

Review by Glenn Sterner

What is community development? Why is community development practiced in certain ways? How do people engage in community development? Why is community development relevant? Gilchrist and Taylor tackle these and other tough questions in *The Short Guide to Community Development*. Although explicitly UK-focused, this overview of the history, current practices, and scholarship of community development provides an important opportunity for seasoned veterans, newcomers, and students to reflect on the concept of and their role in community development.

Reflection is important in any professional work, but it is especially critical in community development practice due to the field's interventionist nature. Those with years of experience and those new to the field should regularly consider critical questions about current and historical practices and scholarship in community development, areas that Gilchrist and Taylor highlight succinctly. However, reflection is not simply the reading of additional information; it requires a deeper process. Reflection involves critical, dialogic engagement with both historic and newly encountered ideas, orientations, and professional practice. Integrating information into practice without considering its creation, utility, and accuracy is irresponsible. Thinking critically about how community development practice and scholarship is developed, for whom, and why, allows citizens, practitioners, and scholars to determine whether it is applicable and relevant to their contexts.

Critically examining and reflecting on community development history and current practice should also lead individuals to explore their own perspectives and methods. Complacently accepting current practice and knowledge is as dangerous as blindly implementing new scholarship. Instead, reflection allows for the consideration of newly encountered information, and for exploring how it aligns with, expands, or perhaps contradicts one's own current thinking and practices. What is known about this problem? How do other communities engage with this situation? What is contemporary thinking on this issue? Taking time to reflect on questions such as these provides the opportunity for newly acquired information to enhance one's work in community development.

This reflective process should also lead practitioners to be more reflexive about their place in communities and community development. Reflexivity forces individuals to consider their biases and values regarding their community development approaches. Making individual values explicit allows practitioners to critically consider how they are enacting community development practices. When working with and in communities, community development practitioners should be very aware of their role and how they engage with others. Through reflexive practice, these considerations generate a greater awareness of an individual's effects on community development practice and, therefore, on community, both positive and negative. Reflexivity provides an opportunity to explore new ways to consider how to revise individual practice to maximize impact and minimize unintended negative consequences. Through reflexive self-examination, those engaged in community development may come to realize how their personal perspectives and behaviors lead them to enact certain practices. Gilchrist and Taylor work through several considerations to enhance this process.

Concern for those affected by community development should be central throughout the processes of reflection and reflexivity. This consideration opens the opportunity to emphasize dignity in the community development process. When we engage others with dignity, we show respect for them and their situation. We value and utilize their local knowledge and experiences. We emphasize the importance of their participation in community development initiatives. This orientation toward dignity exposes how an individual approaches community development. A focus on dignity requires individuals to consider the role of the knowledge they bring to a community development initiative as well as how it is enacted. Community development is not an easy task; it requires careful contemplation of how to include others. Working through this process, Gilchrist and Taylor provide a good foundation and framework for resolving these challenges.

Reflection and reflexivity should be integral to community development. *The Short Guide to Community Development* acts as a vehicle for working through these essential processes. The first half of the book explores the foundations of community development, with an emphasis on its theory and historical development. Although they heavily focus on the United Kingdom, Gilchrist and Taylor ensure that the book is relevant for a wider audience by weaving in relevant literature from multiple perspectives. Throughout this examination of the scholarly foundations of community development, the authors refrain from taking normative

stances on the various approaches to community development they highlight. However, in the second half of the book, which explores the practical application of community development, they emphasize a pluralistic approach. In these chapters, they encourage the reader to engage in reflection and reflexivity, and they provide tips and practical advice for those hoping to engage in community development. They also explore contexts where community development may currently be especially relevant. The book concludes with an assessment of future trends that may shape and be shaped by community development, which can inspire individuals and communities to take action on important issues that face us all, such as public or collective action and climate change.

The accessibility of this book offers newcomers to community development a chance to gain a solid grasp of the field's historical, theoretical, and practical foundations. The authors also provide an interesting and honest exploration of the historical context of community development in the United Kingdom that will be of interest to those looking to expand their perspective. Whether new to the field or experienced, readers will find that this book provides an opportunity to reflect on community development, examine their role in community development, and consider how to best engage with communities. It also has direct relevance for academics and public scholars engaged in fostering and nurturing community-university partnerships.

About the Reviewer

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