

DETERMINATION OF THE COMMUNITY CONCEPT

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„...What fed my power of thought and naming
then struck me, with its root and cause.

It was community, our brother,
this poor, drunk comrade called the other,
this bosom-giving nature, wo
curses in somber working places
or through night's huge tree-hollow spaces
sits brooding in the nation's woe.”

Attila József: *Hazám/My Country*. Translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner

In our times – particularly in *East-Central Europe* – the conviction that individual bliss is more important than that of the community reigns supreme in wide circles. An atomised, extremely individualistic view of humankind seems to be getting stronger, which is only concerned with material interests and views; and believes itself the more free, the less it is tied to community and cultural traditions. The radical representative of the human paragon is the world citizen these days, who feels at home everywhere.

The phenomenon is perhaps understandable, since the two blights of the twentieth century, fascism and communism, destroyed individualism by force with great efficiency. Everyone was forced into collectivism and accepting the “one and only true common ideal”. However, *Gábor Náray-Szabó* warns that a great price is to be paid, if the individual consistently cruises above community.¹

On the one hand, historical *experience* shows that communities are indispensable both for society and for the individual. On the other hand, it has become clear that the balance of individual and community must be re-established from time to time.

Man needs the community because the community provides him with security, goals and meaning for his life; with greater efficiency in fulfilling his intentions and with many opportunities for develop his personality. The community is basically an important goal and at the same time a means for every person, even for a hermit, since he broke with the earthly for the heavenly community of saints. The man-hater loner also defines himself with negative behaviour against community. Yet, we can find that people do not necessarily live badly denying or apart from community.

The community is important to *society*, because society atomises without the rich network of communities. It will fall apart into an incapable mass of individuals unable to support the manifold individual interests by way of

1 Náray-Szabó, Gábor (2003): *Fenntartható a fejlődés?* Budapest, Akadémiai.

efficient group representation. At the same time, it can be seen that numerous communities based on a particular interest do not necessarily serve (local or regional) societal efficiency.

In *everyday* speech community is a *valuable something*, a good and useful sign of life in society, a thing people strive toward and they suffer when it is missing. All words used together with “community” are meaningful only when they denote something positive. Community effort, solidarity, life devoted to the community, belonging to the community, community development are all desirable things, part of a state that seems ideal.

*The word “community” has always had a strong – mostly positive – value content.*² It can express a *group of people* (young people, old people, pensioners, art lovers, students...), *quality* (common activity...), not *individual* (pushy, selfish but with community interest) organisations, *locality* (local and/or village community), *common creation, creative workshops* (world of arts, community institutions...), *feeling and intention* (feeling of belonging somewhere), *intention of leaving or breaking away* (I don’t belong among you...), *key ability* (co-operation...), *economic form* (association...), *pledge of identical beliefs and values* (human, political parties...), *belonging to a greater unity* (some civilisation, European Union...). The Hungarian expression of “közösség” (= community) can be connected by the words “köz” and “közös” (= collective; common; concerted; corporate; joint; mutual; public). We can think of the expressions “közügy” (= public case or issue), “köztesség”, and “község” (= civil parish, village, community) (“község” is another form of “közösség” in literature). In the English language the situation is similar, since “community” can be any settlement as well as group. In Hungarian “community” is a community of people, whereas in western sociology it denotes collective place and locality.

We cannot do much, however, with such dissonant word combinations – albeit grammatically correct – as community of criminals, the mentally ill, slimmers, ... communal laze, community aggression ... It is a negative experience in everyday life, when we find that someone we respect denies the importance of community, does not feel well in the community, takes it on, perhaps commits aggression against it. *It can also be found that not every community serves the fulfilment of the individual.* Numerous such smaller or larger communities (tied to ideology) came about and worked in history, which rather served the suppression of the individual. We need only think of the Hitlerjugend existed in the twentieth century; the last phase of the people’s colleges (in Hungarian “népi kollégium”) built on criticism and self-criticism; or the various suicidal-murderous sects.

