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

“Inclusive Heritage Advice Hub”

This important and impressive Hub¹ has just been launched by Historic England.

“The Inclusive Heritage Advice Hub is part of Historic England’s commitment to supporting the heritage sector to become more diverse.

It contains digestible information for any organisation wishing to celebrate inclusive heritage and ensure their work is as diverse and inclusive as possible. Advice is presented through case studies, templates, checklists, guidance, and external signposting. Experts within Historic England created some of the resources, while others were commissioned externally.”

It has four main sections, and each of those contains links to separate webpages with advice and guidance. The main sections are:

- Inclusion and diversity in the workplace: “This section provides advice on creating an inclusive workplace culture and practical tips for supporting and building diverse teams.”
- Diverse workforces in the heritage sector: “This section provides advice on the benefits of diversifying your workforce, how to support diverse workforces, and how to collect data about the diversity of your staff and volunteers.”
- Inclusive governance boards and diverse trustees: “In this section, you will find advice about diversifying governance roles in your organisation, ensuring diverse boards are supported, and advice for potential future trustees within the heritage sector.”
- Understanding and working with diverse audiences and participants: “In this section, you will find advice on how best to undertake work with diverse audiences and participants, as well as information on why it is both important and beneficial for your organisation to work with diverse groups.”

There are also sections looking at:

- Exploring diverse histories
- Inclusion, diversity and equality training and professional development.

There is also a selection of case studies to illustrate some of this work.

¹ “Inclusive Heritage Advice Hub”, <https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/training-skills/heritageskills-cpd/inclusion/>.

To take just one example (to show the range of information available), in the fourth section is a sub-section, “What should we be aware of when looking to engage with refugee communities?” This includes some key points:

- “Remember that refugees are hugely diverse and have diverse needs
- Consider potential barriers around language, literacy, educational background and cultural difference
- Always consider the wellbeing of refugees you work with and be mindful of their potential trauma”

It outlines who refugees are, then asks “How can we connect with refugee communities?”, suggesting, for example, community-led organisations, local charities, ESOL providers, housing associations, local councils.

It then asks: “What are some of the barriers or challenges to be mindful of when doing heritage work with refugees?”, giving some very useful reminders about language, literacy, getting around, history and historical language, even the concept of heritage, cultural differences, trauma, discussing challenging histories, costs.

Finally, it looks at volunteering – and potential employment, if possible.

This is a really valuable resource, do look at it and see how it can apply to your work.

Highly recommended.²

LGBTQ+ issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

“Dozens of UK school librarians asked to remove LGBTQ+ books, survey finds”

This article³ in *The Guardian* reports that:

“More than two dozen school librarians in the UK have been asked to remove books – many of which are LGBTQ+ titles – from school library shelves, according to new survey data.”

² Source: LinkedIn.

³ Ella Creamer “Dozens of UK school librarians asked to remove LGBTQ+ books, survey finds”, *The Guardian*, 19 Aug 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/books/article/2024/aug/19/uk-school-librarians-asked-remove-lgbtq-books-index-on-censorship?utm_campaign=1263851_Fortnightly%20newsletter%202021%20August%202024%20-%20MEMBER&utm_medium=email&utm_source=The%20Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Library%20and%20Information%20Professionals&dm_i=6WFS,R36Z,9VBO9,3MWOS,1.

It is drawing on the results of a survey carried out by CILIP, the SLA and Index on Censorship⁴.

The article quotes Alison Tarrant (CE of the SLA):

“There appears to be something of a ‘trend’ of censorship targeted at books written by queer authors or featuring queer characters, Tarrant said. Censorship can take many different forms – one clear example is a teacher seeing a book in the library and asking the librarian to remove it. At other times, it is less clear: librarians might be told that the library can have a book, but it should not be on display.

There could also be a level of self-censorship, Tarrant said. Though nobody has told her this directly, it might be the case that certain books are not being bought in the first place to avoid complaints being made.

These UK bans may be influenced by book censorship in the US, which reached record highs last year. ‘We’ve seen a couple of cases where things have been stirred up or initiated by groups or people in America – it’s no one actually in the school community itself,’ said Tarrant.”

The article concludes:

“If a pupil is wanting to know more about sex or sexuality, I would much rather they went to their school library and explored the resources there than they went to the internet and explored what’s there, because that isn’t written with children in mind, and it’s not written with an educational purpose,’ said Tarrant.

If LGBTQ+ books are not ‘visible’, it is ‘exclusion and otherness by a more subtle means’, she added, and may affect the extent to which pupils looking for LGBTQ+ books see themselves as readers.”

Broader issues – Other Agencies

The Spirit Level at 15: the enduring impact of inequality

The Equality Trust was established as a result of the publication of the major book on inequality, *The spirit level*⁵, and the Trust has just published this evaluation⁶ of what has been achieved in the 15 years since publication.⁷

⁴ Index on Censorship have published a long article with more detail: Katie Dancey-Downs “Banned: school librarians shushed over LGBT+ books”, 19 Aug 2024, <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2024/08/banned-school-librarians-shushed-over-lgbt-books/>.

⁵ Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. *The spirit level: why more equal societies almost always do better*. Penguin Allen Lane, 2009.

⁶ Kate Pickett, Aini Gauhar, Richard Wilkinson, and Priya Sahni-Nicholas. *The Spirit Level at 15*. The Equality Trust, 2024, <https://media.equality-trust.out.re/uploads/2024/07/The-Spirit-Level-at-15-2024-FINAL.pdf>.

