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

Number 169, May 2015

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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 …?

CILIP Update

The April issue included:

- "Dementia help through Reading Well books", a very brief report of the launch of the latest part of the scheme [p14]
- "Read on support", which notes that CILIP has joined the Read On. Get On. campaign[1] [p15]
- "Alzheimer's Society input delivers friendly design", which looks at the partnership work involved in the redesign of Sandal Library in Wakefield[2] [p15]
- Lord Ramsbotham "Rehabilitation through literacy and learning", in which the former Chief Inspector of Prisons argues strongly in favour of giving prisoners access to books and library services [p33]
- Carolynn Rankin and Avril Brock "A pathway of opportunity for young children", which looks at the importance of the Early Years, and the key role that libraries can play[3] [pp40-41]

The May issue includes a couple of interesting articles:

- "Library task force: targeting the decision makers", an interview with Paul Blantern (Chair of the Task Force) [pp22-23]
- Stella Thebridge "A library card for every primary school pupil", which assesses Warwickshire Libraries' drive to enrol every primary school child [pp42-44].[4]

Museums Journal

The May issue[5] includes an interesting brief article[6], "Help the blind access your collections", by Matthew Cock and Kirin Saeed from VocalEyes[7], about the work

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[1] See: http://www.readongeton.org.uk/. There was a brief assessment of the campaign in *Network Newsletter*, 161, see: http://www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/Newsletter-NS-161.pdf.

[2] Wakefield Council have also published a brief guide to what they have done to make the Library more dementia-friendly; see: *Sandal Library – our first dementia friendly library*, http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/Documents/libraries/sandal-library-making-it-dementia-friendly.pdf.

[3] This article is drawn from their latest book, *Library services from birth to five: delivering the best start*. Facet Publishing, 2015. See: http://www.facetpublishing.co.uk/title.php?id=300082#.VVtFetHbLIU.

[4] Further information about *CILIP Update* at: http://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip/membership/membership-benefits/monthly-magazine-journals-and-ebulletins/cilip-update-magazine.

that still needs to be undertaken to make museums' collections more accessible [p15].

Among Equals

The Spring 2015 issue of the newsletter[8] from The Equality Trust argues that:

> "Eighty per cent of people now believe the gap between rich and poor is too great. 70% believe it is the government's role to reduce it. In fact recent polling found more people believe the government should focus on reducing the gap between rich and poor than believe they should first prioritise economic growth." [p2]

In order to focus on this for the post-Election period, this issue contains three interesting articles:

- Deborah Hargreaves (Director of the High Pay Centre) "Tackling high pay" [pp3-4]
- Danny Dorling (Professor of Human Geography, University of Oxford) "A progressive property tax", which looks at resetting Council Tax bands [pp5-8]
- Frances O'Grady (General Secretary of the TUC) "Addressing power imbalances in the workplace", which looks at some practical ways to tackle inequality at work [pp9-10].

Books for Keeps

The May issue[9] includes:

- Kimberley Reynolds "Radicals and Readers: the Little Rebels Children's Book Award", which briefly outlines some of the long history of "publishing politically, socially and environmentally engaged books for young readers", and then lists the winner and other shortlisted titles (the winner is the terrific *Scarlet ibis* by Gill Lewis[10]) [p5]

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[5] *Museums Journal*, May 2015. Further information about *MJ* at: http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal.

[6] Also available at: http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/comment/01052015-blind-access?utm_source=ma&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=20052015.

[7] "VocalEyes is a registered charity working across the nation at a variety of venues and with a range of partner organisations. The heart of our mission is to work with blind and partially sighted people to enhance engagement with the arts, through audio-description." [Taken from: http://www.vocaleyes.co.uk/page.asp?section=26&sectionTitle=About+VocalEyes].

[8] *Among Equals*, Spring 2015. Available to download as a pdf (414.79 kb) from: http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/civicrm/persist/contribute/file/Among%20Equals%20Spring%202015.pdf.

[9] *Books for Keeps*, 212, May 2015. Available to download from: http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/212.

[10] Gill Lewis. *Scarlet ibis*. Oxford University Press, 2014 – for further information, see: https://global.oup.com/education/product/9780192793553/?region=international.

- Margaret Mallett "Ten of the Best to introduce children to their human rights", which celebrates the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta [pp8-9].

