet unexpected financial expenses has increased considerably since the start of the economic downturn, up from 26.6% in 2007 to 36.6% in 2011. The proportion of people unable to afford an annual holiday has also increased from 21.4% to 29.7% over this period.
- The proportion of people in the UK living in households with low work intensity fell to 11.5% from 13.1% the previous year. Despite this fall, the level of low work intensity in the UK remains higher than in most other EU countries." [p1]

"The severe material deprivation rate measures the proportion of the population that cannot afford at least four of the following items:

1. To pay their rent, mortgage, utility bills or loan repayments,
2. To keep their home adequately warm,
3. To face unexpected financial expenses,
4. To eat meat or protein regularly,
5. To go on holiday for a week once a year,
6. A television set,
7. A washing machine,
8. A car,
9. A telephone." [p6]

The article also relates the deprivation rate to the rest of Europe:

"Across the EU there is a wide divergence in the severe material deprivation rate between countries. For instance, Bulgaria had the highest levels of severe material deprivation in the EU, with a rate of 41.0%, followed by Latvia and Romania with 30.9% and 29.4% respectively. In contrast, only 1.2% of the populations of Sweden and Luxembourg are considered to be severely materially deprived. Between 2010 and 2011, the largest changes in levels of severe material deprivation were in Bulgaria, Italy and Greece where rates increased by 8.6, 4.3 and 3.6 percentage points respectively." [p7]

This could provide useful support for backing up arguments about the need for provision of types of services.

Tackling social exclusion – Other Agencies

Monitoring poverty and social exclusion in Scotland 2013

JRF have just published their summary report[6],[7]. The key findings include:

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[6] *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion in Scotland 2013*. JRF, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (470.75 kb) from: http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/monitoring-poverty-scotland-2013.

"JRF's sixth study of poverty and social exclusion in Scotland highlights a huge rise in unemployment for under-25s, and stark and growing health inequalities.

Using the latest Government data, it assesses a wide range of indicators including unemployment, education, and health.

The research, carried out by the New Policy Institute, shows that:

- Since 2008, the number of under-25s who are unemployed has almost doubled to 90,000.
- Among those without dependent children, there was a rise in the number living in low-income, working families from 125,000 to 150,000
- The number of people working part-time, who want a full-time job, has risen from 70,000 in 2008 to 120,000 in 2012.
- A boy born in the most deprived 10 per cent of areas has a life expectancy of 68 – 8 years below the national average and 14 years below boys born in the least deprived areas."[8]

As noted in the fourth bullet point above, some of the grimmest findings are around health inequalities, including also:

- "Rates of mortality for heart disease (100 per 100,000 people aged under 75) are twice as high in deprived areas as the Scottish average.
- • Cancer mortality rates in the poorest areas (200 per 100,000) are 50% higher than average, and have not fallen in the last decade, while the average has fallen by one-sixth." [p1]

The report concludes:

"From now until the referendum in late 2014, the issue of independence will dominate the Scottish political landscape. Poverty is currently far from central to the independence debate as it stands but it is vital that it becomes so ...

This *Findings* highlights real and growing problems – rising poverty among working-age adults without dependent children, rising numbers of people working part-time for want of a full-time job, and high young adult unemployment. They are problems that cannot wait." [p6]

There is a lot of information here that not only updates the picture for Scotland, but could also prove valuable as background for our work.

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[7] Source: *Children & Young People Now Early Years News*, 22 Jan 2013.
[8] Taken from: http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/monitoring-poverty-scotland-2013.

Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Libraries: innovation, co-location and partnership

The long-awaited Labour Party Policy Review[9] has just been published.

The Network contributed ideas, comments and case studies – and John Vincent was asked to comment on various early drafts – although, sadly, we are not acknowledged.

However, it is gratifying to see a strong emphasis on the role in the community:

> "Libraries should act as a focus for community life." [p4]

social justice:

> "Libraries embody a basic principle of equality of opportunity, providing access to information and learning for all. They are ladders to improve social mobility." [p4]

education and literacy:

> "Libraries have an important role in encouraging reading and literacy, particularly amongst children; one in three of which do not own a single book." [p4]

as well as being a "partner for co-location or anchoring of other services" [p4].

It is, perhaps inevitably, general rather than specific, but, if the recommendations are really taken up, could well lead to some significant change:

> "As part of the Policy Review we are looking closely at the following areas;
> - A concerted effort to engage with councils and help them minimise the impact of cuts on frontline services – for example through a stronger focus on co-location and support for sharing of back-office functions.
> - A comprehensive review of the services libraries could offer their communities, and of opportunities for collaboration with other departments and outside bodies.
> - Developing a long-term strategy, in partnership with local authorities, to suit an evolving, and increasingly digital, society.
> - Developing ways in which libraries can engage with local communities to ensure they are responsive to their needs.
> - An organisation working across government and in collaboration with councils to effectively promote better libraries – sharing ideas,

