Communities

Prof. Gurnam Singh
Professor & Head
Department of Social Work
University of Lucknow, Lucknow

Community as a System

- The most difficult system to define with precision.
- Employed to impute commonality of interest to what in fact are disparate groups of people.
- Community is a macrosystem.
- Held together by feeling and sentiment.
- At the interface between society and microsystems.

Community as a System

- Community is simultaneously a subsystem of society and is the society itself.

- Consistent with adaptation and accommodation importance is placed upon the mutual causation: the citizen and the community influence each other with family, small group and organizations as intermediaries.

Kinds of Communities

- Gemeinschaft: characterized by implicit bonds that relate all community members to the others.
- Gesellschaft: characterized by bonds that are both formal and specific.
- A second way that communities differ from one another is in the degree of attachment to a specific location:
  - Place communities
  - Nonplace communities

Social Network

- Consists of the relationship between pairs of people.
- In a social work context, a social network consists of "a set of people all of whom are linked together, but not all of whom know one another."
- Kinship is a third kind of community in which members have blood relationships.

Social Network

- Barnes's definition of social network includes a "networking", goal-oriented social system and kinship networks.
- Nonplace communities and social networks have some geographic connection, even though members may never convene in one location at one time and do not consider physical location to be a primary or constant factor.

Definition of Community

- Community is a population whose members;
  - Consciously identify with each other
  - May occupy common territory
  - Engage in common activities
  - Have some form of organization that provides for differentiation of functions, which allows the community to adapt to its environment, thereby meeting the needs of its components.
- Components include the persons, groups, families and organizations within its population and the institutions it forms to meet its needs.

Energy Functions

- The functions the community performs include the maintenance of a way of life or culture.

- Another important function is the satisfaction of common needs, interests, and ambitions.

- Members of a community must be aware of its "we-ness".

Energy Functions

- The importance of the social environment, including the community, is providing a medium for the evolution of the person.
- Other components such as families, organizations, and groups must also be able to identify with and find common cause with the community's way of life in order that their energies may be used to meet the community's needs.

Energy Functions

- The term "common cause" was adopted as the name of a national citizen's action organization that explicitly recognizes the necessity to involve citizens and to draw upon their energies.

- For environment/suprasystem – a community must also meet the needs of its environment in order to survive.

Energy Functions

- Religious communities, as examples of Nonplace communities, have also been confronted with the need to adapt to their environment.

- American Indian reservations are examples of communities that were excluded from the general society and suffered entropy.

Energy Functions

- A systems perspective would indicate that mutual accommodation would be necessary, and each culture would have to both accommodate and assimilate.
- The functions that a community performs for its environment are the energy functions described in Chapter 1, giving, getting, and conserving energy.
- The community supplies energy to its environment and its components in the form of persons and products to be used by those systems.

Aspects of Community Systems

- Evolutionary Aspects – the first cities were burial places to which wandering tribes returned at certain times to perform ceremonies that ensured the stability of the universe.

- The character of a particular community is determined by its relationship to other communities and the society within which it exists, by the characteristics of its components.

Aspects of Community Systems

- How a sense of community will be maintained is not clear.
- Divisions of social class or status, ethnic or racial heritage, religion, or ideology, continue to frustrate efforts to strengthen a sense of "the common" shared by all inhabitants.
- The shape taken by cities of the future is being determined by experiences and crises in cities today.

Aspects of Community Systems

- Structural Aspects (Boundaries) – the boundaries that separate communities from larger and smaller social units (the so-called vertical hierarchy) are often difficult to establish precisely.

- Communities are subordinate to larger, regional networks and to industrial and communication centers in their economic and social affairs.

Aspects of Community Systems

- Boundaries within the community include those between institutions that differentiate tasks.
- Institutions – differentiation of function by assigning them to specialized subsystems lead to the emergence of institutions within communities.
- The form the institution takes in a particular community depends upon the community's components, it previous steady states, and its environment.

Aspects of Community Systems

- Some institutions almost escape our notice because they exist in most communities, but their functions are overlooked (Bars and taverns).

- Community institutions pose special challenges, as well as support, to social workers and other professionals acting as change agents, because institutions are social systems and seek to maintain themselves.

