

Arts, Culture and Community Development

Rosie R. Meade and Mae Shaw (editors) 2021, *Arts, Culture and Community Development*, Bristol, Policy Press, paperback, 272 pages, 9781447340515, £26.99

This excellent text, recently published in the Policy Press Rethinking Community Development series, critically explores the relationship between arts, culture and community development in different parts of the globe including Lebanon, Latin America, China, Ireland, Sri Lanka, Chile, Brazil, and Finland. Arts and culture in this book are taken as being created in a manner that is participatory and practised by those involved as equals. This recognises that people bring different skills and talents, and all should be understood as being part of a democratic enterprise.

Internationally, community development has at its core the promotion of social justice and democracy, thereby confirming it as a political activity and usually in opposition to the status quo. As a strategy, a key strand of community development practice is providing a creative safe place where people's demands and aspirations for social justice and democracy can be acknowledged and given the wherewithal to proceed with action.

This new book provides evidence of how this strategy can be developed in a creative and exciting artistic manner which addresses community development's principles.

The connection between arts/culture, and community development is not an easy one to conceptualise. However, those influenced by the thinking and writings of Antonio Gramsci argue that traditionally art/culture has been represented as having a strategic role in supporting the cultural hegemony where the status quo can transmit their values and beliefs often with well-resourced events and productions. Art and culture in this interpretation is focused on influencing values, norms, ideas, expectations and agreed worldviews. The dominant ideology of society is reproduced through the

social structures and in this understanding intellectuals, including artists and cultural movers, function as ‘deputies’ of the ruling class. Whilst these artists act as individuals, they have an important role in reproducing and extending cultural hegemony and ‘common sense’ that obscures and marginalises inequalities that pivot on class, ‘race’, and gender.

It is welcome therefore to enjoy *Arts, Culture and Community Development* which frankly is a breath of fresh air with its well-crafted chapters by those who as practitioners, researchers and educators present a strong case for recognising arts and culture as part of progressive social and economic change. In many cases the contributions here have evolved from community struggles, others from the desire to challenge conventions and articulate uncomfortable truths. It's not my role here to choose favourite chapters, they all have much to tell us in so many ways. Finally, I warmly recommend this nuanced must-read book in an area of community development that has only occasionally addressed the role of arts and culture in providing a vehicle for disempowered communities and neighbourhoods.

Keith Popple is Emeritus Professor at London South Bank University and author of *Analysing Community Work: Its theory and Practice* (2nd Edition) published by the Open University Press.