Library Journal

LJ has recently published an important article, "President Obama Announces New Library Initiatives"[11]; these are:

- "The ConnectED Library Challenge, will engage civic leaders, libraries, and schools to work together to ensure that all school students receive public library cards. Commitments from 30 library systems are already in place."

- "As part of an effort to provide broad access to digital content, the Open eBooks Initiative has secured a promise from the "Big Five" publishers and a number of independent presses to provide $250 million in free ebooks to low-income students. Some 10,000 popular titles will be made available over the next three years, and libraries have joined forces with nonprofits to create an app to deliver the content, as well as material from the public domain."

The article also cites Barack Obama's support for libraries:

"President Obama has been working to highlight the importance of lifelong learning and the crucial role of America's public libraries. The president visited the ImaginOn branch of the Charlotte Mecklenberg Library, NC on April 15, and recently paid public tribute to his fifth-grade teacher, adding, 'This is a story that every single kid in this country, regardless of background or station in life, should be able to tell. Sharing stories like these helps underline the vital importance of fighting for that reality.'

At his visit to the Anacostia Neighborhood Library, in one of the district's poorest neighborhoods, Obama stated: 'I really want to talk about how we can harness the amazing technological revolution going on to help people read and be able to get great jobs and start their own businesses and do great things.'

Obama stressed the value of reading, and told the assembled crowd of middle schoolers, 'We're going to provide millions of ebooks online so they're available for young people who maybe don't have as many books at home, don't have access to a full stock of reading materials.'

While he mentioned that libraries around the country were taking part in his initiative, he said, 'The New York Public Library in particular is taking the lead' on the collaboration with book publishers."

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[11] Lisa Peet. "President Obama Announces New Library Initiatives", *Library Journal*, 30 Apr 2015, http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2015/04/youth-services/president-obama-announces-new-library-initiatives/# .

Youth Library Review

The latest issue[12] focuses on diversity, and includes:

- Peta Lawrence "Supporting looked after children in Surrey Libraries" [pp4-5]
- Becky Adams "Literacy through practical film production", an innovative piece of work in Northamptonshire [pp6-7]
- John Lake "*Eurotoolbox* – what is that?", a brief introduction to resource collection that introduces the latest children's books in European languages [p8]
- "Is everybody in? Inclusive Minds", which introduces the work of the organisation Inclusive Minds[13] [p9]
- Caroline Downie "I can sing a rainbow", a brief look at children's picture books with LGBTQ themes [pp10-11]
- Jake Hope "Raising our voices – The Diverse Voice initiative", an outline of the development of the list of 50 of the best culturally diverse children's books published since the 1950s[14] [pp12-13]
- Alison Brumwell "Diversity in children's and young adult fiction: *intimacy and adventure*", which looks at ways of introducing diversity to young people in a school setting [pp24-26]
- Amy Powell "Arts Award Explore in Telford and Wrekin Libraries" [pp27-28].

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Tackling social and digital exclusion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

Culture and poverty … [a further update]

To implement this review[15] even further, the Welsh Government has just established "The Fusion: Tackling Poverty through Culture" programme. This will bring together Communities First and cultural bodies for the first time to engage with and inspire young people and adults who would not normally have the opportunities to participate in culture and the arts.

"The initial strand of the programme establishes six Pioneer Areas in Swansea, Wrexham, Gwynedd, Cardiff, Newport and Torfaen, which will

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[12] *Youth Library Review*, 45, 2015. *YLR* is the annual journal of the CILIP Youth Libraries Group – further information at: http://www.cilip.org.uk/youth-libraries-group/publications.

[13] "Inclusive Minds is a collaboration of consultants and campaigners with a passion for inclusion, diversity, equality and accessibility in children's literature", see: http://www.inclusiveminds.com/.

[14] See: http://www.sevenstories.org.uk/news/latestnews/diverse-voice-top-50.

[15] *Culture and poverty: harnessing the power of the arts, culture and heritage to promote social justice in Wales – a report with recommendations by Baroness Kay Andrews OBE for the Welsh Government*. Welsh Government, 2014. Available to download as a pdf (988.36 kb) from: http://wales.gov.uk/docs/drah/publications/140313-culture-and-poverty-en.pdf.

be supported to trial new approaches which will place culture at the heart of their work with disadvantaged communities.

This includes creating a range of opportunities for people in Communities First areas to engage with culture, from school visits to enrich the school curriculum, to cultural volunteering opportunities and accredited learning for adults. Each will focus on helping individuals, families and communities engage with heritage and culture to support learning and developing important skills.

