

## The Welcome Workshop Summary



The Hawke EU Centre for Mobilities Migrations and Cultural Transformations hosted the *Welcome Workshop* to discuss topics of arrival, welcome and placemaking in an Australian context. It was designed to be a community-led discussion with representatives from various organisations who would encourage questions, possibilities and proposals to assist the social inclusion of new Australians. *Welcome Workshop* convenors, Associate Professor Joanne Cys and Dr Angelique Edmonds outlined the workshop as being the first event of the Hawke EU Centre's 'Policy and Outreach' work package, which aims to contribute to an international understanding of issues related to global mobilities. The workshop provoked questions such as 'What does it mean to feel welcome?' 'At what point does one feel welcome in a new place?' and 'What contributes to feeling welcome?'

A panel of five speakers presented views, ideas, challenges, experiences, problems and opportunities relating to the notion of 'welcome':

- South Australian Artist **Peter Drew** spoke about creative catalysts for changing the conversation using the example of a recent project he undertook with students from the Adelaide Secondary School of English.
- Co-ordinator of youth services at the Australian Refugee Association (SA) **Dijana Karaahmetovic** discussed young people's experiences of arrival and welcome, making references to her personal experience

- National Director of Welcome to Australia **Brad Chilcott** spoke of the importance of providing everyday experiences of welcome: the role of place and the unexpected
- **Eugenia Tsoulis** from the Migrant Resource Centre (SA) discussed the importance of providing support to navigate the formalities of migration and arrival
- **Mayor Angela Keneally** from The City of Charles Sturt used examples of her Council's responses to the challenges of civic responsibilities for recent arrivals; and in transforming communities of welcome.

Following the speaker presentations, the workshop participants worked in small groups to focus on the various aspects of welcome proposed by the speakers. The group discussions all aspired to improve existing or create new approaches, initiatives or policies to foster a sense of welcome in our society.

To view Peter Drew's "My Story, My City" Video see:

<http://unisa.edu.au/Research/Hawke-EU-Centre-for-Mobilities-Migrations-and-Cultural-Transformations/News-and-events/Multimedia/>



## Summary of discussion and findings from the Workshop:

### Creative catalysts for changing the conversation about Welcome

Word choice is a tool of communication taken for granted, however it is imperative to generating a sense of welcome. The word 'welcome' itself raises awareness, not only about the feelings of the guest but also the host who supposedly has the authority to say welcome. When changing the conversation, the alternative perspective, that of the host, must be discussed. As an example Peter Drew's *Real Australians Say Welcome* project acted as a catalyst to sway the conversation to focus on those who considered themselves the "Real Australians". His word choice questioned the role nationalists play in creating an inclusive environment as opposed to requiring new arrivals to assimilate. The ability to say welcome should be accepted as an act of strength and a form of acceptance that regardless of one's nationality, as human beings we are equal.

Creativity was agreed as being both an effective and engaging method of changing and challenging the sentiment towards migrants. Art gives people the opportunity to participate and contribute. It speaks directly to identity and encourages emotional connections with both the creator and viewer. It is through creativity that people are able to tell their stories that should be viewed as assets to this country.

As opposed to a focus on differences, a balance of difference *and* similarity in discussions about diversity is required. Differences should be positively viewed as having the potential to contribute and enrich existing culture. Meanwhile emphasising similarities between examples that seem worlds apart can remind people of their common humanity. Although recently arrivals are often active volunteers, their skills need to be recognised and they should be assisted in achieving employment. Local government should also take lead roles to build a sense of welcome in their council areas and not shy away from so called "political issues".

### Support to navigate the formalities of Welcome

To help integration, new arrivals should be given the choice of being introduced to the religious or ethnic communities they may feel connected to. This can help them feel comfortable and assist their integration. Service providers need to be aware of the complex cultural, linguistic, political and religious make up of groups. For this reason there should be good communication between the service provider and client to understand their needs and desires to accommodate unaffiliated and affiliated group services. Participants said there should be focus on a strengths-based approach to help clients achieve independence and employment, although welfare is essential to providing basic living support during

the resettlement process. At the same time, the process of adaptation is adaptation occurs at a different pace for each individual and people should not be expected to integrate by a specific time. They should also be allowed and encouraged to nurture their roots and traditions, as they can enrich Australian values. It was suggested that the resettlement process be improved by considering the systematic differences of migrant's home countries and the Australian governments processing procedure. Bureaucracy was also viewed as isolating which is contrary to the view that new arrivals must be made to feel equal and appreciated by the system. It was recommended that service providers worked together to complement each other rather than compete for funding. They should be given opportunities to consult with government and provide suggestions on how to improve the various formalities of welcome, including the resettlement process.

### Everyday experiences of Welcome

To help build a sense of welcome, understanding the journeys of migrants, refugees and other recent arrivals is important. Workshop participants believed there was still a tendency for recent arrivals to feel isolated in Australia and therefore still room for improvement. The role of education systems and local council were identified as being key to fostering the idea of welcome in younger generations. One group participant, who migrated from England saw the need to balance assimilation with the conservation of her English culture. Therefore to achieve a welcoming environment, recent arrivals should not be given the ultimatum of choosing Australia or their mother country. Power relations behind the "invasion of space" were then discussed by referring to the Adelaide Hills detention centre. Workshop participants felt racist groups had lost their sense of humanity and became defensive over the space they believed to have power over. Such sentiment may have resulted from attributing a "guest" identity to new arrivals that can induce resistance from the "host" to accept newcomers and this is not in line with the values of a multicultural society.

### Youth Experiences of arrival and Welcome

Workshop participants recognised the contradictions of welcoming and prejudice existing in Australian society. However they stated we must not neglect our power as individuals to shape and make change in society. Welcoming actions do not have to be complicated or difficult, people enjoy simple events to engage, and have informal discussions, with others. By forming individual relationships and sharing knowledge, feelings of isolation are decreased, self-esteem is built and confidence begins to bloom. Connectedness should be facilitated through events like shared dinners. Barriers that obstruct connection-building should be analysed and understood in order to break them down. The group stated the media plays a

major role in constructing the perceived view of migrants that can hinder relationship building and the current negative media rhetoric should change. Additionally, habits of labelling and categorising multicultural groups should be altered as they can lead to isolation and tension. The group also saw a need to accept identities as ever changing. New arrivals should be supported in determining 'who they are' while host societies should not see diversity as threats to their identity.

For more information of The Welcome Workshop, visit the below link to the Hawke EU Centre webpage:

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/Research/Hawke-EU-Centre-for-Mobilities-Migrations-and-Cultural-Transformations/News-and-events/Past-Events/The-Welcome-Workshop/>

Or Contact the Conference Convenors:

**Associate Professor Joanne Cys**  
[Joanne.cys@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Joanne.cys@unisa.edu.au)

**Dr Angelique Edmonds**  
[Angelique.edmonds@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Angelique.edmonds@unisa.edu.au)

