

**Book review****The Short Guide to Community Development****Alison Gilchrist & Marilyn Taylor (2011) Policy Press 184 pp**

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Given the nature of Community Development, with its contested terms and inherent tensions, this very concise guide is by its nature superficial. However, at the end of each section (covering theory, history, values, challenges and current/future trends in Community Development), there is a brief conclusion and a list of suggested further reading, which is helpful. The authors state from the outset that Community Development is a *'long-term, value based process..... whose purpose is to promote social justice... and is therefore political'*.

Emphasis is given to structural inequalities, and power is given much attention which is to be welcomed; much less emphasis however is given to the educational role of the process and/or the worker.

Social enterprise approaches and social capital outcomes are valid and have their place in the extensive range of CD work both in the UK and abroad, but in my view *far* too much emphasis is given to them in this guide, at the expense of more discussion about learning and poverty (educational processes aren't mentioned until p53). The case studies which pepper the guide are weighted in terms of social enterprise; much less space is given to Marxist approaches and raising the consciousness of the powerless.

To this practitioner, the authors seem very naïve about David Cameron's 'Big Society' claiming that this means that CD has 'found favour' with the current government, that *'giving communities more say and more control is a core element ...of their agenda'*. In reality the 'Big Society' is a concerted attack on poor communities and the public sector and is therefore the antithesis of Community Development. At one point the authors assert that welfare and service reform (read cuts) are *'a chance for (people) to run their own services', 'save local facilities'* (which are often hard fought for through community campaigns) and to *'take over state-run services'*. The irony! .... although later they do claim that CD workers have a role to play in *'helping residents to defend the services they need'*.

One more point of contention is that of *'lost community'* and the need to build social capital. There is no doubt that community spirit has diminished in the past few decades, and no wonder (think of mining communities), but it is *not* lost. North Edinburgh in particular has recently revived a proud history of community activism through documenting it, in the *'Never Give Up'* report. We must acknowledge how strong and supportive communities can be, even in the face of attacks on the most vulnerable groups in our society.

The guide notes that CD is both an approach, a social movement with values *and* a profession (which requires high levels of skills and understanding, and space is given to core competencies, although it sometimes states the obvious *'CD workers need a good understanding of the locality in which they are based', and 'be able to work with people'*), which is being more mainstreamed within services and policy, and argues that we must become more strategic in our work.

This book is a brief yet thorough guide for students of Community Development and a quick 'refresher' course for practitioners, who are given the chance to locate themselves in the myriad of approaches and theories of CD.