The programme is complemented by the Welsh Government's Arts and Creative Learning Plan, which will increase and improve arts opportunities in our schools, and greater cultural participation in the Schools Challenge Cymru programme."[16]

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Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

"The Carnegie Trust and the Wheatley Group: showing us how we can tackle digital exclusion"

This blogpost[17] is a handy brief summary of the current state of digital inclusion in the UK.

As it says:

"As the government pushes towards 'digital by default', a policy which envisions most public services being delivered online, it's worth remembering that 20% of the UK population still lack basic internet skills. Groups such as Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) have raised concerns that 'digital by default' could significantly impact on vulnerable and marginalised communities, particularly those claiming welfare benefits."

Drawing on information from the Government's strategy[18], it identifies that:

"[…] digital exclusion occurs among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society. These include:

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[16] Taken from: "Wales sets UK example using culture to tackle poverty", news release, 21 May 2015, http://llyw.cymru/newsroom/cultureandsport/2015/150521-culture-and-poverty/?lang=en.

[17] Steven McGinty. "The Carnegie Trust and the Wheatley Group: showing us how we can tackle digital exclusion", *Knowledge Hub*, 5 May 2015, https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/web/steven.mcginty/blog/-/blogs/the-carnegie-trust-and-the-wheatley-group-showing-us-how-we-can-tackle-digital-exclusion.

[18] *Government Digital Inclusion Strategy*. Cabinet Office/Government Digital Service, 2014. Available online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/government-digital-inclusion-strategy#people-who-are-digitally-excluded.

- those living in social housing (approximately 37% of those digitally-excluded live in social housing);
- those on low incomes (44% of people without basic digital skills are either on low wages or are unemployed);
- those with disabilities (54% of people who have never been online have disabilities);
- older people (69% of over 55's are without basic digital skills);
- young people (only 27% of young people who don't have access to the internet are in full-time employment)."

The blogpost goes on to identify some of the barriers to using online services (and the drivers for people wanting to go online), and then, very briefly, outlines some of the initiatives developed by the two organisations[19].

Finally, there is a useful list of links to further reading.[20]

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What happened to poverty under the Coalition?

This new assessment[21] by the NPI:

> "[…] presents NPI's estimates of the latest headline poverty statistics for the United Kingdom, for the financial year ending in March 2015. Starting with the latest published poverty statistics, for 2012/13, we have estimated the combined effects of the changes that have taken place since then in the size and mix of the population, the levels of employment and earnings, as well the value of benefits and tax allowances. The conclusion is clear: poverty in the UK is rising once more; it is rising among all age groups; and it is also deepening." [p3]

It summarises the position as:

> "Behind the overall headline that poverty is both rising and deepening, there are three specific points which mark 2013 as a turning point.
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> 1. Incomes in the middle are rising once more; at the bottom they have fallen.
> 2. Pensioner poverty is rising after half a dozen years of steady and substantial falls.

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[19] "Wheatley Group – which currently comprises four social landlords, a care organisation and two commercial subsidiaries – is named after John Wheatley, the Glasgow MP who became known as the father of social housing. The Group spans 12 local authority areas across Central Scotland, providing homes and award-winning services to over 100,000 people." [Taken from: http://www.wheatley-group.com/about-us/].

[20] Source: Ageing Well update from *Knowledge Hub*, 6 May 2015.

[21] Hannah Aldridge, Peter Kenway and Barry Born. *What happened to poverty under the Coalition?* New Policy Institute, 2015. Available to download as a pdf (319.66 kb) from:
http://npi.org.uk/files/5214/3031/5186/What_happened_to_poverty_under_the_Coalition_FINAL.pdf.

3. Poverty among tenants in the social rented sector also rose, which can be linked to tax and benefit changes." [p3]

The report then goes on to explore these findings in slightly more depth.[22]

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New reports: ESOL in prison and rehabilitation

The Bell Foundation[23] has just launched two reports to inform its three-year programme for prisoners and ex-offenders with English as a second language.

A prison within a prison …

This literature review[24] was commissioned by the Bell Foundation in order to inform their long-term programme in this field.

