Local Communities

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Local Communities

- There is never only ONE community! For anyone
  - So, we often say '*communities*'

- There are two main types of communities:
  - Spatial or Geographic Community
  - Communities of Affect, or Communities of Feeling
    - Also called Communities of Interest

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Geographic community

- A Physical Location (Anywhere)
  - Varying definitions – local, regional, national
    - And namings – habitated area, villages, hamlets, suburbs, towns, …..
  - Common denominator:
    - <u>an area</u> where 'a group' is located
    - <u>some formal aspect</u>(s) attributed to the group
      - Geography
      - Administrative/managerial

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Geographic community

- Size and scale matter
  - how the community works within itself, and how it retains beliefs and identities. (proximate – distant)
- Large scale tends to require simpler definitions of identity in order to encompass diversity
- The smaller scale is the level at which people *interact* with each other
  - Although: 'large' and 'small' are highly relative

- Geographically, communities tend to be made up of multiple smaller communities, nested within each other

Communities of Affect

- *Communities* to which we *connect ourselves*

- *Often voluntary membership – not born into*

- *Across a very wide range of things*
  From vocation to age to interests to hobbies to…. Anything
  And further: families/households/clans

- *We can (and generally do!) belong to multiple communities at the same time*

Communities Role in Our Societies

- Communities are the core units where we work, involve ourselves and actually live,

- They consist the framework around our belonging to and relations to other people, structures and settings

- Everything happens in this (more or less clarified) community context

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Communities Role in Our Societies

- We 'grow up' in them (both literally and relatively)

- They shape us and how we develop

- They may assist, support and empower us

- Or they could repress, disencourage and obstruct…

WHY SO?

- Because we are not the only ones there

- Because they are run by traditions, rules and norms

- Because they need to be nourished and tended to

- Because they become what we (either actively or passively) allow them to become!

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«Traditional Societies»

- Communities were relatively stable over time

- But also rather strict and unyielding to individualism

- Were there to secure the survival of the community!

- Was the safety-net in absence of state/government

«Modern Societies»

- Quick to change

- Large throughput (people, tasks, ideals, norms)

- Losing importance
  - ➢ To the modern state (the welfare state)
  - ➢ To market economy
  - ➢ To other types of 'communities'
    - ➢The media-community
    - ➢Political communities

The Village Animal (Bygdedyret)

(Tor Jonsson, poet, Norway, 1950's)

- In rural communities a feeling that the community was *outdated*, as well as 'controling' and 'oppressing'
  - No room for 'otherness'
  - No room to follow your own dreams

- A negative transparency – you could not hide from the community's view

Result: leave the (rural) community for the 'big city'
  - Become anonymous – but free (unseen)

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The Nosy Neighborhood Woman (Nabokona)

Gro Harlem Bruntland (former Prime Minister) held a speach some 15 years ago:

- «we must welcome back the nosy neighborhood woman»

  (the very entity «Bygdedyret» tried to escape from)

Why this change of mind?

- Had realized that the transparency of community was what consisted the community

- That the anonymity of urban life erased relations and contributed strongly to unhealth

So:

- Communities can be both bad and good
  - often at the same time - for different participants
- Still – they have an important role to play in the societal fabric

Thus emerged our answer:

- There are no quick fixes *(... seldom is for anything societal)*
- Communities become what we let them become
- We need to work WITH communities – NOT best left alone

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- This goes for us all as individuals

- As well as for authorities and institutions

Norway: a long tradition of local community studies, experiments and interest.

- For good and for 'not so good'….

Have Found:

- Active and well-functioning communities may improve development
  - Social
  - Relational

- As well as
  - Economical

Community Entrepreneurship

Interacting actively with your community$^{(*)}$, you can improve your chances of success, security and sustainability.

Getting

• Support from communities' members

More important:

Access to communities' assets

• Particularly their ideas and creativity

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$^{(*)}$ any kind of communit
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