2 Varga, A. Tamás–Vercseg, Ilona (2001): *Közösségfejlesztés*. Budapest, Magyar Művelődési Intézet.

In spite of the fact that communities are so much present in our actions, in our thinking, and in our everyday life, it is extremely difficult to define the word. There are hardly any concepts in the social sciences that are less developed and more contradictory than community, though numerous branches of science deal with it. Pedagogy deals with the rising generation; andragogy deals with the adult communities; communication theory deals with the internal and ancillary information systems of communities; social psychology deals with the societal embeddedness of communities; psychology deals with the “spirit” of the community; micro-sociology, sociometrics, and group dynamics deal with the relations based on internal choices of communities; sociology deals with the “body” of the community, and information technology deals with globally organised on-line networks of communities.

Genetics, social anthropology, and archaeology have different definitions of community. One of the newest natural sciences, ethology devotes itself to the research of “community formation” in the animal world (insect states, co-operation of predators...).

In the course of thinking through the community concept and determining the motive of certain communities, from time to time there are thinkers who speak out their complaints of the break-up of community, as well as those who interpret the same social phenomena as signs of transformation and survival of the community.

The development of community theory

The great figures of social theory, Herder, Schiller, and Hegel, inform us that community existed to the fullest extent in the Greek polis, particularly in Pericles' Athens. *The German thinkers were of the opinion that the Greek community embraced the complete person in social interactions. In these communities the social roles of people were fully in interaction with each other, not just partly.* (The ancient Greeks were the embodiment of pure humanity, “full-blooded individuals”. Their originality appears from that they hardly adopted anything from other nations; in their culture they invented everything for themselves. We must note that the German social scientists over-idealised the Greek city states somewhat. The Greek world kept slaves and was misogynous; the references cannot confirm the premises of the philosophers).

The German thinkers saw the value of community in that *it raises the individual above personal particularity and self-interest. Thus the person can realise a less narrow and less fragmented social practice in the community. This all encourages those who see the community as the actual area and realisation form of brotherhood and co-operation.* At the same time, attention was also drawn to that labour and mass society undergoing urbanisation was dividing and destroyed communities, and that the people's social contacts broke up. (Kant, for example, relates how nature slakes the instincts of greed and selfishness [which are stimulated to

obtain goods], as man wants to live together with others. On the one hand man strives for agreement, on the other hand he is driven by ambition, to obtain rank within society, and thus get on top of others. As a result, individuality and collectivity get into opposition with each other within him). Louis Wirth entered the debate with this basic position³. In Wirth's opinion *the urbanised individual plays various roles in his contacts with others. He is in a greater state of dependency regarding food than a person in the country. From this it follows that he is in contact with a large number of organised groups. Now he is less dependent on individual persons. The dependency on others is also limited by the other's different acts.*

The French thinker Rousseau was the one who indicated that the conformation to *part-interests* was adverse to the development of the community. *He said that we had our doctors, our surveyors, our chemists, our astronomers, our poets, our composers, and our painters, but we did not have our citizens.*

Marx put this standpoint further by claiming that *capitalism "disrobed" historically established communities from their customs and their traditions. The community feature of social life was exchanged for one of competition and the connections of money.*

Huizinga discoursed in the 1930's that every "play element" had been dangerously cut down in modern society. *The rationalisation of technology and the trend toward uniformity – especially in western civilisation – demoted the role of the playful element.*⁴ Albeit play can be a trans-biological form of community life, in which the community forms its conception of life and the world. The essence of common play is the competition, which raises tension, and offers relaxation in winning.

