

Book Review

PSICOLOGIA DI COMUNITA' (Vol. I, II)
[COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY]

Caterina Arcidiacono, Norma De Piccoli,
Terri Mannarini & Elena Marta (Eds)

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“Renzo Canestrari”, University of Bologna, IT, and President of ECPA (European Association of Community Psychology). January 2022.

The book edited by Caterina Arcidiacono, Norma De Piccoli, Terri Mannarini e Elena Marta is interesting for several reasons.

The first is that it provides the Italian reader with a very up-to-date and articulate overview of community psychology state of the art. It explains its guiding principles and history, highlighting the multiplicity of the discipline roots, tracing its development in the United States and Latin America, without forgetting the history (more recent, but no less significant) of community psychology in Italy. Indeed the first volume after a first introductory "historical" chapter, offers a clear and articulated overview of three scientific and epistemological approaches that, taken as a whole, define the conceptual lenses through which our discipline looks at understanding and intervening in human and social issues: the ecological and systemic approach, the psychodynamic approach and the cultural semiotic approach.

The second part of the volume illustrates the critical constructs of the discipline (empowerment, sense of community, participation, resilience, wellbeing, prevention, networking and social support, trust and hope), devoting one chapter to each of them. This kind of articulation facilitates the novice reader, and the reader who is more focused on discipline-specific topics since

each chapter offers a basic framework of the construct (definitions, theory and conceptual, leading research and empirical evidence) in a simple language. However, since it also considers the most recent research and the debate that animates it in international scientific journals, it satisfies the expert reader as well, who will not fail to find connections between the various parts of the book and food for thought to contribute to further strengthen the conceptual and scientific background of the discipline.

The second reason is that this book brings together the contributions of 45 academics and practitioners with different degrees of seniority, where experienced and acknowledged scholars and professionals share with younger peers the challenge to conjugate tradition and innovation in community psychology with its emerging challenges. The number of contributors could already be considered an interesting quantitative indicator of the vitality of the discipline in Italy, but a qualitative analysis of the contents produced by these scholars is undoubtedly the most significant proof of this vitality.

The second volume, dedicated to methodology, research, and intervention, offers insight into Italy's most exciting fields of practice and research.

The volume opens with two chapters devoted respectively to the Planning and Evaluation of interventions (the first) and Participatory Research-Action (the second), offered as the essential methodological keys without which the intervention of the community psychologist is not even conceivable.

There is no doubt that the community of community psychologists in Italy has produced a great deal of research, intervention and professional practices on various topics of extraordinary conceptual and applicative relevance. The book bears witness to this, showing how community psychology in Italy has tackled the 'classic' issues of social marginality, addiction, and gender-based violence. Unfortunately, as we know, classic does not mean out of fashion, but always "current". The book, however, does not only deal with issues on which the discipline has long shown that it has conceptual and methodological tools that work. It also deals with emerging issues (collective emergency, sustainability, living with diversities, hate speech), clearly defining the (specific, transferable and transdisciplinary) competencies of community psychologists that allow them to engage with contemporary challenges and be agents of change.

The third reason is that it is an authentically collective enterprise that provides an account of the research, intervention and theoretical reflection that has developed in the international landscape of community psychology, thanks also to the passionate work of Italian researchers who, as is made clear in the book, in their variety of interests, perspectives and domains of research, are "creating and expanding community". As such, this book can help a new generation of students and practitioners adopt a community psychology approach in professional practice,. Furthermore, it can help local, and community stakeholders understand what community psychology can do for them / with them. We needed a book like this, in Italian, because it can be handled by the professional who works in the welfare system, the operator of a co-operative, the apartment block administrator, the president of the voluntary association engaged in an urban regeneration program. These people may be strangers to the English-speaking world of scientific journals and have little or no interest in researching communities. Nevertheless, they may be struggling daily within the community and honestly engaged in promoting community wellbeing and equity. This book is for them too.