Review: Community Psychology and Social Policies (English translation)

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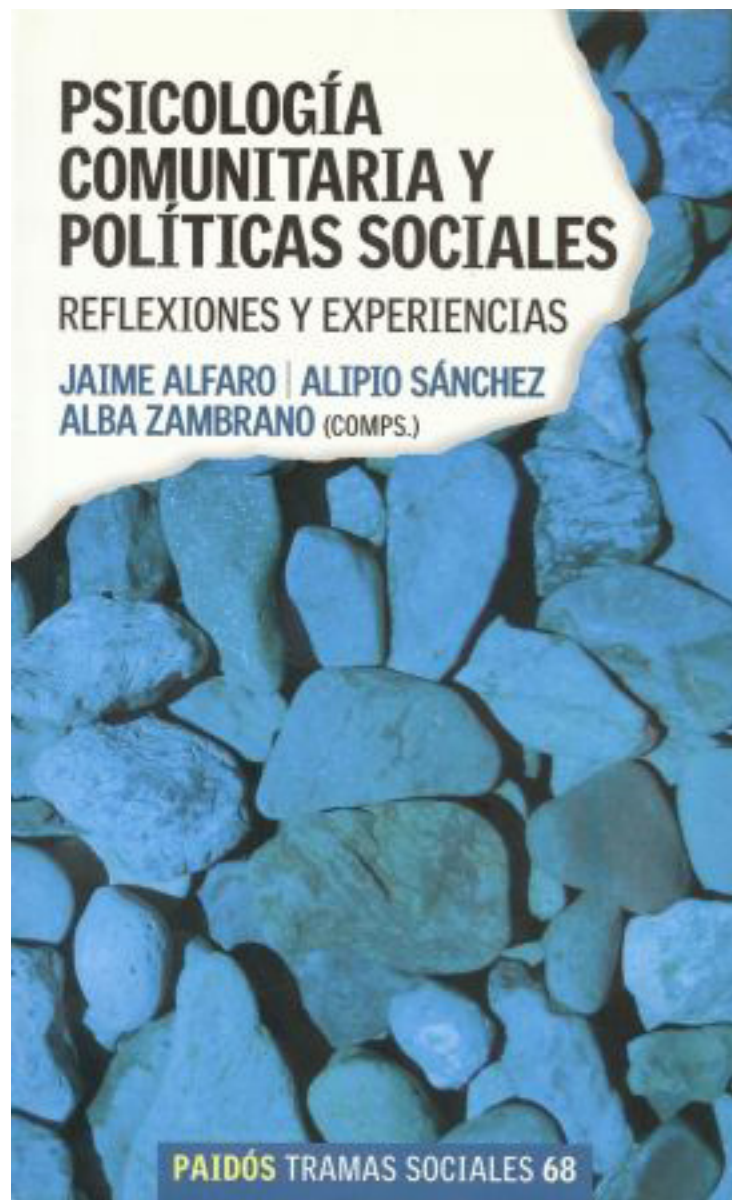
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This book confronts one of the challenges for those who work from a community approach: establishing a new dialogue between institutions, people and community (Martinez, 2006).

Those who labor in the field of community psychology know that the aim of this discipline is to promote the active participation of community members. Consequently, we want an active community and not just a group of spectators receiving the benefits of community without working for them. We expect the community to be an active agent with voice, vote and veto (Montero, 2004), allowing the development of strengths and capabilities rather than a focus on weaknesses and deficiencies.

From the above description, you can guess that social change is present in most of the definitions of community psychology, which gives it a political character in the sense that those who work in community psychology develop interventions to achieve community empowerment and change. To this is added an interest in the scientific side of our field, with an applied research emphasis, as mentioned by Rappaport (1977). Arriving at a definition of the field is not easy, especially one that includes the questions, uncertainties and tensions to which those who work in this area are exposed.

