



Ilan Katz, Director of SPRC 2007–2011

It seems very strange to celebrate 40 years of SPRC at this time. Of course, a celebration during COVID 19 is never going to be normal, and the SPRC founders could hardly have anticipated that 40 years down the track the centre's celebration would be largely conducted online. On the other hand (so far) SPRC appears to be demonstrating the resilience which has characterised its progress since its establishment in 1980, and even though this anniversary will be celebrated with virtual champagne, canapes and cakes, there is an enormous amount to celebrate. SPRC is special in a number of different ways. Firstly, in terms of its outputs over the 40 years,

SPRC staff have produced prodigious numbers of influential reports, seminars, conference presentations, blogs and tweets. The cumulative impact of the research conducted by SPRC members of staff must be very difficult to calculate. Secondly SPRC has maintained a degree of collegiality which is possibly unique in university centres and departments for the duration of its existence. Most impressively, perhaps, has been that SPRC has been able to maintain its organisational culture and impact even though it has confronted significant headwinds throughout its existence.

My own tenure as (Acting) Director started with me, having arrived from the UK the previous week, being summoned to the Dean's office and told by the Associate Dean Research (there was no Faculty Executive Director and the ADR was responsible for centres) that SPRC was in the red, and that unless urgent action was taken, the Dean was considering closing the SPRC or at least radically changing its operation. This scenario was repeated a number of times during my time as Director, and I dare say that every senior manager of SPRC has had similar experiences from time to time. The SPRC 'business model' was then, as it is now, out of alignment with traditional models of funding at universities and posed challenges then as it does now to accounting systems and budget processes. Perhaps paradoxically, the Centre's focus on applied research for policy impact and diverse partnerships is now much closer to the goals of social impact and leadership than other traditional models of research.

Surviving 40 years is testimony to the hard work and determination of successive leadership groups over the years and also the support of SPRC staff, who have mostly supported the leadership in maintaining SPRC and keeping it focused on its task. Two other examples of SPRC prevailing over the resistance of the UNSW bureaucracy were firstly the establishment of the HDR program (by Bettina Cass and Deb Brennan) and the long campaign to recognise the SPRC way of working in staff promotions, given that most SPRC staff work and publish in teams rather than as individuals. In both these enterprises we faced hostility and condescension from some colleagues who were reluctant to accept different ways of working and different forms of academic excellence. In both of these assumptions the powers that be were proved wrong.

However, SPRC's unique contribution is not really its longevity and resilience. SPRC exists to make a difference to the world by producing robust evidence and deep theoretical insights into social policies which enable policy makers and advocates to use our research to make the world a more equitable place for vulnerable and oppressed populations. Each and every research output, conference presentation and tweet is ultimately aimed at this ultimate goal. This is even more significant now in the age of social media and fake news. It is my hope that SPRC will continue despite the significant headwinds, for at least the next 40 years.