The quoted thinkers pointed out correctly that *if a person considered him- or herself the constituent part in every field of life and he or she was not aware of any kind of division of labour, nor had a part-interest, then that person was a member of the community in the broadest meaning of the word. However, the industrial revolution resulted in urbanisation is developing such tendencies in the world of political and economic power, on account of which people are feeling themselves less and less at home in society.*

Two very striking phenomena affected the formation of community theory in the nineteenth century (particularly in the second half of the century). The first: urbanising and industrial societies felt that they had lost something from their past; that the thread of memory had broken. Society had ceased being a "memory-society". The memory cut brought "the values of folk, namely peasant culture" into the foreground. The phenomenon moved artists, researchers, and journalists

3 Varga, A. Tamás–Vercseg, Ilona (2001): *Közösségfejlesztés*. Budapest, Magyar Művelődési Intézet.

4 Huizinga, Johan [1938] (1990): *Homo Ludens*. Szeged, Universum. /Universum Reprint./

to cast light on the world no longer known by them from the haze of oblivion. *They started to rediscover and popularise “traditional societies”, the communities organised from the bottom up, in order to find the memories lost from their own societies.* For them the “community” meant the *old*, “society” the *new*.

The second phenomenon that appeared in the nineteenth century was the *large-scale media publicity*. The large-scale printed press lifted the individual out of his own locally organised community and placed him into a larger “*imagined community*” as a member of the nation, or as a supporter of some ideology (labour movement, liberalism, left wing, right wing, communism, fascism...). In truth individuals were bound together by the common value set and unified language of articles appearing in the printed press. Yet this kind of *artificial “top-down social organising”* was not really reminiscent of the real world of local communities built from the bottom up on interpersonal relations and communication.

In the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in the decades from the 1950’s to the 1980’s (equally in East and West, during the “era of the cold war”) *strong ideological pressure* hindered community theory. In the countries of the Soviet block “*community*” became synonymous with “*socialist*”, while the “*individual*” and “*bourgeois*” (that is non-socialist) behaviour were the opposite. Everything was socialist that agreed with the official goals of society. Everything was bourgeois that deviated from that. This outlook and practice strove to cease the traditions of community. *Socialism wanted to create new communities, while at the same time strongly restricted it. It forced the individual’s self-determination into tight bounds and abolished the capability for self-organisation. Socialism, declaring itself to be the “society of communities”, often gave a kind of negative “community” experience to the population, which, as a result of this, withdrew from “dictated community forms” into private life between four walls.* In conclusion from the end of the 1970’s and the beginning of the 1980’s it was more acceptable to speak of groups than ideologically, uncertain and played-out communities. (It can almost be regarded as a natural law in the former socialist countries that after the collapse of socialism the word “community” was full of negative connotations and has been only slowly and gradually regaining its true meaning).

The separate choice and use of the concepts of group and/or community in truth hardly helped to solve the problem. According to socialist (Marxist) social scientists *community denotes a quality excess over group in terms of human forms*. However, they did not really know what to do with this quality excess related the goals delineated by official ideology and politics.

The problem was also dealt by western social scientists. For example, *Kurt Lewin* sees the essence of group not in the similarities or differences of its members, but in their *interactions* and how they depend on each other.⁵

5 Lewin, Kurt (1975): *Csoportdinamika. Válogatás Kurt Lewin műveiből*. Szerk.: Mérei Ferenc, Szakács Ferenc. Budapest, Közgazdasági és Jogi.

Robert K. Merton does not only regard *interaction as a criterion, but also as the distinguishing mark between the two concepts – group and community*.⁶ Every group is also a community – he says –, but those communities whose members are not in interaction with each other cannot be considered groups.

At the end of the twentieth century it had already become accepted in the widest circles that in today's strongly differentiated and ever more globalising society ancient groupings were preserved. *Traditional communities* are not being discontinued, because of their importance to the individual and society alike, as "organic building blocks". At the same time they are changing. Especially the transformation of family communities had to be taken notice of. In the twentieth century the number of cohabiting communities grew enormously, while at the end of the twentieth century "gay marriages" were legalized in more and more countries. It can also be found that numerous *new types of communities emerge, the basis of organisation has changed accordingly*. Whilst traditional communities⁷ are organised on the *basis of area* and the world of *face-to-face* formations, the foundation of modern communities is not constituted by the physical meeting of the members in space and time, but by contact through *new types of interactive communication* (mobile, e-mail, internet...) *built on common interests and value choices*.

It has also become obvious that *disintegrated structures are not immediately followed by new ones. So-called "vacuums" arise in which "pseudo communities" and "ersatz communities" emerge*.

