

Book Review

The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power, Third Edition

Edited by Wolfgang Sachs, Zed Books, London. 332 pages
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I was new to graduate studies and to development theory when I read the first edition of *The Development Dictionary* (Sachs, 1992) many years ago. Like countless students since, its name attracted me but I quickly discovered that it was far more challenging to read than any dictionary I'd come across before. Despite this, I read it something like a dictionary, partially and often repeatedly, and my 1992 copy is covered in hand-written notes which helped me through what became an incredibly rewarding experience.

As one of a number of early post-development texts (see also Latouche, 1993; Escobar, 1995; Marchand and Parpart, 1995; Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997; Rist, 1997), its influence on post-development cannot be underestimated. In 2017, the Journal *Third World Quarterly* published a special issue on it, 25 years after its publication, and Aram Ziai (2017) argued, at the time, that few books on the history of development have had such an impact. Over many years, I have been hugely influenced by *The Development Dictionary*, and the authors who contributed to it.

I was delighted to hear that a third edition of *The Development Dictionary* was published in 2019 and to have a chance to review it. Though somewhat disappointed that very little new ground was forged this time, apart from the inclusion of a new 2019 preface (along with the one from the 2009 second edition), I cannot but recommend this book for readers of the *Community Development Journal*.

This recommendation comes in light of the limited treatment post-development has received in this journal over its history. A quick search reveals just seven citations of *The Development Dictionary* in its pages, with marginally more references to other post-development texts, and no articles specifically addressing its relevance for community development. In this journal, some of its contributions have been highlighted—its critique of participatory development, especially the chapter by Rajid Rahnema

(1992) on 'Participation' (Murray, 2011). Its influence on advancing thinking on the Commons (O'Donovan, 2015a, 2015b) has also been highlighted, notably drawing on Gustavo Esteva's (1992) chapter, 'Development', and his subsequent work (Esteva, 2014). Though signifying its importance, these inclusions also suggest the potential for further engagement with its critical perspectives.

For those who are new to post-development, this book is a must. Its 19 thematic or concept-based chapters, written by luminaries in the field, traverse a range of topics of interest to community development theorists and practitioners. From equality to the market, participation, poverty, and the state, like its predecessors, it offers essential critical questions about taken-for-granted assumptions of what constitutes development. Focusing on the language, we use and discourses of development associated with institutionalized practice and power, its critique of the influence of modernity and coloniality in development thinking, policy, and practice is particularly important. Though in need of updating, its unsettling insight will never become jaded.

For those who have read earlier editions, reading this third one is like meeting an old friend again after many years. Readers are reminded of its key contribution to the 'decolonisation of the imagination' (Sachs, 2009 p. xxii) when it comes to development. As cited in its original introduction, 'development is much more than just a socio-economic endeavour; it is a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passions' (Sachs, 2019 p. xxix). The book 'offers a critical inventory of development credos, their history and implications, in order to expose in the harsh glare of sunlight their perceptual bias, their historical inadequacy, and their imaginative sterility' (ibid). Like other ground-breaking texts, once its questions were asked and its analyses were presented, they could never be ignored. Considering what they mean for community development is, therefore, an important task for readers, practitioners, and theorists in this field.

Questions around holding critique and alternatives together in new forms of radical politics are at the heart of debates about the relevance and influence of post-development theory and *The Development Dictionary*, more precisely. Where *The Development Dictionary* hailed the end of development, others have found its predictions premature and its conflation of development with mainstream western and modernization-influenced development too generalized and simplistic (Kiely, 1999; Nederveen Pieterse, 2000). The tendency of *The Development Dictionary* to critique, with limited focus on alternatives (an issue addressed in the 2009 preface and in some of the chapters), could irk community development practitioners who advance grassroots and alternative development practice. The *Community*

Development Journal is replete with discussions of development alternatives (Bernier and Phillips, 2005), of decolonization (Wutich and Beresford, 2017) and of radical community development (Kumar, 2017), many of which are not framed in terms of post-development. It's clearly not the only way to critique mainstream development thinking and practice. This edition highlights that despite years of post-development, post-colonial and feminist critiques, and development alternatives, 'development' remains 'one of those zombie categories that have long since decayed, but still wander around as a worn-out utopia' (Sachs, 2019: ix). For Sachs (2009: xxiii), it 'is a plastic word, an empty term with positive meaning' (2019: xii). As such it 'can be easily filled with conflicting perspectives', on the one hand reinforcing the hegemony of an economic world-view while on the other signalling hope for equality and rights. For him, development theorists need to address these contradictions as 'the basic direction of politics is at stake' (2019: xvii).

This third edition of *The Development Dictionary* reminds us of the importance of critiquing what we take for granted with development. In so doing, it helps to shape the foundations for radical and political alternatives. Though it is a pity, it did not include more discussion of what these might involve, especially in light of contemporary challenges, a related publication, *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (Kothari et al. 2019), with its 100 short chapters, addresses this gap. Including a foreword by Wolfgang Sachs, its editors argue that 'what has been missing is a broad transcultural compilation of concrete concepts, worldviews, and practices from around the world, challenging the modernist ontology of universalism in favour of a multiplicity of possible worlds. This is what it means to call for a pluriverse... an invitation to explore what we see as relational "ways of being"' (Kothari et al., p. xvii). It's clearly time for development critiques and alternatives not to be discussed separately, but together. *The Development Dictionary* remains an important part of this story.

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