If we start from an ecological perspective, which tells us that the individual is embedded in a family, a neighborhood, a region, a country, and a continent, we recognize the impact of these in the different areas of the individual's life. Thus every approach must consider the context in its broadest sense, and this includes community psychology and social policies.

This book shows how community psychology (at least for those of us in Latin America) has been based on social and economic demands, interacting with and facing unique social policy issues. Policy reflects (in many cases) the State in action, and these actions affect the community.

As noted in the chapter "Possibilities and tensions in the relationship between community psychology and social policy," community psychology is increasingly involved in integration processes in social policy programs. This involves analytical, technical and conceptual approaches, and -- in some cases -- tension and disagreement between the orientations of social policies and those of programs that result from community psychology. However, there are portions of the book that offer specific strategies to address and enrich intervention and programmatic approaches to social policy, providing visible areas in which our discipline of psychology can contribute.

The book discusses the tensions, proposals and meetings we use as strategies to resolve the complex historical relationship established between community psychology and social policies. Through intervention experiences and practices, the authors refer to

this relationship and its tensions, and confront us with questions that reveal the limits and potential of this relationship in terms of working models and strategies.

The book is divided into three large sections where different authors describe complex projects in the exercise of joint community psychology and social policies. The first section of this book "Thinking about the relationship between community psychology and social policy: history and possibilities", provides a critical view of the role of social policies, as these have been implemented--by whom and for whom. This allows reflection on the dynamics of power and participation processes. But it also highlights and reinforces the necessary connection between community psychology and social policies.

Do not forget that these social policies, although in some cases difficult to implement in the community, can become a great ally when working with communities. The challenge is precisely in the articulation of each, while recalling that the focus is on working with communities, and not on us as individuals. In this sense, social policies should transform into social action -- involving actors who allow the community to identify their resources and recognize and use their power. It is important for communities to develop new skills that allow them to strengthen their internal self-management processes, as noted in the chapter "Community psychology and public policy: a possible and necessary partnership."

In the second section, titled "Experiences and intervention practices," the focus is on the practical experiences of intervention, presenting different experiences of community in Latin America, but also in

other communities in other regions. This is particularly interesting for those of us who are dedicated to the teaching of community psychology.

This section will definitely be useful, with examples and explanations that community work is not merely intuitive, but has solid theoretical foundations that support the actions taken. This section also shows us how community psychology is further developed and carried out in different contexts. It helps us recognize the specificity and uniqueness of each experience, as well as providing common elements that allow us to reflect more broadly about the discipline.

In the third and final section, the authors discuss the training and organizational challenges of community psychology, the field's relationship to social policy, and the role of the community psychologist. In other words, we come to see how this approach contributes to the understanding of the impact that programs have on their recipients.

The approach advocated in this book is not easy -- we face more challenges than we would like -- to design policies that are not always consistent with our values in implementation. One of the biggest challenges for social policies is commonly called "the fall". Traditionally, social policies ignore the importance of social evidence, being developed without considering (or poorly considering) the opinion and values of the people who "will benefit" from such policies. Thus, effective implementation becomes a challenge.

Moreover, in this book we observe a socially responsive community psychology, defined in its foundations from working together with

people and the community. Thus, issues such as social change and primary prevention are well addressed. The question that comes to mind for me is "How is it possible to imagine the meeting spaces for Social Policy and Community Psychology?" To put it another way, how do we promote intellectual spaces that are often disturbed by tensions in the underlying paradigms and ontological and epistemological differences? Fortunately, the reflections and experiences recounted in the book "Community Psychology and Social Policy" allow us to not only visualize these tensions, but also know how they have been addressed and successfully resolved.

This book represents an effort to support and extend community psychology by exploring links with other perspectives, without becoming overly indulgent about our importance as community psychologists. The authors also emphasize the importance of a text done in Latin America that gives account of the local and situational experiences of this region. The authors share experiences and provide reflections on the work of community psychology and the challenges that it faces. I invite you all to dive into this book, hoping that the community psychology principles presented will seduce you, and become a part of your work in the coming years.

References

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