The classics of community theory

The first résumé and a new interpretation of problems in connection with communities appeared at the end of the nineteenth century (1887) linked with *Ferdinand Tönnies*. In his opinion the *concept named "Gemeinschaft" (community) must be distinguished from the concept of "Gesellschaft" (society)*.

According to Tönnies, the "*community*" that characterised a typical pre-modern European peasant society consisted of a dense network of personal relationships, which heavily based on kinship and on the direct, face-to-face contact that occurred in small, closed villages. Norms were largely unwritten and individuals were stuck with a web of interdependence that touched all aspects of life, from family to work to the few leisure activities.

"*Society*", on the other hand, as the framework of laws and other formal regulations characterized large, urban industrial societies. *Social relationships*

6 Merton, Robert K. (1980): *Társadalomelmélet és társadalmi struktúra*. Budapest, Gondolat. /Társadalomtudományi Könyvtár./

7 Tönnies, Ferdinand [1887] (1983): *Közösség és társadalom*. Budapest, Gondolat. /Társadalomtudományi Könyvtár./

were more formalised and impersonal. In the aspect of needs individuals depended on each other not nearly to the same extent, therefore were they much less morally obligated to one another. *In other words, as time went on informal norms and values were exchanged for formal laws and regulations. In pre-modern times societies' members related through "status-contacts" to each other. In contrast with this, such contacts were based on "contracts" in modern capitalist societies. For example, there is a formal agreement, as the employer pays a certain sum as wages to the employee in return for completing a certain amount of work.*

Tönnies contrasts the disappearing traditional community (*Gemeinschaft*) (based on close and lasting family and neighbourly ties, solidarity, homogenous culture and norm system, characteristic of villages and small town) with the society (*Gesellschaft*) of culturally heterogeneous, alienated, rapidly changing, contingent civilisations characterised by relationships based on interest.

Tönnies posed three essential questions in his work *Community and Society*, which arised numerous problems of definition later.⁸

The *first* question was about the "community by blood" (kinship). According to Tönnies this distinguishes human communities from "communities" formed by animals; or shows how certain species or races differ from each other. However, the given answers led to tensions in human societies. Exceptionally fertile ground is offered by the "We and They" distinction, to the development of discriminative or prejudicial thinking (scapegoating).

The *second* question was about the "community of place" (stability, whether can people's groups be tied to a place, or, in other words, should communities be imagined in a geographical approach. Is it even possible to attach a community to a place?

It must be noted that *the local determination played substantial role in Tönnies' community concept, which had a significant effect on later research, too.* Several researchers studying *urban communities* on the basis of the determining role of place and space (for example, in certain city quarters) presumed to find the community Tönnies thought had been lost. After all, "*communities of place*" members with different interests are forced by nature to co-operate in solving common problems because of their interdependence due to living together. *These "traditional" communities are fairly closed. They defend their boundaries, and they accept new members with difficulty. Members cannot easily leave their communities. The ties between solidary members are strong. They provide several functions at once (company, assistance, support, information, arising feelings of respect). The web of contacts is woven tightly. Public spaces (bars, coffeehouses, parks) play important role in community life. Community members meet in these places of communication and interaction.*

8 Tönnies, Ferdinand [1887] (1983): *Közösség és társadalom*. Budapest, Gondolat. /Társadalomtudományi Könyvtár./

It is possible that we cannot really find signs of communities described above in the society of today's large cities, but that does not necessarily mean the cessation of those communities.

The *third* question is whether the examined communities were created by the internal conditions or the researcher. The latter cited is extremely relevant, because in the branches of science emerging *in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries diverse and different condition systems were used to determine and form the definitions of community.*

In the course of tackling the research field full of problems it turned out that several determinants must be taken into account in a nuanced way.

The question of *historicity and temporality* has to be paid attention to. Besides existing historical eras – Neolithic times, Antiquity, the Middle Ages, early Modern times, and Modern times – research fields are tied down in space and past time. Research reports and literature appear about communities of empires, nations, countries, provinces, cities, local and family histories, famous people, and peoples. In other words, the space and time notions of historians, ethnologists, and ethnographers gradually class and even divide among each other the fields awaiting discovery.

