2021 International Journal of Community Development

**Book Review**

Budd L Hall, Professor Emeritus, University of Victoria

Eurig Scandrett, editor (2020) *Public Sociology as Educational Practice: Challenges, Dialogues and Counterpublics* Bristol: Bristol University Press

What is there in the water in Edinburgh? There must be something that is good for progressive scholar activists. Over the past 25 years we have seen a rich outpouring of publications on literacy, community education, popular education, participatory research, radical adult education, community development, social movement learning, environmental activism, citizenship and more. Eurig Scandrett, a core member of the Edinburgh movement, has brought us a major addition to the literature on knowledge, learning and action. This book makes an important link between the fairly recent discourse (2005) of public sociology and the theories and practices of social movement education and learning that have lived a parallel life in the same universe for decades. Scandrett has brought together about 40 activist scholars to examine the discourse of public sociology as an educational practice. The book is organized into three sections: Publics, Knowledges and Practices.

Publics covered include mad people, gender justice in higher education, domestic abuse survivors, post-industrial Fife, the invisibility of class. All of these publics are examined through a dialogue on subaltern counter publics. Knowledges includes policy research, feminist knowledge for social change, dialogical methods with youth, participative research, multilingual communication as action and art, and public knowledge within planning processes. This section like the others is dialogically examined through a reflection on 'really useful' knowledge. While one could argue that all three of the book's sections are about practice, there is a separate section called practices which looks at the expansion of precarious work, challenges in widening participation in higher education, art, identity and the sociological imagination, community engagement, service learning, and trade union education. This section is completed with a dialogue on public sociology practices and privatizing universities.

In his conclusion Scandrett says, "Through a series of dialogues, this book has attempted to explore the extent to which public sociology as an educational practice contributes to social processes in which mechanisms of exploitation and oppression can be challenges" (p343). Scandrett and his colleagues have made a convincing case that the theories and practices of public sociology are a useful addition to our understandings of the relationships between lived experience, actions for cultural freedom, knowledge for social change and the many movements of what Scandrett refers to as subaltern counter publics.

This is a major contribution by an important activist scholar and his numerous colleagues. The book is well organized, beautifully produced, provocative and intellectually delicious. When I see books like this designed to support the emergence of subaltern counterpublics, I only wish

that they could be available free of charge to those counterpublics with whom they engage. A book that costs US$155.for the hard cover copy I was given to review means that many people will not have access. The question of access to progressive works remains a contradiction for so many academics whose thought and action is genuinely transformative. We want to challenge regimes of power, but continue to publish within a market pricing world that excludes those for whom and with whom we work.

That said however, this is an excellent piece of work. I commend it to readers attention. Get your library to order it and borrow it from there!