Key conclusions include:

- "There is no national data available on the number of individuals in the criminal justice system with ESOL needs, making it difficult to plan for provision for this group.
- Delivering effective ESOL in the custodial setting is challenging, due both to a lack of knowledge about the target group and due to the frequent transfers and movement restrictions of prisoners.
- Having ESOL needs presents a very real challenge for prisoners' experience in prison and after release."[25]

As the review says right at the end:

"… the recognition that ESOL needs can and do exacerbate all other problems faced by offenders and ex-offenders […] reminds us of the urgency for this subject to receive greater attention by all those concerned with their welfare, education and rehabilitation." [p37]

The language barrier to rehabilitation

The second report[26] highlights the dearth of information, and how little is being done with what is known.

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[22] Source: NCB *Policy & Parliamentary Information Digest*, 5 May 2015.

[23] "The Bell Foundation's main focus will be to work in partnership, initially in the UK, to create opportunities and change lives through language education for excluded individuals and communities, with the aim of changing practice, policy and public opinion through evidence." [Taken from: https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/About/].

[24] Catherine Carroll, Jane Hurry and Anita Wilson. *A prison within a prison: the provision of ESOL education and training for prisoners and ex-prisoners.* The Bell Foundation, 2015. Available to download as a pdf (1410 kb) from: https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/assets/Documents/APrisonwithinPrison.pdf?1423048388.

[25] Taken from: https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/News/2015-02-09/New-reports-ESOL-in-prison-rehabilitation-/.

[26] Liz Hales. *The language barrier to rehabilitation.* The Bell Foundation, 2015. Available to download as a pdf (1330 kb) from: https://www.bell-

"The main source of information that helps to indicate the potential size of this group is NOMS data for England and Wales, showing that in the last quarter of 2013 13% of the male prison population and 15% of the female prison population were non UK nationals. If one includes the Immigration Removal Centres run by the prison service the overall percentage of non UK nationals held in the prison estate is 14%. However distribution of those without UK nationality is not evenly spread, with 6 prisons holding over 28% at the time of this research […]

Nationality breakdown of this non UK population, taken from the latest available MOJ data from those in custody on 30th September 2013, shows, with the exception of those from the Irish Republic (796), a domination of those from the East European countries such as Poland (876) and Romania (532), followed by Albania (267). Within this East European group there is evidence from caseloads of those offering support to foreign offenders that there are large numbers of Roma15. Although it is not possible to substantiate this by the NOMS data, where only nationality is recorded, this is recognised in the Prison Inspectorate report for 2012-13 which points out that:

> 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners are a significant but often unrecognised minority in many prisons' [27].

There are also high numbers in the male and female estate from African countries such as Nigeria (525) and Somalia (439). The dominant Asian nationals are from Pakistan (558), India (431) Bangladesh (281), Vietnam (277), Afghanistan (157) and China (118). The pattern in the female estate is slightly different with the highest numbers from Vietnam and China. There are smaller numbers from the Middle East, dominated by those from Iran (195) and Iraq (157). The only other notable nationality group are Jamaicans (741) […]

Looking at these figures what is apparent is the fact that, in none of these countries is Standard English the mother tongue. In Nigeria, teaching Standard English is a core element of the education system, but Pidgin English is the core lingua franca, incorporating words from the many regional languages. In Jamaica Standard English is more dominant, used in all written material but in many areas of verbal use it is mixed with Jamaican Patois.

The other point of note is that in many of these countries of origin there is no universal free state education or social security system and some potential students, particularly girls, are excluded from education by

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foundation.org.uk/assets/Documents/TheLanguageBarriertoRehabilitation.pdf?1423048443.

[27] The report cites: HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales. *Annual Report 2012–13. Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 5A of the Prison Act 1952 as amended by Section 57 of the Criminal Justice Act 1982*. [HC 682] The Stationery Office, 2013. Available to download as a pdf (1960 kb) from: https://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/corporate-reports/hmi-prisons/hm-inspectorate-prisons-annual-report-2012-13.pdf.

poverty, or pulled out of education at the end of the primary stage to contribute to the family economy, or as a result of cultural or religious discrimination. Civil conflicts have also impacted on the ability of pupils to safely attend schooling or further education and the delivery of educational services in a number of the countries of origin listed above." [p12]

The report looks at delivery frameworks for education in custody and in the community, and then draws out of the investigation the following twelve conclusions:

"1. The growth in numbers of those caught up in the criminal justice system for whom English is not their first language.

2. The fact that this group of non UK nationals were often the most disadvantaged in terms of accessing work, accommodation and other services to which they had rights and that they were thus additionally vulnerable at the point of release from custody.

