

Review

McCrea, N and Finnegan, F (23rd January 2019) *Funding, Power and Community Development*, Policy Press, Bristol, paperback, 208 pages, ISBN-10 1447336178, 216 pages, cost £29.99

This book is one of a series of edited and authored books, *Rethinking Community Development*, re-evaluating community development in theory and practice in light of the new challenges and localised consequences of global processes. In this volume, McCrea and Finnegan explore ways in which ‘funding relationships, structures and processes contribute to or undermine the possibility of meaningful community development.’

At a time when funding to support community work is so scarce, this book is a useful reminder that we need to be aware of the power implications and potential hazards, alongside the benefits, of sources of funding. Given the resurgence of right-wing politics in the US and the rise in inequality, Erica Kohl Arenas takes stock of what she has learned about the politics of philanthropic funding from her experience of community organising: ‘is it still ok to critique liberal philanthropy?’ Her conclusion is both yes: philanthropy creates common sense narratives that perpetuate individualist solutions to collective structural problems; and no: when we need ‘every penny and every ally to stand up against hate, racism and fearmongering politics.’

The editors focus on three interrelated themes emerging from the chapters: the significance of governance in funding community development, the changing role of the state and its impact on communities, and the most effective way to bring about egalitarian social change in contemporary contexts. A few reflections on one chapter from each theme.

Part 1 New configurations of power and governance

When I read the chapter by Natascha Mueller-Hirth about the role of NGOs since democratic transition in 1994 in post-Apartheid South Africa, I was surprised to find so much resonance with community development in the post-1994 partnership era Scotland. In the post-1994 South African nation-building era, NGOs were shifting from an oppositional to a development mode, and those who were critical of the new government - social movements representing the poor and environmental issues - were locked out as being unpatriotic. Sound familiar?

Meuller-Hirth explains that, currently community-based organisations are the largest bloc of organisations numerically, engaged in service delivery at local level enabling poor and marginalised communities to survive. The remaining NGOs have positioned themselves - and have the capacity - to access funding from the state, donors and corporates, and to act as intermediaries between these funders and community-based organisations. An NGO's ability to 'maintain partnerships, act flexibly and demonstrate fluency in auditing techniques' is key to its position and survival. The NGOs, 'come to speak for, rather than with, those who may be able to bring about progressive change, further shrinking the space for marginalised groups.'

Part 2. Questions of state and grassroots democracy

Robert Fisher and Helene Balazard's interesting chapter concerns social movements and grassroots organising in the US, but they also refer to the Conservative government's Community Organisers Programme in England from 2011. Funding for conflict-oriented community organising has been in decline since 2008 caused, they argue, by over-reliance on philanthropic funding sources. In the past, community organisers critiqued reliance on state funding to maintain a social movement's independence, but the authors argue that this position needs to be reconsidered. Fisher and Balazard point to the vital role of community organising in 'addressing critical societal needs such as the widespread challenges to democracy.' In the face of massive austerity budget cuts undermining the welfare state, and the hardship experienced in marginalised communities, the authors argue passionately that the state

should be seen as a potential ally, not only to support community organising but to re-democratise the state.

Part 3 Modes of agency and horizons of possibility

A dialogue between Japhet Makongo, a Tanzanian community development worker, and Lin Bender, CEO of an Australian philanthropic organisation, discuss day-to-day realities of funding relationships, resonating with current Scottish debates about 'place-based' approaches to funding. Makono states that, when funders invite bids via their websites, most applicants will be tempted to adjust their goal to fit the funder's priorities. The authors acknowledge that successful funding applications require a level of expertise that is often a challenge for smaller organisations and communities. Agreeing on the importance of opportunities to build leadership skills to better understand the funding landscape, Makongo and Bender argue that funders should 'create space and time at the outset of the relationship as part of the process of building their capacity.' Funders, in most cases, find themselves wearing two hats; firstly, supporting the applicant and secondly, maintaining power in the process of investing.

The contributors write from diverse contexts, continents and perspectives and, while not all the contributions resonated with my experience, all were illuminating in terms of power dynamics and social change. It reminded me that, even in the most unlikely funding relationships, such as the Conservative's Community Organisers Programme in England, important achievements are possible because we work in dynamic environments where likeminded people – community members, community organisers and funders – build relationships based on trust and find space, opportunities and determination to work together for change.

Iyaah Warren

Retired community development worker

Fife