

Book Review

**MANUALE DI PSICOLOGIA DI COMUNITA’.**  
**TEORIE, METODI, ESPERIENZE PER IL BENESSERE DELLE SOCIETA’ CONTEMPORANEE**

**[HANDBOOK OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY.**  
**THEORIES, METHODS, EXPERIENCES FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES]**

Donata Francescato & Manuela Tomai

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*By Terri Mannarini, Professor of Community Psychology, Department Human & Social Sciences, University of Salento, Italy. September 2024.*

“Manuale di Psicologia di Comunità” [Handbook of Community Psychology] by Donata Francescato and Manuela Tomai (Carocci, 2023) is the most recent handbook on the discipline published in Italy, updating, innovating and integrating the authors’ writing and research in recent years. In particular, the text benefits from the latest insights of Donata Francescato, a prolific international author who introduced community psychology in Italy in the mid-1970s and has since been dedicated to its dissemination and critical elaboration.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part is devoted to presenting the theoretical foundations of the discipline and tracing the origins and development of community psychology through an overview of its evolution not only in the United States and Europe, but also in countries in the Global South. Indeed, the historical context is crucial to understanding the development of the discipline and the influences it has received. The authors note the coexistence from the outset of a moderate and a radical current, sharing the same principles and values, but alternating between periods of dialogue and conflict, and possibly finding a solution to the theoretical and practical divergences in the concept of empowerment.

In line with the radical perspective, the volume gives space to critical community psychology,

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liberation psychology and decoloniality, which focus on inequalities arising from the structural dynamics of macro-systems. As the authors write, "we are living in a historical period where it is increasingly necessary to be able to read economic, political and cultural changes in order to identify emerging opportunities and obstacles. But we also need to develop a greater awareness of the link between individual and family well-being and the technological, political and socio-economic changes in our local, national and international contexts". These approaches also challenge coloniality, the psychological construction of people from other cultures as inferior and not fully human, and the hegemony of Euro-American psychological models, raising the question of epistemic justice.

Another important consideration concerns the role of emotions and unconscious processes in the community perspective, which have traditionally received little attention. However, it is evident that if community psychology has always distanced itself from an individual-centred approach by emphasising the circular relationship with the context, clinical psychology has increasingly moved towards context-anchored intervention, serving not only individuals but also groups, organisations and communities. There is thus a convergence that allows community intervention to incorporate psychodynamic insights such as the distinction between desire and need, transfer and counter-transfer processes, and the emotional dynamics that shape human behaviour.

Overall, the theoretical examination developed in this part of the volume provides a basis for understanding the practices and intervention methods described in the second part of the book, which covers a range of practical issues from participatory action research and community development methodology to organisational analysis, self-help groups, networking, working with groups, empowerment training, socio-emotional education and evaluation of intervention programmes. This section concludes with a chapter devoted entirely to climate change, one of the most serious global emergencies and also one of the new frontiers for community intervention, exploring strategies for raising awareness of environmental issues and increasing the willingness of individuals and communities to address them by developing a planetary sense of community. As the authors write, a planetary community requires a mundane solidarity between those who are alike, which affirms the same way of feeling, and a sublime solidarity between those who are different, which transcends the boundaries of identity and connects us to others even when we are not alike.

Finally, the third part of the book presents a series of first-hand experiences of community psychologists working in different contexts: public services, private practice, social enterprises and academia, offering a concrete perspective on how community psychology is translated into everyday practice.

Throughout, the text emphasises the need to understand the complex interactions between individuals and social systems, and is notable for its cultural sensitivity and attention to issues of diversity, inclusion and responsibility, offering valuable insights into how to respond effectively and ethically to the challenges of the globalised world.