3. The fact that the need for support was generally higher for women and girls, who had experienced more restricted access to education.
4. The shared view that learning to understand written and spoken English opens a new door of opportunity and can be one of the most critical factors in resettlement for non-UK nationals.

5. The view that the priority in Literacy and ESOL delivery should be to enable their students to manage the challenges they face on a day to day basis (this being particularly acute for those going through court and/or in custody and whose residential status is being decided by Immigration). Beyond this, it should help them to access key resources, improve their abilities to find legal work and provide effective support for their children within the UK.

6. The need to adapt standard literacy and ESOL course provision to meet these goals.

7. The value of using peer support, both in terms of providing support for those who are most vulnerable and isolated and for the supporter, whose self-esteem can be enhanced by appropriate training and formalisation of their role.

8. The greatest demand is made by those who are pre-entry level and/or are illiterate and this is the areas where there is the greatest gap in community resources.

9. Due to the individuality of needs and ability to progress, delivery of literacy and ESOL support is sometimes most effective on a one-to-one basis.

10. Time outside the classroom needs to be set aside to discuss the many issues that those with English learning needs bring to those with whom they develop trust.

11. Changes in funding and rights of access for non UK nationals means that this group has felt a disproportionate effect of funding cuts in terms of eligibility to attend and finance courses.

12. The impact of funding cuts on all the third sector organisations contacted in the context of this work and the fact that confident forward planning of some of these organisations is hindered by the uncertainties of their role within the government's new rehabilitation agenda." [p27]

These two important reports give us valuable information, and also indications as to where our own ESOL work might have a new impact.[28]

LGBTQ issues – Other Agencies

The state of the city for Manchester's older lesbian, gay and bisexual communities

This new report[29] from the Manchester-based LGBT Foundation:

"[…] focuses on the needs of older LGB people in Manchester, discussing the available evidence on inequalities related to health and the wider determinants of health; setting out Manchester's policy context in relation to older people; exploring the inclusion of older LGB people's needs in service provision across Manchester; and recommending how this can be improved." [p6]

It includes some clear recommendations which could be applied anywhere:

- "All providers of public services across Manchester should monitor the sexual orientation of service users, to better understand access, experiences and outcomes for LGB people, and to improve services accordingly. Services should avoid assuming that sexuality is not relevant to older people, while retaining awareness of the particular sensitivities of recording sexual orientation for some older LGB service users.
- The specific needs of older LGB people should be recognised and addressed in the design and delivery of services across Manchester, including services which address the wider determinants that affect health such as housing, advice, support and care services [...]
- Commissioners should continue to support existing specialist services for older LGB people which reduce social isolation, and look to invest in new and innovative solutions to meeting the specific needs of these

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[28] Source: Learning Matters *e-news*, May 2015.

[29] *The state of the city for Manchester's older lesbian, gay and bisexual communities*. LGBT Foundation, 2015. Available to download as a pdf (1790 kb) from: http://lgbt.foundation/olderpeople?utm_source=LGBT+Foundation+weekly+bulletin&utm_campaign=e84c64b07d-LGBT_Foundation_Bulletin_19_05_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_43f936b912-e84c64b07d-197315569&mc_cid=e84c64b07d&mc_eid=a859be8b1c.

communities. The LGBT voluntary and community sector can share valuable evidence of need. These organisations, along with the communities they serve, can coproduce innovative solutions for their communities that are cost-effective and potentially attract other sources of investment [...]

- The LGBT voluntary and community sector should continue to work with partners and communities to develop and celebrate community assets, including exploring opportunities for intergenerational learning, and sharing achievements to recognise Manchester and the North West as a beacon of good practice nationally and internationally." [p21]

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Broader issues – Other Agencies

How to save our town centres …

This new title[30] has just been published by Policy Press.

It is divided into two sections, "Today" and "Tomorrow". In "Today", it begins with a brief introductory overview, "It took a riot", which looks at the sudden refocusing on the plight of the high street following the riots in 2011, and the setting up of the Portas review, and begins the process of analysing why it is that the high street is suffering.

The next chapter, "Thanks for the memories", looks briefly back to the heyday of the shopping high street, and identifies where things have started to go wrong: one key issue that Julian Dobson raises is the misplaced faith that politicians and planners have in "retail-led regeneration" – even successful developments, such as Liverpool One, he argues, thrive by sucking the life out of surrounding areas ("Projects like Liverpool One don't create wealth so much as concentrate it." [p25]). Other cities have tried massive redevelopments which turned into costly failures.

