

Community Work

Twelvetrees, A. (2002) Palgrave, £14.99, 224pp.

Alan Twelvetrees' *Community Work* is, in all probability, the most successful book available on the topic in the UK. Now in its third, much revised and expanded, edition previous versions have run to some 12 imprints and have been standard texts on both Social Work and Youth and Community Work training programmes for the best part of two decades.

There is, indeed, much to commend in this edition. The writing is accessible, often engaging, and thankfully free of much of the jargon often associated with key texts on community work and related professions. Twelvetrees gives a clear description of the history and development of community work – drawing both on experiences in Britain and America to highlight different models and traditions, from social planning and community action through to the growth of broad based, or citizen, organising.

Two of the new sections in this third edition are particularly welcome. In 'Specialist Community Work; Some Initial Thoughts' Twelvetrees reflects on both the increasingly fragmented nature of professional community work 'in its own right' as well as its role in, and contribution to, community safety, environmental and health development programmes. 'Community Work and Public Policy; The Case of Urban Regeneration' highlights the historical 'start-stop' pattern of funding for community work and makes a strong case for a more strategic, long term, approach to building community participation and combating social exclusion.

Given the success of this publication, in all its editions, it may seem churlish to criticise. *Community Work* is broad in its scope and the range of topics covered. Whilst, at one level, this is a strength, it makes for somewhat fragmented reading. Ideas are often introduced, but not discussed in any depth. For example, the influence of feminist thought and liberation theology on community work is mentioned – but exactly how such ideas have impacted on principles and practice is not explored.

There are also a number of strange omissions. The development of occupational standards in community work is not mentioned – nor the work of the Standing Conference for Community Development and the Federation of Community Work Training Groups in raising the profile of community work in national and regional policy forums. Whilst the writings of Alinsky are usefully summarised, no reference is made to either Freire or Gramsci as key figures in the development of community work values. Twelvetrees is right in his comments that community workers have neglected writing up their practice, but then omits several important recent contributions to the literature – notably Keith Popple's *Analysing Community Work* and Margaret Ledwith's *Participating in Transformation*.

Perhaps the major problem with *Community Work*, however, is that its intended audience is often unclear. In the introduction, Twelvetrees writes that he is drawing on his experiences as a 'patch based' practitioner, academic, and, more recently, as a National Manager in Wales for the Community Development Foundation. Each of these interests is reflected in the text. However, some sections can be read as introductions to community work skills for students or those with no prior experience in the field. Others assume substantial prior knowledge of 'internal' community work

debates. These are often introduced in ways which are somewhat cryptic, and must make little sense to those unfamiliar with those discussions – for example, on the tensions surrounding the ‘professionalisation’ of community work in the 1970s and 1980s. Still others appear to be written with a more academic or urban policy audience in mind. As a result, *Community Work* runs the risk of lacking a central focus and depth which is satisfying to either existing practitioners or other potential readers.

In this third edition, therefore, Twelvvetrees has produced a series of useful ‘snapshots’ – of community work theory, practice and its policy context. These parts, interesting as they are, never quite build to a coherent whole.

Angus McCabe
University of Birmingham