

Fabricant / Fisher

Settlement Houses Under Siege - The Struggle to Sustain Community Organizations in New York City

Settlement Houses Under Siege: The Struggle to Sustain Community Organizations in New York City examines the past, present, and future of the settlement house in particular and nonprofit community-based services as a whole. Too often viewed as an artifact of the Progressive era, the settlement house remains today, in a variety of guises, a vital instrument capable of strengthening the social capital of impoverished communities. Yet it has been under attack in recent years, particularly in New York City. Cutbacks in social service funding at federal, state, and local levels during the late 1990s left many nonprofit agencies in an essentially untenable position, dependent on a public sector interested primarily in cutting costs. Both this trend and a concomitant shift to privatization continue today, challenging the flexibility and creativity of social service administrators and undermining neighborhoods and community organizations. The findings contained in this book extend well beyond just settlement houses. The tension between the ever more restrictive business practices required by government contracts and the provision of effective social services is a powerful trend in the larger world of nonprofit agencies. Michael B. Fabricant and Robert Fisher offer a ground-level exploration of the complexity of developing and implementing a service-based community-building agenda in a hostile climate. Community building, they argue, will be the most important social service work of the twenty-first century. Drawing on more than one hundred interviews with directors and staff members of social service and nonprofit agencies throughout New York City, Settlement Houses Under Siege makes the case for a holistic view of the structural pressures confronting poor communities, one that seeks not only to reposition the idea of social service and revision social assets in a conservative age but also to pose important questions about our broader civic life.

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Kundenservice Fachmedien Otto Schmidt

Neumannstraße 10, 40235 Düsseldorf | kundenservice@fachmedien.de | 0800 000-1637 (Inland)

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