We must take into account the *advent of sociology* as an important point. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries sociology was concerned in establishing a community concept on which social scientific methods would be found. *Postulating that social associations exist in clear numerical and linear organisational form*, instead of attending to “small communities” (as they were called by anthropologists), *sociologists turn their attention to “large communities” or to the “masses” – also a hard-to-define concept.* The starting point is the association of two, which is followed by a “triangular form”, subsequently give or take two to seven persons constitute a community. This is the specific *zone* of spontaneously formed small groups and circles of friends. A “*social field*” can be developed of twenty to twenty-five persons, followed by “multitude” and “*mass*”. The generally accepted sociological terminology tries to eliminate the word “community” itself for reasons of safety. Mostly the word “group” is used, yet they are not identical. Exactly that is missing from group in which community is more than the pure sum of the members. (Of course, this approach can thus be interpreted as each community is a group, but not each group is a community.)

Attention must be paid to *the contact forms and behavioural forms between the members of the examined community, group, association, etc.* Community studies, appeared between the two world wars, brought the most novelties into this field. The researchers examined marriage customs, rites, and language and stumbled on numerous factors assumed to be the basic determinants of the respective community.

Finally we must be aware of the *statements of community studies.* The researchers pointed out that no community can be examined as a completely independent,

isolated point-like formation, an island without external connections. The village monographs and later the urban anthropological works made numerous valuable observations. One of their most important discoveries was that the community was not necessarily identical with any geographical or political entity.

Macfarlane set out his criticisms of classical community theory⁹ as follows:

1. Community theory studies cannot be compared with each other. The analyses at the macro level hardly contribute towards understanding the way “large societies” and “complex societies” work.
2. Classical community theory studies generally deal with geographically or locally described communities and closed systems. They are however useless for drawing boundaries between communities.
3. Non-western societies are described according to the model of western type individualistic, highly mobilised societies.

Approaches and trends in Hungarian community research

Hungarian community theory research looks back on a significant past. Among the advocates and innovators of classical community theories we are bound to mention the names of *György Csepeli*, *András Dékány*, *Elemér Hankiss*, *Ágnes Heller*, *Ferenc Mérei*, *Ferenc Pataki*, *János Rudas*, *László Szabó* and *Iván Vitányi*.

The social psychologist, *György Csepeli*, already at the beginning of the 1980's drew attention to that a social scientific community concept could only be reached by *studying the actually existing* groups of people.¹⁰ He stressed the following properties to determine community as opposed to all other forms of societal relations:

- *Human gregariousness concentrates in community*, and appears as a direct psychological reality in social experience.
- *Community is a development concept*. Exactly in its development it makes the goals and needs keeping it together possible to mean motivation, additionally they also have a broader validity.
- Group processes in community contexts, the different role structures, attitudes and norms with the function of emotional and cognitive unification, keep renewing, filling up with modern social content.
- *It also means the development of community members*. The community member is not only the suffering participants of his or her duties, but also the

9 Macfarlane, Alan (1993): *Az angol individualizmus eredete. A család, a tulajdon és a társadalmi átmenet*. Budapest, Századvég. /*Methamorphosis historiae*./

10 Csepeli, György (2003): *A szervezkedő ember. A szervezeti élet szociálpszichológiája*. Budapest, Osiris.

active creator of him/herself, others and relations. Community is the workshop of education. The personality in the community connects to other community members not as a given but as a potential.

According to Csepeli *all social formations potentially hide the hope of community development*. There is no anti-community social relationship, and there is no social alliance predestined to community existence. According to the experience of community pedagogy progression is possible even in the most hopeless cases, while regression can happen even in the most evident communities' life.

According to Csepeli the following groups, exactly described by social psychology, provide conditions and possibilities for the chances of community existence. It is worthwhile to study these groups empirically as with their help the society's social interaction map can be drawn.

1. Both everyday experience and science agree that people's behaviour and experience are very different depending on whether they are members of *small or large groups*.

