Note from the editors: [diversity and exclusion in construction]

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Diversity and Exclusion in Construction
With a slight delay, we bring you the third issue of CLR-News for 2012. We are approaching the 20th anniversary of our Journal; more about it in the number four issue. In the meantime, work has been done in several areas of the (European) social agenda. A group of researchers has cooperated with the EFBWW and the European Parliament on a new initiative in the field of asbestos. This has led to the idea to produce a new book in the series CLR-Studies; hopefully ready to be launched during our AGM in 2013. Other activities involve the continuing story of the Posting debate. The EC proposal for an Enforcement Directive related to the functioning of the Posting Directive will stay on the agenda for a while. And with the withdrawal of the so-called Monti 2 Regulation, the political dimension of the Enforcement Directive might become even more important. We hope to bring more about this debate in one of our next issues.

This issue has been co-edited by Linda Clarke and Paul Chan. Under the general heading of diversity and exclusion, they have collected a broad range of contributions. The themes of this issue have not (yet) been tackled prominently in relation to the labour processes in construction (apart from the position of migrant workers and of women – for instance in the CLR-book Women in construction). The core meaning of social exclusion is usually bound up with social isolation and segregation, and with a lack of social mobility. The contributions in this issue partly cover the headings of the construction industry and the production of the built environment (labour process, labour market participation), besides the important issue of health and safety for special groups on the labour market.

The theme diversity is a sensitive issue in the sector. Construction workers are often associated with macho behaviour: She walks through a group of construction workers who are eating lunch in a line along the pavement. Her stomach tightens with terror and revulsion; her face becomes contorted into a grimace of self-control and fake
unawareness; her walk and carriage become stiff and dehumanized. No matter what they say to her it will be unbearable. She knows that they will not physically assault her or hurt her. They will use her body with their eyes (Meredith Tax, Women’s Liberation: Notes from the Second Year, 1970, p. 12). And the general notion is that gender and ethnic minority exclusion is a common practice in the industry. Yet, there are other forms of exclusion that have hitherto been given scant attention in construction labour research. For example, the lived experiences of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered (LGBT) individuals in the construction industry remain underrepresented. Issues of class and race continue to be ignored in much contemporary writings about construction work. Indeed, these constitute very fertile opportunities for future research as we aspire to build a more equal, diverse and inclusive construction industry.

In this issue, Petersen, Pederson and Baarts discuss health and safety practices in the Danish construction industry given the influx of migrant workers following EU enlargement in 2004. They explore how language and communication barriers, along-side poor employment conditions especially of the ‘hidden’ migrant workers working in the informal economy, serve to promote dangerous work in the sector. Matthew Hallowell and Rayyan Alsamadani also examine, using social network analysis, how language proficiency plays a crucial role in facilitating effective communication of safety messages in the construction workplace. Their findings suggest that multi-lingual workers, as well as younger workers (i.e. below the age of 35), play a significant role as connectors of safety information within social networks at the workplace.

Of course, securing the future for young workers is vital for sustaining the construction industry. Yet, Lefteris Kretsos paints a rather grim picture of the employment prospects of young people in the Greek construction industry. He argues that the growing precarious employment conditions for young workers is not simply a consequence of structural adjustments due to the global financial crisis, but also a legacy of social, cultural and economic conditions that pre-date the 2008 crisis. Two further articles explore the dynamics of exclusion in the construction industry. Valerie Francis discusses the Australian situation, highlighting the limits of growing participation of women in construction work; women still occupy much of the
administrative positions in the Australian construction industry whilst participation in craft work remains low. Linda Clarke provides an update of the blacklisting scandal in the UK construction industry, as she weaves together a series of interview quotes from victims of blacklisting in the 1960s to illustrate the far-reaching implications of such ‘hidden’ exclusion.

This issue also contains a number of news reports. Paul Chan writes about the marginalisation of queer voices in construction as he puts out a call for participants in a study on sexuality and construction. Kate Sang and Abigail Powell also set the scene for a forthcoming special issue on equality, diversity and inclusion in the construction industry, to be featured in Construction Management and Economics in 2013. Two book reviews conclude this issue. Chris Wall reviews Darren Thiel’s Builders: Class, Gender and Ethnicity in the Construction Industry, praising its rich ethnographic context whilst posing further questions on employment relations and the production of masculinities at the workplace. Jörn Janssen reviews Nicolas Pons-Vignon and Phumzile Ncube’s Confronting Finance to raise concerns over future directions of the global labour movement.

A number of critical themes have emerged from the collection featured in this issue:

- Often, scholars have tackled the challenges of building a more equal, diverse and inclusive construction industry by focusing on the structural characteristics of construction work and the sector (e.g. transient nature of construction projects, physical demands of the work, male-dominated etc.). Yet, the articles presented in this issue show that exclusionary forces in the construction industry cannot simply be explained through structural means, but that one should also consider the interplay between social, cultural and economic concerns and how these serve to produce and reproduce the structural characteristics of the sector.

- From the contributions presented in this issue, there appears to be a developing tension between the decline of collective, social institutions and the rise of an informal (often-underground) economy and working practices. Whilst the CLR community is more familiar with the marginalisation of collective, social institutions, there is certainly scope for more research attended to the socialisation of informal practices at the workplace and how these pro-
mote or prevent the creation of a more equal, diverse and inclusive industry.

- With the rise of youth unemployment across Europe, there is a need to place more emphasis on researching age in the construction industry, an issue that has been given scant attention in the study of equality, diversity and inclusion in construction.
- Finally, although much discussion about diversity in the construction industry focuses on what goes on at the workplace, the consequences of exclusion is often felt beyond the realms of organisational life. It is therefore useful to note that a number of articles found in this issue explore the connections between living conditions and employment conditions, and between personal (private) lives and what goes on in employment and organisational (public) life.

We hope you find the articles, reports and reviews of books worthwhile to read. Enjoy this issue and we look forward to receiving your feedback.