Aspects of Community Systems

- Social class and caste – Studies of social stratification have substantiated social class or status groupings in most communities.
- Another differentiation between communities may be that of caste: defined as an impermeable boundary, a status assigned by virtue of some characteristic beyond a person's control (skin color, gender, national origin, or age), it may be an accurate description for the status of some Latinos, Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and American Indians.

Social Networks

- Some theorists maintain that neighborhoods are simply social networks that have a base in a particular locality.

- Social networks have become popular as a vehicle for "consciousness raising" among disadvantaged populations such as women, gays and lesbians, and racial or ethnic minorities.

Social Networks

- Such networks emphasize awareness of their disadvantaged status and the societal dynamics that underlie it.

- The more organized the groups become and the more specific their goals, the less they resemble networks and the more they become formal networks.

- Networks can be highly useful to human service professionals who want to secure support for a client or patient.

Social Networks

- Social networks often cross economic and social lines in their common identification as victims, or people with problems.
- Behavioral aspects include social control, socialization and communication.
- The overall purpose of social control is to maintain the system, not necessarily to maintain the status quo.

Social Networks

- Social control may be exerted by the entire community through its network of values and goals, which are embodied in one or several of its institutions.

- In Nonplace communities, social control may be exerted by formal or informal sanctions.

- Overlapping memberships of community members can mitigate social control.

Social Networks

- A related aspect of community is that of "community power": that persons simply represent their interests and form subsystems; that communities are an ecology of such subsystems that cooperate or compete as the occasion arises; that power is not distributed evenly among these subsystems, which rise and fade.

Social Networks

- Socialization is essential to the life of a community. If new members are not socialized into the community to supply new energy (negentropy), it becomes entropic.
- New institutions arise to perform new functions, just as public school were created to socialize millions of European immigrants.
- Project Headstart was intended to socialize racial minorities.

Social Networks

- There are less formal means of socialization (parades on holidays, graduation of students).
- Social networks can be highly significant in socialization organizations and communities.
- Networks function primarily as sources of information and as efficient distributors of information.

Social Networks

- Networks are typically more fluid and have fewer fixed roles than groups, organizations, or communities; thus, it is easier to fit into a network and to both give and get energy.

- Information exchange is the primary reason for the existence of a network.

- The most frequent and significant communication activities occur between persons face-to-face and through public media.

Social Networks

- Social networks have communication as their major function.
- Social networks resemble groups and communities in some respects while resembling organizations in other aspects.
- A network may be seen as an interlocking set of roles with relatively specific functions, compared to groups that are broader in their functions.

Professions as Nonplace Communities

- When a group carves out for itself a societal function or some part of society's stock of ideas, it becomes established as a profession.
- The major commonality among the professions is that they are formally legitimated by society to bring about change that is beneficial to the society and its components, as well as maintain society.

Professions as Nonplace Communities

- Professional licensure symbolizes societal acceptance and sanction for a professional territory.
- Social work has concerned itself more with change among microsystems than with change among macro systems.
- Social work has enlarged its territorial claims in the past half-century, and boundary disputes between professions within the same institutions are common.

Professions as Nonplace Communities

- Other characteristics of a profession:
  - System of values
  - Ethics
  - Allegiance
  - Social control and socialization within the profession.

The Community in Critical Condition

- Two fundamental systems questions to be answered:
  - What is the focal system: society, community, the family, or the person?
  - What should be the relationships of subsystems to the community: what should be the balance among them?
- There is general agreement that communities in the United States are threatened, and many are in decline, or defunct.

The Community in Critical Condition

- The culprit is television.
- It is suggested that heavy TV watching is one important reason why less educated people are less engaged in the life of their communities.
- One ideological solution to the problem is offered by "communitarianism".
- A philosophy of community that stresses the "social compact" or "social contract" between persons and the society, and the mutual obligations that community members have to each other.

The Community in Critical Condition

- The communitarian viewpoint is attractive.
- It reestablishes community as the focal system in the effort to bring a sense of belonging to the atomized society of the United States.
- To emphasize mutual obligation among its citizens.

Thank You