In a *small group* the scope of our attention limits the number of members. Members are connected with the most inner layers of our personality via intimacy, directness, the net of mutual personal relations, the dynamics of freely functioning interpersonal emotions. Therefore the membranes between "I" and "the other" are the most permeable here.

The base of *large groups* is the common social category, which can be independent from the individual's will, or taken upon by choice. Determination is of social nature, its base is the similarity of interests, values, norms, and customs. Large groups are significant for the individual because they provide him or her with goals and perspectives. Regarding self-definition, they provide the feeling of togetherness with similar thousands, millions.

2. The second differentiating factor is the *informal or formal* feature of a group.

Talking about *informal* groups we can refer to small groups: family, circle of friends, a set of people voluntarily undertaking common action. Here the rational controlling principles of behaviour – fair exchange, pursuit of individual advantage – are less emphasised. Transmission is more important than reception; searching for advances is not in contradiction with self-denial. Informality is the bedroom of the soul, where secrets are not secrets any longer: the members' relationships are transparent, and individual dignity is the limit.

Informal groups can be formed spontaneously within the framework of *formal* groups. However, this has the potential of developing cliques, sects, and deviant forms of behaviour. The frameworks are too rigid, they are not following men's collective nature. The inner role relations of organisations often start their own life: they become self-contained, and lose their contacts with the world outside the organisation.

3. The third particular dimension of group phenomena is the existence of *primary* and *secondary* groups.

Primary groups. Already at the beginning of the twentieth century Charles H. Cooley described that the wide circle of primary groups is the ground of our everyday personal social experience.¹¹ *Cooley* ascribes five properties to primary groups. (1) Face to face feature. Members have known each other well, from all sides, for a long time past. They face each other with their entire personalities. (2) There is no (or there does not need to be any) external goal apart from the association itself. (3) The group is associated for longer term. (4) A small number of people is involved. (5) The relations between the members are direct and may be intimate. Primary groups are informal small groups important to the members, and also each member is important in the group.

Secondary groups. Social psychology has relatively bare reliable knowledge on the conditions of secondary groups. There are realistic necessities and needs behind them, which cannot be satisfied in the existing frameworks.

4. The *membership or reference* feature of groups can be the basis of empirical studies.

Membership group (In-group). Independently of being small or large, formal or informal, primary or secondary, – all those groups we are members of, we identify ourselves with or others identify themselves with are included.

Reference group. Our norms and scale of values can be based on experiences gained about other groups. In this instance we refer to reference groups. We are not members of these groups but we wish to be. Getting from a group to another can be achieved by assimilation or mobility. The reference group is an important phenomenon because it is voluntary, not forced. For groups on their way to be organised into communities it is especially important that the membership and reference frameworks are concurrent.

István Dékány states his point briefly and concisely¹² *the goal of community is nothing else but itself!*

Elemér Hankiss – whose views in detail are worthwhile up to the present – at the very end of the 1970s stated that community is the cohabitation of those people who are connected by the following four factors: *common goal, common interest, common system of values, as well as the idea that they have the previous three factors in common, i.e. the “us” feeling.* He differentiates between two main types of community: *direct* and *notional communities*.¹³

11 Cooley, Charles Horton (1902): *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.

12 Dékány, István (1942): *Mi a közösség? Társadalomtudomány*, XXII. évf. 335–362. p.

13 Hankiss, Elemér (1983): *Közösségek válsága és hiánya*. In *Társadalmi csapdák. Diagnózisok*. Budapest, Magvető, 205–240. p.

The members of a *direct community* know each other personally, have direct ties, and occupy a well-defined point in societal space. They must *come together in space and time* to maintain and operate their community. Examples of these communities are circles of friends or colleagues, sects, associations, clubs, societies, neighbourhood related communities.

The members of a *notional community can live far away from each other in space and time*: the awareness of common interests, goals, and values binds them together without having them to know each other personally, although such ties can exist between them. The essential community creating force is not “being together”, but “belonging together”. We can think of supranational spiritual and moral communities (like the humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), religious denominations, militants of a social movement, the international community of radio amateurs, or a nation.