As the new paper says:

“Biased public policies and flawed economic systems are serving a few wealthy people at the expense of the wellbeing of people and planet. This update to the analyses of The Spirit Level underscores how inequality lies at the root of our escalating environmental, health and social crises, as can be seen when the new Index of Health, Social and Environment problems is plotted against income inequality.” [p4]

It is packed with important and useful information: for this brief assessment, I will list the main areas with a few examples. There are four main sections (with a fifth including recommendations).

Section 1: Inequality is central to the climate crisis

A couple of stark messages:

“Carbon emissions inequality: The carbon-intensive investment and consumption patterns of the ultra-wealthy – including private jets, yachts, and large homes – contribute significantly to carbon emissions. The carbon emissions of the rich are a smaller proportion of the ecological footprint in more equal countries.

Recycling: High inequality intensifies status competition and class insecurity, leading to overconsumption and a throwaway culture. This reduces social cohesion and public responsibility, undermining recycling efforts. More equal countries recycle a higher percentage of their waste compared to less equal countries.” [p4]

Section 2: Inequality erodes social cohesion

The opening paragraphs of the summary are worth quoting in full, given their timeliness:

“As income and wealth inequality rise, status anxiety and populism grow, and social cohesion erodes. Inequality not only increases social distances but also fosters a sense of relative deprivation, alongside worry about how others perceive us.

What emerges is a culture of competition rather than collaboration, increasing feelings of insecurity and inadequacy among the less affluent. The resulting isolation and chronic stress increases violence and vulnerability to mental illnesses. Wealth and income inequality also compound inequalities, such as those related to race and gender, leading to more discrimination and exclusion of people already in the margins, deepening their vulnerabilities. Income inequality sits at the heart of

⁷ There is also a brief summary in an article in *The Guardian*: Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett “Our landmark book revealed the cost of inequality. Fifteen years later, things have only got worse”, *The Guardian*, 23 Jul 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jul/23/landmark-book-spirit-level-cost-inequality-fifteen-years-later-worse-labour>.

social cohesion and wellbeing. When inequality worsens, so do trust, democracy, racial inequality, gender inequality, homicide rates, imprisonment, mental health stigma, and equal opportunities.” [p5]

Section 3: Inequality prejudices the chances of children and young people

Again, a powerful summary:

“For the vast majority of young people today, the policies that allowed an obscenely large share of the world’s wealth to accumulate at the highest income levels have resulted in a challenging present and an anxiety-inducing future.

The largest global youth population in history, today’s young people bear the burden of being failed by a broken social contract through social, economic and political inequalities that are not allowing them the living standard afforded to their parents, and they are being robbed of the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. Inequality prejudices the chances of children and young people, impacting child wellbeing, educational underachievement, educational inequality, teenage births, the parity of spending on young people and social mobility.” [p6]

Given what we have heard this week about GCSE passes, this is also highly relevant:

“High inequality creates a persistent educational achievement gap in maths and reading scores between the most and least advantaged students.” [p6]

Section 4: Inequality is a determinant of population health and wellbeing

“Health inequalities result from the social conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, and from inequities in power, wealth, and resources – the social determinants of health. Rising income inequality has worsened infant mortality, life expectancy, excess deaths from COVID-19, life satisfaction, and the prevalence of drug use, diabetes, asthma, obesity and mental illness.” [p7]

Section 5: Recommendations

These include:

1. “Commence the Socio-economic Duty (SED): The SED, as outlined in Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010, is a tool designed to reduce inequalities resulting from socioeconomic disadvantage. Despite its potential, this duty has not been enacted in England, although it has been successfully implemented in Scotland and Wales. All public bodies should be required to conduct Socioeconomic Impact Assessments as part of their decision-making processes. These assessments should

evaluate how proposed policies, programmes, and projects will affect socioeconomic inequalities.” [p8]

2. “Create co-production mechanisms: Develop mechanisms and closed feedback loops for communities to actively participate in identifying needs, designing services on how best to meet them, and overseeing accountability through co-production processes.” [p8]
3. Introduce wealth taxes
4. Transform the social security system
5. “Invest in community wealth building (CWB): Establish a CWB Task Force to develop and enact policies that support CWB principles, including incentives to channel investment into good local jobs, municipal forms of organisational ownership, public procurement practices that benefit local supply chains, and the role of anchor institutions in promoting decent work.” [p8]

More specifically relevant to our work:

“Put wellbeing at the heart of our economy: Shift the national measure of success away from the pursuit of unsustainable economic growth and crude GDP metrics to instead focus on providing a high quality of life for all, within ecological limits. The measure should be replaced with a broader suite of indicators that capture multidimensional wellbeing, including health, education, inequality, environmental quality, and subjective wellbeing.” [p31]

“Guarantee access to free basic public services: Entitlement to public services must be guaranteed based on need, not ability to pay, so that people are able to participate fully in society. Universal access must be extended to a range of essential public services, including education, health, water, energy, connectivity, and housing.” [p32]

“Invest in and diversify Third Spaces: Support a wide range of Third Spaces, including public libraries, community gardens, and placemaking workshops to preserve and uphold public areas, and encourage interclass mixing and public engagement. Enact policies that support the development and sustainability of Third Spaces, including tax incentives for organisations that provide community-oriented spaces, and funding for public Third Spaces.” [p32]

Finally, there is a list of resources and further reading.

This is a really useful, timely report, and one which we should be able to draw upon to support our work.

Highly recommended.⁸

⁸ Source: email from The Equality Trust, 24 Jul 2024.

Abbreviations and acronyms

CE = Chief Executive
CWB = community wealth building
GDP = gross domestic product
SED = Socio-economic Duty
SLA = School Library Association

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