

Tuesday 2 September 2003

Writing up the balance sheet on immigration

The often heated and controversial debates about Australian immigration and multiculturalism have failed to consider the contribution of migrants to building better cities and towns according to the organiser of a seminar on ethnic communities this Thursday (4 September) at the University of Technology, Sydney.

UTS Professor of Economics Jock Collins is leading a push to establish an Australia-wide research partnership to explore the past, present and future links between ethnic diversity in Australian cities and the building of better local communities. The project is being developed by the Australian Centre for Co-operative Research and Development (ACCORD), a joint centre of UTS and Charles Sturt University.

Professor Collins says new research from UTS shows that in Sydney alone immigrant communities from a non-English speaking background have contributed nearly \$1 billion to build churches, schools, clubs and childcare facilities.

"Most of these funds were generated by ethnic communities who provided the volunteer labour to build, staff and operate facilities that are increasingly used by all members of the suburbs where they are located," he said.

Professor Collins said this was in contrast to negative views on the impact of immigration, including the "green" argument that immigration is not environmentally sustainable.

"The impact of immigration on Sydney's environment is complex, particularly since it is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world today," he said.

"Simplistic analysis that blames immigration and immigrants for Sydney's environmental problems runs the risk of both undermining Sydney's social environment while, at the same time, redirecting attention away from the physical environmental reforms that are needed the most. This fails the critical test for political leadership that sustains both Sydney's social and physical environment."

Thursday's ACCORD seminar *Ethnic Communities Building Better Australian Cities and Towns* aims to start telling the story of why, when, where and how Australia's diverse immigrant communities have helped improve the urban, suburban and rural environment in a way that has been beneficial to all Australians.

Speakers include: Stepan Kerkyasharian, Chairman of the NSW Community Relations Commission; Maire Sheehan, the Mayor of Leichhardt; Ian Burnley, Emeritus Professor of Geography UNSW; and Ms Hurriyet Babacan, Executive Director of the Community Outcomes Branch, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Queensland Government.

The seminar will also launch a report by Walter Lalich of UTS on *Ethnic Community Capital in Sydney*, which documents the contribution that immigrant communities from non-English speaking backgrounds have made to building the city of Sydney.

"It is only by new research that we can fully document the contributions that immigrant Australians have made to improve the suburbs and towns that they live in. Only then can we look at the balance sheet to determine if immigration benefits Australian or not," Professor Collins said.

The seminar will be held from 9am to 1pm in Room 470, Level 2, UTS Building 10, Jones St, Broadway.

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