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[9] *Libraries: innovation, co-location and partnership.* Labour Party ("Policy Review" series), 2012. Available to download as a pdf (660.92 kb) from: http://www.yourbritain.org.uk/uploads/editor/files/LIBRARIES.pdf.

encouraging best practice and new partnerships, raising awareness, promoting efficiency, providing advice to ministers and local authority leaders and supporting libraries across England (and also engaging with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

- National reading and business challenges, and other measures to raise the profile of local libraries and increase usership.
- A clearer and stronger system for oversight and standards, that strikes the right balance between effectiveness and avoiding bureaucratic constraint." [p8]

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Branches of opportunity

This report[10,11] "takes an in-depth look at the role that New York's public libraries play in the city's economy and quality of life and examines opportunities for libraries to make even greater contributions in the years ahead" [p4]

It argues that:

"Although they are often thought of as cultural institutions, the reality is that the public libraries are a key component of the city's human capital system. With roots in nearly every community across the five boroughs, New York's public libraries play a critical role in helping adults upgrade their skills and find jobs, assisting immigrants assimilate, fostering reading skills in young people and providing technology access for those who don't have a computer or an Internet connection at home." [p3]

In five key chapters, the report looks at:

- "For Immigrants, a Trusted Resource: Libraries serve as a magnet for many foreign-born New Yorkers, offering material in their native language and resources to help them adjust to life in their new country"

- "Senior Centers with a Difference: With the population aging, older New Yorkers are likely to become increasingly important to the city's libraries, but a lack of resources hampers efforts to serve this key population". This chapter shows that many older people rely on public libraries: "They come to read newspapers or pick up forms for government programs; they participate in social activities like bridge or classes such as Tai Chi, one of several physical fitness classes that NYPL offers especially for seniors. But, just as important, seniors rely on libraries as public spaces where they can see and meet other people, something they may not be able to do where they live" [p15].

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[10] David Giles. *Branches of opportunity*. Center for an Urban Future, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (2270 kb) from: http://www.nycfuture.org/images_pdfs/pdfs/BranchesofOpportunity.pdf.
[11] Thanks to John Pateman for alerting me to this.

- "Getting Ready for Work: Unbeknownst to many affluent, educated New Yorkers, libraries play a key role in helping people develop job-related skills from basic literacy to technical savvy"

- "Out of the Classroom, Into the Library: The city's public schools and its libraries are stepping up efforts to bring students to libraries to improve their skills, do research and pursue their own interests"

- "Getting Down to Business: Many successful New York businesses got their start at the local library, while the city's two business libraries offer more specialized information and run start-up competitions that have helped inspire a broader entrepreneurial culture"

It also includes chapters on mapping the City's libraries; the difference in growth of library usage between different boroughs (and shows the influence of budget; staffing; library service opening hours; the "comfort" of the building); the crisis brought on by lack of consistent funding; and a summary of the obstacles standing in the way of library development (isolated and outmoded buildings; issues surrounding e-lending; inadequate government and philanthropic support).

Finally, the report considers the library of the future, in which it suggests the following need to be taken into account:

- New types of buildings to meet new needs and demands, and new types of usage
- Developing creative partnerships
- Expanding website capabilities
- Investigating revenue-raising opportunities.

It concludes with a series of recommendations, some of which are New York-specific, but many of which would apply equally here:

- Increase library budgets
- Enable libraries to increase their hours
- Reduce the dependence on individual elected officials for capital funding
- Challenge city agencies to partner with libraries in delivering services and reaching new populations
- Change funding laws to allow libraries to bid for specific pots of money (eg for ESOL)
- Tap local sources of wealth for fundraising efforts
- Ramp up outside advocacy on behalf of libraries
- Invest in new buildings and designs to match current library needs
- Take advantage of the traditional neighbourhood bookstore's demise
- Establish new senior-focused branches and resource centres
- Create a task force to figure out how to improve services in high needs neighbourhoods
- Pursue new revenue opportunities
- Cultivate creative partnerships with both non- and for-profits
- Develop work-share and incubator spaces at appropriate branches

- Change capital funding arrangements to allow for interior projects to be included.

To conclude, some significant quotes:

Madhulika Khandelwal, director of the Asian/American Centre at Queens College:
"Libraries are an indispensable resource for immigrants … There have been many immigrant waves in America's history and many different institutions that helped them assimilate. In this age, I think libraries are the leading institution playing this role." [p5]

Tom Kamber, executive director of Older Adults Technology Services (OATS):
"Libraries offer seniors the opportunity to flourish and stay active and engaged in their development … At a time when the city is rapidly aging, there really isn't another institution that does that." [p6]

Denise Scott, managing director of the New York City programme for the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC):
"Libraries are often the only access to digital resources that are available at no cost in low-income communities." [p6]

Abbreviations and acronyms

ESOL = English for Speakers of Other Languages
JRF = Joseph Rowntree Foundation
NCB = National Children's Bureau
ONS = Office for National Statistics