

Book Review

Meade, R., Shaw, M., & Banks, S. (Eds.). (2016). *Politics, power and community development*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.

Reviewed by Peggy Proudfoot Harman, MSW, Ph.D., Marshall University

Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, Volume 14, Number 1 (2017)

Copyright 2017, ASWB

This text may be freely shared among individuals, but it may not be republished in any medium without express written consent from the authors and advance notification of ASWB.

This edited work consists of 13 chapters divided into three sections focused on thinking, practicing, and planning in community development through the lens of emerging neoliberal political arenas. The book provides a world view of the latest discourse on community development written by scholars who study dynamics affecting the planning, design, and implementation of community development projects.

The introductory essay by Meade, Shaw and Banks highlights the influence of political power on community development. All three authors work as professors and are experts in community development throughout the United Kingdom. Their opening essay discusses the nuances of the meaning of community development throughout the world and expresses the need for “a critical vision of community that supports diversity while promoting dialogue across distance and difference” (p. 1). The authors explain that the purpose of the collection is to assist community developers by providing politically useful resources for working within neoliberal political environments. We are reminded that community development is “historically situated, ideologically contested, and a contextually specific set of practices” (p. 7). Contributors to this edited collection provide readers with insights into the nucleus of these elements specific to their own histories, ideologies, and contexts. The essays provide us with a glimpse of how community developers are engaging worldwide to work within the confines of neoliberal policies.

In “The politics of deploying community,” Newman and Clarke provide a basis for considering community development couched within the context of political translation and articulation. Newman and Clarke call on community developers to recognize that there are always competing projects and to consider that diverse political, sociological, and cultural resources are fluid which result in reshaping “the relationship to power and inequality” (p. 44).

Providing insight on the way community development is practiced in different settings, Kenny contributes a thesis on “Politics, Power, and Community Development.” Kenny maintains that the role of community developer should be framed in two different ways: One is based on “capacity building, social inclusion, and welfare delivery” (p. 60), and the other is based on social movements. Although Kenny is based in the United Kingdom, elements consistent within her treatise are also found in an essay from India by Jha, who discusses cases of how government services provided to those who are considered to be impoverished and disempowered ignore the root causes of disenfranchisement, creating communities that are bastions of “private, poor, and depoliticised individuals” (p. 78). Jha maintains that through collectivism, these communities can transform into politically powerful entities, challenge the concept of subjugation, and ultimately attain their own governance.

The section on practicing community development within the confines of changing political climates

draws from scholars located in various locations throughout the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, New South Wales, Taiwan, and the United States. These chapters are rife with material focused on how political elements have changed the face of the roles and practices of community developers and community development projects.

Chen discusses the “mobilization of community” (p. 98), describing how outside economic forces restructure entire communities and in the process develop community organizations designed to create a new Taiwanese “identity and democratic citizenry” (p. 97) which encourages political engagement. The “mobilization of the community” (p. 98) as Chen describes it, is sourced from many forces, both state and private, which have both positive and negative consequences. However, Chen recognizes that the process of empowering citizens through encouraging cultural identity and creative industry also has the benefit of enhanced economic opportunities through tourism.

These contributions highlight the need for community developers to be flexible within the confines of a continually changing world. Discussing each entry individually, requires more space than is provided for a singular book review. However, I encourage community developers and academics alike to read this work. It provides the reader with an interesting and in-depth discourse on how to think about the topic and gives solid examples of how various countries are thinking about community organizing and implementing community development projects.