Introduction to the issue

TOWARDS A EUROPEAN VISION OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY: THEORETICAL REFERENCES AND APPLICATIONS

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This special issue intends to provide a broad overview on European-based Community Psychology (CP) and explore its perspectives, areas of interest, scope, theoretical approaches, methods, and social impact. We have therefore brought together a variety of contributions drawn from current European transnational research and intervention projects, developed with the support of EU funding and other sources within the national or transnational options available.

The selected articles either address themes, social issues, and challenges of relevance to CP, or engage with and/or interrogate societal challenges through the lens of CP.

The contributions originate in different European countries, and reflect a broad basis of initiatives related with the co-production of knowledge, acknowledging that different stakeholders may contribute towards individual and community change. We believe that this issue has the potential to contribute to broader critical and reflective international scholarship in CP research and practice.

In recent years an international debate has developed around the roots and special features of CP. In the United States Dalton and Wolfe (2012) and then Wolfe, Chien-Scott, and Jimenez (2013) summarized CP practice competencies in four major pillars: a) The application of foundational principles; b) Community programme development and management; c) Community and social change; and d) Community research. More recently, Jason and Glenwick (2016) discussed a variety of methodological approaches to community-based research, and APA published a Handbook of Community Psychology (Bond, Serrano-Garcia, & Keys, 2017), where core concepts, emerging challenges and methods within international CP are extensively presented and discussed. However, despite including a number of different contributions also from non US-based scholars, a North-American cultural perspective permeates these textbooks.

In Europe too there are significant contributions and scholarly CP textbooks that offer a systematized picture of concepts, models, and applications according to different perspectives. They originate in several European countries and are written in different European languages, such as Italian (among others, Amerio, 2000; Francescato, 1977; Francescato, Tomai & Ghirelli,

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2002; Lavanco & Novara, 2002; Santinello, Vieno, & Dallago, 2009; Zani, 2012), Portuguese (Ornelas, 2008), Spanish (Musitu Ochoa, Herrero Olaizola, Cantera Espinosa, & Montenegro Martínez, 2004; Sanchez Vidal, 1991, 2007), and English (Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom, & Siddiquee, 2011; Orford, 1992, 2008), like many other publications focused on specific areas of research and intervention. However, despite this array of publications and approaches, the European CP debate has only recently engaged in defining its distinctive path, focusing on social innovation and developing CP domains and community psychologists' core competencies (Francescato & Zani, 2013; Arcidiacono, 2017; Arcidiacono, Tuozzi & Procentese, 2016).

A more detailed description of CP efforts in Europe can enhance and complete this debate, going back to the transformative principles and theories that characterized the last 50 years in Europe, as well as discussing some specific uses of the core CP principles in the European Union's future projects.

The contributions presented in this special issue of Community Psychology in Global Perspective reflect the intrinsically diverse nature of the applications and possibilities within the discipline, but they are also diverse in scope and sources of influence. Except for one, they all come from countries where languages other than English are spoken, therefore the increased investment of expression in other languages is also to be acknowledged.

With a focus centred on CP approaches to promoting the well-being of individuals, groups and communities, there are three contributions, one from Roehrle and Strouse, one from Mannarini and Salvatore, and another one from Ornelas and colleagues. Three other articles reflect on the intrinsic linking nature of CP by Stark and the experiential report of Service-Learning in higher education by Herrera-Sánchez and colleagues. A social impact evaluation model deriving from an extensive literature review and the analysis of case studies is presented by Meringolo and colleagues. Finally, an example of the critical stance characterizing CP is offered in Orford's position paper on militarism, arguing that if psychology has been at best ambivalent about militarism, CP should take a lead in opposing it and defining a clearly identified critical position.

These contributions have in common a strong commitment to the advancement of CP both as a science and as a comprehensive and value-based discipline aimed at promoting social change.

Bernd Roehrle and Janina Strouse's *Community psychological perspectives of psychotherapy: A contradiction?* is a reflective article focused on a contextual, ecological, and humanistic approach to psychotherapy. It emphasizes the reciprocal exchanges of psychotherapy with different systems and contexts, and the potential benefits of its integration in preventive strategies; it also takes into account the community factors that may influence treatment effectiveness. The authors highlight the need for clinical psychology and psychotherapy to recognize the added value that a community psychology perspective brings both to treatment and prevention, and also the need to overcome the individual-based approach that still characterizes the mainstream attitude to well-being in European healthcare and welfare systems.

The article by Terri Mannarini and Sergio Salvatore (*Making sense of ourselves and others: A contribution to the community-diversity debate*) addresses and renews the long-standing interest of CP in diversity and sense of community. The authors provide us with an in-depth reflection for a broader understanding of how notions associated with diversity are affected by the socio-cognitive and symbolic processes of self construction and the experiences of others. They highlight the insight that the cultural-semiotic perspective and the focus on sense-making processes offer to the analysis of social interactions. Furthermore, they enrich Sarason's (1974) theory on sense of community by connecting it with concepts and models drawn from social

psychology research, namely intergroup, identity, and acculturation theories. This contribution is a very up-to-date and relevant reflection on the need for belonging and identity as a basis for a broader understanding of diversity.