He identifies three sets of risks that are likely to change the future of the town centre: economic; environmental (eg the impact of severe weather on the economy and people's lives); and social (eg where we are in danger of becoming more and more disconnected from each other).

The next two chapters, "To market, to market" and "Lost in the supermarket" outline what has been lost in the move from smaller-scale, local shopping to large, often out-of-town supermarket shopping.

Finally, in "Declaring independence", Julian Dobson argues a strong case for the growth of small, independent retailers – whilst also recognising that:

> "Independent traders won't save the high street. Nor will hosts of people spending £5 or £10 at a time, although it will certainly help. But if we can

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[30] Julian Dobson. *How to save our town centres: a radical agenda for the future of high streets.* Policy Press, 2015, £23.99. Further information at: http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?ISB=9781447323938&.

activate the networks they are part of, the impossible can become possible." [p103]

The rest of the book looks at how this could happen.

> "It examines how business can be done better, how revitalised public services can turn high streets into places of possibility, how creative uses of in-between spaces can bring new life into our towns, and how town centres can once again become good places to live in. it explains why all of this requires a new look at property ownership, access to finance, and a philosophy of common interest and shared value." [p103]

"Part Two: Tomorrow" starts with "Raise a glass to the new economy" which looks at some of the different ways that retail is being organised locally, such as peer-to-peer business, the 'civic economy' (where social, public and private overlap), and "redirecting money that is already being spent" [p129]. This also involves planning via, for example, the Transition Town movement.

The book cites the Museum of East Anglian Life as a good example of a flourishing social enterprise that also aims to help to make their communities a better place.

The next chapter is called "The unexpected buzz in the library" – Julian Dobson uses the plight of public libraries as an example of what is happening to all sorts of high street organisations that "lay the foundations of a sense of place" [p133]. He goes on to look at "The rise and fall of the civic" – for example:

> "Pop into your high street post office and you'll observe a similar dynamic at work. A century ago the post office was a civic institution, often occupying a grand building in a prime location. Today it's more likely to look like a glorified convenience store […]" [p137]

The author argues that, instead, we could work towards "information commons", for example the joining together of different services (as is already happening widely), or linking more closely public and academic provision (however, he's not an advocate of having services run by volunteers!). Finally he touches on the move towards co-production.

In "The space in between", he looks at the broader environmental issues, particularly the different activities that often clash, eg walking or driving. He firmly rubbishes the idea that more free parking will bring in the customers; instead, as he goes on to argue in the next two chapters, "A place to live" and "Reclaiming the land", we ought to be looking at more creative – and less money-orientated – ways of using the land, especially in and around town centres.

"If we had a little money" looks at a range of different ways of funding these initiatives; and, finally, in "From 'me' towns to 'we' towns", he sets out the core philosophy – sharing resources and responsibility, 'whole-place thinking', creativity – all of which can give us hope to "craft a better future for the places where we live […]" [p270].

One of the key aims behind this book is to try to ensure that something happens! Julian Dobson identifies that, despite the work undertaken by Mary Portas, and the publication of the review[31], very little has actually changed; blame is cast (eg shoppers changing their patterns; car-parking charges; absentee landlords, etc), whereas there needs to be concerted action to make change happen.

The whole book is written in an accessible and engaging manner, and puts over some quite difficult concepts in a straightforward way. The analysis is very strong, and Julian Dobson also relates it to other work being undertaken, eg by the Equality and Diversity Forum. The way forward isn't easy, but the book begins to highlight some possible directions for a high street that "prioritises shared value: commerce, community, culture, and civic action" [p266].

For me, however, the one missing ingredient is how exactly we do get from 'here' to 'there': the book makes a mass of suggestions, and does have a very clear agenda for change, but I don't feel there is a clear enough 'route-map', and the author doesn't really relate this change to the 'political' realities of big business, local authorities, community politics, etc.

However, for any of us working in and/or living around a town centre that is dying on its feet, this is a very important book – highly recommended.

Abbreviations and acronyms

CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
ESOL = English for Speakers of Other Languages
MOJ = Ministry of Justice
NCB = National Children's Bureau
NOMS = National Offender Management Service
NPI = New Policy Institute

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[31] Mary Portas. *The Portas Review: an independent review into the future of our high streets.* BIS, 2011. Available to download as a pdf (1970 kb) from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6292/2081646.pdf.