

Editorial

Discontent – a moment for opportunity and inclusion?

In recent months the world has witnessed upheaval and protest. The 'Arab Spring' saw the governments of Tunisia's Ben Ali, Egypt's Mubarak and Libya's Gaddafi fall. In Tunisia protestors moved from neglected rural sites to the cities, in Egypt young urban people generated change from the heart of the major cities, whilst in Libya the eastern provinces gave birth to an armed rebellion throughout the regional and urban government strongholds. The uprisings of these popular political and social movements are not unique in the region as each country's regime developed in different ways against the backdrop of contested responses to European/modern western engagement. What unifies these movements however is the shared aspiration for recognition of respect due to each citizen and the need for each government to be stimulated and motivated by its' citizenry. In the West, the 'Occupy' movement kick-started by Wall Street/New York protests on 17 September 2011 has experienced a groundswell of support across the globe with 2,464 towns and cities¹ worldwide signing up to the catchcry of "We are the 99%".

From Italy, Ireland, to Spain and now Greece, world attention has been captured by the European Sovereign debt crisis where unemployment rates oscillate between an alarming 12 – 21% of the population. In the United Kingdom, Manchester and London neighbourhoods were sites of rioting in August. Media reported mayhem, largely focussing headlines on the degree and nature of physical damage and efforts by the police force to dampen down 'hostilities'. Racial profiling figured highly in commentary on television and digital media re-igniting debate about the value, achievements or implied failures of multiculturalism. All rioters were painted as vandals, hoodlums, criminals in spite of many genuine and heartfelt grievances from those people disenfranchised by the inequities of government policies and practice. But it is not essentially about wealthy vs. poor, or racism vs. multiculturalism. This is too simplistic. How can we talk sensibly, in a considered and respectful way about people who feel so disempowered in their own communities and how can we develop strategies to have government be responsive to need, to build strong communities? What is really interesting about these developments is that they have involved a reappraisal of the role and choice of social theory to explain asymmetrical power relations as well strategies of engagement. These conversations are occurring between local community, not-for-profit organisations, unionists and of course, universities.

It would be easy to believe that these events are modern in nature, yet 220 years ago there was a crisis in France, grasped as a moment of opportunity, that produced the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* [*Déclaration des droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*] (1789). In 1788- 1789 poor people from French cities faced a harsh winter. Unwilling to adopt cheaper foods introduced from the New World, the French poor relied on bread and had little reserves to sustain them. When a catastrophe caused the price of bread to rise nearly 90% in one year, many found themselves working to keep the requisite two loaves of bread on the table.² This is often known as the winter of discontent. The roots of the food shortages,

feudalism and escalation of taxes provoked what is now known as the French Revolution. During the Revolution itself, bread riots again erupted, igniting the infamous Reign of Terror in 1793. We are in the midst of profound change and whilst there is uncertainty of the ways that 'our crisis' will unravel, we know that 'solutions' to social malcontent and injustice occurs through informed critical conversation, debate and dialogue. The social inclusion platform must be at the core of any considerations of a social, economic, and environmental politics.

Margaret Shield, Melissa Graham and Ann Taket report on the promising effects of implementation and continuation of area-specific interventions to address disadvantage and social exclusion across Victoria, Australia in their article "*Neighbourhood renewal in Victoria, Australia: An effective way to address social inclusion*". A comparative study of data collected from two Neighbourhood Renewal sites leads the authors to evaluate community members' assessment of the quality and accessibility of services, government performance, opportunity for education and employment, community participation, sense of belonging, trust, hope, influence and control over the future.

John O'Rourke also explores opportunity for education as he looks at the emerging policy initiative in the university setting which specifically addresses the inclusion of students with an intellectual or developmental disability. Based on an extensive examination of a pilot study, "*Inclusion at University: Can we do more than open the door?*" considers the design of a specific program of inclusion at a Western Australian university and reflects on different models from Canada, United States of America, Ireland, Finland and Australia.

Rinta, Purves, Welch, Elmer and Bissig introduces the reader to another type of inclusive education strategy when they report on the "*Connections between children's feelings of social inclusion and their musical backgrounds*". The article reports on a study undertaken that forms a part of an EU-funded project on music technology and social inclusion specifically in relation to migrant children and children with special educational needs. As well as exploring the connections between musical backgrounds and children's feelings of social inclusion the study developed and analysed the reliability, validity and effectiveness of the social inclusion assessment instrument used in data gathered with the participant group; 8-11 year-old children in the UK and Finland.

Zoe Murray highlights the importance of community representative, participatory and advocacy roles in the community, especially in planning and implementing public health decisions. "*Municipal public health planning needs representational skills within the community*", argues that creating social partnerships is an effective tool for building participatory government. Murray examines the framework in Queensland, Australia of Municipal Public Health Planning (MPHP) based on the WHO Healthy Cities model. Murray also considers the elements of organisational skills, communication and identification of stakeholder and target populations as a critical component to successful representative outcomes.

Susanna Chamberlain's discussion paper "*Whispers on the wind*": *social inclusion and the media* is an historical overview from the 17th century to the present day, linking social movements and developments in the transmission of information through the ephemeral practices of the media. The author asks significant questions, particularly in the light of the Arab Spring, U.K. riots and the 'Occupy' movements. What is the relationship between the growth and expansion of various forms of the media and social movements which emerge simultaneously? Chamberlain engages in discussion with strong intertwining of historical framing and questions the power,

place and overall influence of technologies of communication over time and asks “Has the media enabled, demanded or actively created a space for the inclusion of varying groups in society and how has this been done?”

Zoe Rathus reflects on the importance of legal clinics, ‘Street Law’ and her outstanding contribution as legal educator in the interview conducted at Griffith University. Amongst Zoe’s achievements is her induction into the Order of Australia for service to the law, particularly through contributions to the rights of women, children and the Indigenous community, to education and to professional organisations.

The two books reviewed in this edition address issues that are different in scope and subject but both bear testimony to the role of history in shaping contemporary approaches to social inclusion. *Serena Mullins* considers Stephen Kuusisto’s autobiographical work, his life with blindness and his personal and political growth from 1950’s USA to the late 1990’s in *Planet of the Blind*. In contrast *Majid Rafizadeh* explores Janet Afary’s intricate, intriguing and dense historical research of women’s place within ancient and present day cultural landscapes in *Sexual Politics of Modern Iran*.

In this issue of the *Journal of Social Inclusion* we travel across territories, engage in debate; discover new ways of responding to the words, the idea, the practice and the varied meanings of social inclusion. In the process of deliberation, even contention, we recognise that which is recent is actually not so separate from the peoples and struggles of past generations, and perhaps it is in the inclusive access to forms of communication which provide impetus for a global aspiration for social justice.

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On behalf of the Editorial Team

¹ As of the 4th November 2011, <http://www.meetup.com/occupytogether/>.

² Hufton, Olwen. Social Conflict and the Grain Supply in Eighteenth-Century France, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 14, No. 2, *Hunger and History: The Impact of Changing Food Production and Consumption Patterns on Society* (Autumn, 1983), pp. 303-331