As for José Ornelas and colleagues (*The role of community integration and empowerment for the transformative change in community mental health*), the piece is a reflection on another long-standing topic of interest within CP, that is, Community Mental Health (CMH), and the notions of empowerment and community integration. Contemporary challenges for CMH programmes and practices need to be more aligned with people's empowerment and community integration, and associated with self-representation movements, organizations and networks to strengthen and inform renewed partnerships focused on active citizenship of people who have an experience of mental illness.

Wolfgang Stark brings a contribution (*From disciplinary approaches toward trans-disciplinary perspectives: Conceptual and political frameworks of community psychology in Europe*) that positions CP in a trans-disciplinary perspective, fuelling a controversial ongoing debate on the specificity and identity of the discipline and its relationships with other disciplines. Indeed, as Stark points out, while CP is a "small island of science and practice" that is not very influential within psychology, distinctive CP concepts and principles are used in many disciplines and domains. His approach supports the development, design and renewal of civil society, anchored in trust and mutual support, as well as individual and collective empowerment in a globalized world. In recalling the political and anti-institutional movements that, within and outside Europe, are at the basis of the values and the vision that characterize CP as a discipline, this contribution reveals how its seeds are rooted in Europe as well as in the US.

On community oriented service-learning, Isabel Herrera-Sánchez and colleagues (*Community-oriented Service-Learning: A university experience for preventing cannabis abuse in vulnerable adolescents and young people*) report an experience with student engagement in higher education as a reflective experience involving CP learning and practice associated with the prevention of cannabis abuse in vulnerable adolescents and youth. Service learning brings together students, academics and the community with the overall purpose to promote students' civic engagement and sense of responsibility towards the broader society. Embedding service-learning in higher education is a very relevant and topical issue in Europe (see Aramburuzabala, McIlrath, & Opazo, 2019), and the article corroborates the contribution that the CP vision brings to training and educational systems and methods.

The contribution by Patrizia Meringolo, Carlo Volpi and Moira Chiodini (*Community Impact Evaluation. Telling a stronger story*) proposes a procedure for the evaluation of community impact according to CP values and principles. Their piece is subdivided into two major sections; one that is an extensive revision of the models that structure Community Impact Evaluation, and analyse the construct of societal impact. In the second section, the authors present four case studies where they expand their thought and analysis of the projects. They conclude with the implications of a Community Impact Model in four major areas, the relevance of a community-based approach, the perspective of facilitation, the role of effective management for sustainability, and restitution as a way to redefine community narratives. The proposed model integrates the empowerment evaluation model (Fetterman, 2001), which fosters improvement and self-determination; it enhances Wandersman's model (Wandersman et al., 2005), and it also enriches Holland's "Community Score Cards" (Holland et al., 2007), which evaluate user perceptions on the quality, accessibility and relevance of public services.

Finally, Jim Orford's article (*Community psychology against militarism*) presents an example of the critical stance that is at the core of CP, explaining the reasons why community psychologists should fight against militarism, take a clear stand against it, and overcome the ambiguous positions of much of psychology, which has either directly supported the military or, at best, adopted ambiguous attitudes. Orford must be credited with a leading role in creating a CP vision in Europe, with his textbooks (Orford, 1992; 2008) translated into different European languages, and internationally acknowledged and read.

Summarizing, this issue presents to the global audience a portion of the current topics in European CP research and debate. Specifically, the issues raised can be outlined as follows:

a. The integration of broader contextual variables in psychotherapeutic interventions, both to improve their effectiveness and inform preventive strategies. This integration demonstrates the potential of community psychology applications in the clinical domain, even though reciprocal debts and borrowings need to be further acknowledged and systematized.

b. The potential of a semiotic-cultural perspective in CP as a means of advancing our understanding of the core concepts of the discipline and of individual and collective dynamics.

c. The implications of a CP approach to the renewal of community mental health through citizenship, empowerment and community integration, and to the development of participatory models and procedures for the evaluation of interventions at the community level.

d. The contributions of CP to a linking and trans-disciplinary science to redesign and forge the civil society of the future and to address social and organizational needs.

e. The relevance of a CP framework in training and educational projects.

f. The need to frame both academic research and education within a critical vision of knowledge and society, able to combine scientific procedures and a value-oriented perspective.

The contributions collected in this special issue suggest that CP in Europe is going through a reflective process at the theoretical level, incorporating new perspectives in the original ecological approach, dialoguing with other "psychologies" and coming together with other disciplines. Consistent with this trend, it is also applying this framework to a variety of social domains and developing methods and procedure for interventions that support and enhance people and communities. This issue enables us to deepen our understanding of social issues that interface individual and contexts (e.g., identity, diversity, integration, well-being), and acquire knowledge about specific methods for the analysis of societal challenges and procedures in training and education, as well as in clinical treatment. Last but not least, we find reasons for supporting a critical perspective in the generation and use of scientific knowledge for desirable societal purposes.

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