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Book review

Ledwith, M. (2011): *Community development. A critical approach*. Bristol: The Policy Press. (ISBN: 978-3-779-2214-8)

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This study is relevant in the time of accelerated world crises of social justice and environmental sustainability. The main aim of Margaret Ledwith is call for grassroots, community actions. As wrote Professor Ira Shor from City University of New York Graduate Center in foreword to the second edition of this book: “The great strength of the book is that it provides such comfortable travelling between theory and practice, philosophy and history, and practical social justice activism”.

Margaret Ledwith lives in Lancaster and she is Emeritus Professor of Community Development and Social Justice at the University of Cumbria and in the same time a coordinator of the international Collaborative Action Research Network.

In her book presents a critical approach to community development, which calls for reflection on action. According her understanding is empowerment as a transformative concept applied too often naively as a confidence and self-esteem at a personal level without overlooking structural analyses of inequality.

In the first chapter the author deals with a brief history of radical community development including its critiques and sets its the political context. The second and third chapters go more into practice and explore the ways in which critical approaches take shape. Her approach to community development is based on Freirean pedagogy, which begins in the narratives of the people and is set within an analysis of structural conditions.

In the fourth chapter emancipatory action research is introduced as “the glue that binds” community development theory and practice as a unity of praxis. This kind of research develops knowledge in action and keeps it relevant to the changing social context.

In chapter five Ledwith see collective action as a tool for achieving social change. Her approach is based on critical pedagogy (which involves questioning, naming, reflecting, analysing and collectively acting) and concept of Paulo Freire (pedagogy of liberation) and ideas of social movements and participatory democracy. Many practical examples are used in this chapter.

In chapter six the author demonstrates the power of ideas in the processes of dominance and liberation. She uses the concept of hegemony from Gramsci and she discusses the role of intellectuals to radical community development praxis. The PCS concept of Thompson is used to explain the way that the personal, cultural and structural contexts interact in the interest of power. In the seventh chapter reflects the work of Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci and thinks about relevance of their theories for current times. Margaret Ledwith develops a “Freirean-feminist-anti-racist pedagogy” rooted in ideas of cooperation which introduces in chapter eight. In the last chapter she presents organising for social transformation. Author uses many practical examples thank her “storytellers”, which brings theory more in action.

Margaret Ledwith appeal on development of community practices in inspiring alternative to individualised social work practice and offer to social workers the tools to work market-dominant and neoliberal environment. It is also alternative to social work practice in the context in the context of the crisis of the welfare state. The book can be inspiration for people interested in community work and community development or professionals working with disadvantaged and socially excluded people.