
Community Development in Theory and Practice. An International Reader

G. Craig, K. Popple and M. Shaw eds. Spokesman, Nottingham, UK, 2008, 348 pp, ISBN 978 085124 730 4, £15 stg.

The chapters assembled for this book have been previously published in the *Community Development Journal* (CDJ). The genesis of the CDJ, which was established in 1966, lay in the commitment of community development practitioners returning from work in the British colonies to applying the approaches and methods of community development to Britain. The key rationale for the collection was to present articles that are representative of the time, place, and context in which they were written. Five criteria

were used in the selection of the articles for publication. First, the editors sought international spread; secondly, they wanted the reader to be able to go through the life of the CDJ; thirdly, they were committed to reflecting on the differing contexts of community development; fourthly, it was important that an adequate selection of articles on theory be included; and finally, the editors attempted to cover a good range of issues concerned with social divisions.

The collection promises an overview of the changing nature of community development, which, at the same time, provides a taste of the ways in which the CDJ has both reflected the changes and steered community development into new territories. This is a tall order. As Marjorie Mayo points out in the Introduction, community development is essentially a contested field. Indeed, it is full of ambiguities and paradoxes. Given the ambiguities and paradoxes of community development, how successful is this book in fulfilling its promises?

At one level the book more than fulfils its promises. The reader certainly gets a feel of the shifts and different contextual framings of forms of community development. If I were to recommend one existing book that provides a taste of the richness and diversity of community development, it would be this one. It offers a liveliness and honesty that is missing in the earlier attempt to provide an understanding of community development in international context, *Community Development around the World*, edited by Hubert Campfrens, which is limited to six countries and provides a rather dry handbook of community development issues and practices. In contrast, *Community Development in Theory and Practice: An International Reader* provides a range of thoughtful and often moving insights into different contexts, thinking and practices of community development in more than eighteen countries. It reveals lines of agreement and areas of discord.

In eschewing a value-free and positivist approach to theory and practice from the very start, community development has clearly differentiated itself from those practices and disciplines that have (naively or ingenuously) claimed to be objective and impartial. This point of articulation is well articulated in this volume. For example, it takes the reader on a journey through some thorny political issues that are at the heart of community development. In Chapter 11, Jean Panet-Raymond deals with the ever-present tension in community development between adaptability and co-option. In Chapter 22, Vivienne Taylor discusses the role of social movements in redefining and recasting state power in South Africa, in particular the challenge of securing economic stability while at the same time ensuring social transformation and active grass-roots participation.

While most of the chapters in the book engage with some of the conceptual issues in community development, two chapters stand out for

the ways in which they elucidate the essential role of theory in community development. Chapter 15, written by Gary Craig, considers state power and different configurations of the relations between the local government, central government, and community. In Chapter 25, Mae Shaw and Ian Martin engage the concepts of citizenship and democracy, and investigate the often vexed role of community development in the interstices between the state and civil society. They reflect on the management of democracy under New Labour and consider the role of community development in the renewal of a social democracy driven by a creative and active citizenry.

The final criterion used in selecting articles for this publication was based on a commitment to presenting topics in community development concerned with social divisions. As the editors indicate, providing a comprehensive range of social divisions was quite a difficult task, given the limited number of articles in CDJ covering this area. Nevertheless, informative chapters on important forms of social division are included. For example, community development initiatives by rural women of the 'untouchable' 'Paraiya' caste in India are discussed by Sundari Ravindran in Chapter 11. Chapter 21, by Ranjit Sondhi, provokes the reader to think about the engagement of community development with the tensions between the politics of difference and the politics of equality.

There is another level in which we can think about whether the book fulfils its promises. We are alerted to this level in the *Forward* and *Introduction*, where it is suggested that understanding the life of the CDJ and the periodization of the changes in CDJ articles are representative of the 'life of community development itself'. The idea of representativeness is always a troubling one. It is quite problematic in this book, whether it refers to a claim that articles in a journal (albeit one of very high standing) represent a whole sphere of practice, or a claim that periods in the Anglo dominated world, and particularly Britain, are representative of periods of change in community development internationally. These claims about representativeness raise some interesting questions about the hegemonic control of community development by the English-speaking world. They prompt the 'elephant in the room' reflection that maybe we have not moved as far from the British colonial legacy as we might have thought. They prompt us to consider that, if we are really talking about the international dimensions of community development, then why have we not sufficiently embraced, and learnt from, community development projects in countries less influenced by the British colonial legacy, in Asia and the Muslim world. I do not present these concerns lightly. I am wondering if all of us operating in Anglo spheres of domination, including in Australia where I am mostly based, are perhaps myopic when it comes to the

nature, meaning, and dimensions of community development, which results from our ease with *our* discourse of community development.

This reflection should not undermine the value of *Community Development in Theory and Practice: An International Reader* as a portrayal of a living theoretical and material practice. It is to remind us of the importance of self-critique as a central principle of community development, even where it requires revisiting old issues.

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