

A Psychosocial Approach to Community Development, Lessons from the Transition Town Movement in Italy

Authors : Anna Zoli

Abstract : In recent years, we have been witnessing a surge of locally-sustained communities committed to promoting new ethical economies while fostering the full participation of socially excluded groups and individuals into the labor market. This article explores the practices of a particular community development model, Transition Towns, as implemented in Montevoglio, Italy. Data were gathered throughout two years long ethnography, using multiple qualitative techniques, namely participant observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed triangulating from multiple sources of evidence and using hybrid thematic analysis. Major findings show that Transition Town movement works on two main axes, vertical and horizontal. Vertical transition involves interactions with an overreaching political, economic, and social structure which is not transitioning, and therefore poses structural resistances to the transformative social change fostered by the TT. Conversely, horizontal transition involves intragroup dynamics within the communal relational and geographical spaces and therefore poses process resistances between 'self and others' to the interpersonal communication between TT members. The study concludes that a psychosocial approach to community development is essential in order to conflate macro-social dynamics and psychological processes that may obstacle grassroots social movements to thrive. Skills from psychosocial disciplines are a unique set that could facilitate communication and relational processes for community development, and ultimately enabling social change.

Keywords : community development, grassroots social movements, psychosocial approaches, Transition Towns

Conference Title : ICPS 2019 : International Conference on Psychology and Sociology

Conference Location : Vancouver, Canada

Conference Dates : August 07-08, 2019