Hankiss notes that from time to time existing, traditional communities must break up of necessity in a developing and transforming society while new ones arise. Looking back on our history this unceasing course of breakdown and reorganisation is shown well. There are, however, certain historical events, which interrupt this continuity for a shorter or longer time, and disturb this peculiar internal housekeeping of societal-human existence by breaking up traditional communities and not being able to create the preconditions for new ones to emerge. For example Fascism and Stalinism in the twentieth century started with smashing up people’s entire life styles, human-community contacts and ended with the physical destruction of millions of people.

According to *Hankiss* beyond the negative historical-social-political environment (prohibitions, full-force urbanisation, the fast conquest of mass communication and artificially created collectives) other factors also affect the establishment and working of communities. He mentions four significant barriers.

1. *Structural barrier*. *Hankiss* calls the exclusively vertical, top-down, branch system of personal contacts determining a community’s life a feudal structure, which does not permit horizontal relations to develop. Decisions flow down the lines of personal dependence. Those on top determine the lives and the possibilities of those below them. In the reverse direction, from the bottom up the effect is minimal. People have to call on their superiors in all substantial questions, which extends the superior’s power whether he wants or not. All this prevents the establishment of horizontal communities. Another difficulty in forming horizontal communities is that the more low we go down the dependency system, the more far people are from each other. The same is true of the distribution and exchange of news as well.

2. *Barrier of consciousness*.

Apathy. According to *Hankiss* it causes a problem when community consciousness is replaced by guilt.

Bellum omnium (everyone fighting with everyone). If people are desolate, with their tensions, and cannot find security and encouragement in any community, if their interests are smothered and can only be sneakily realised, and if everyone around them feels just as insecure and defenceless, then one of society's most destructive ills takes hold: everyone is insecure and irritable. Széchenyi's simile arises i.e.: "Charging like stags against each other...".

The original sin. In the view of Hankiss we are all participants of the permanent reproduction of the neo-feudal community structure. It is on the one part because we accept and play the subordinating roles assigned to us, and it is almost as if we ourselves strengthen our dependency. On the other part all of us – play roles to a lesser or greater extent subordinating others in the course of our lives.

The trap of high costs. Community cohesion would be called for, but many feel that they will sooner realize their own interests alone. So they make separate deals with those they are dependent on, and thus acknowledge and even deepen their dependence.

3. *Value barrier.* Hankiss sees that if the society's value system is underdeveloped, broken up, charged with crises, then the value consciousness of communities will also be lacking, therefore they won't be able to represent their own value systems either in a distinctive way.

4. *Caveat (warning, notice)* Hankiss warns that communities may not always play an exclusively positive role in society and in people's lives. We can think of the destruction caused to the fabric of society by cliques, sects, the mafia, and terror groups threatening the majority.

Communities playing a socially positive role are not completely harmless either. To a certain extent communities can pose danger to their own members. There is a delicate balance between the development and autonomy of the human personality on the one hand, and integration into community on the other hand. Real community is one of the preconditions of the rich unfolding of personality, while it can also become an obstacle. It can liberate as well as oppress the person. It can lure the person into a trap.

According to *Ferenc Mérei* human grouping is not equal to the members' total sum.¹⁴ The surplus is in interpersonal relations. This surplus he calls *common experience*, which can lift the skills of the group members to a higher level, it can strengthen some of their traits and advance their achievement. The efficiency of "average" members will increase by belonging to the group.

In his researches *Ferenc Pataki* paid a lot of attention to the *birth of the group*.¹⁵ As a Hungarian representative of the so called *genetic approach*, he

14 Mérei, Ferenc (1989): *Társ és csoport. Tanulmányok a genetikus szociálpszichológia köréből.* Budapest, Akadémiai.

15 Pataki, Ferenc (1988): *Közösségi társadalom – eszmény és valóság.* Budapest, Kossuth.

interprets group events and group processes on the basis of their emergence and development. Pataki – accepting the standpoint of soviet researchers – states that the human group always develops from a *mass-like* condition, becomes “mature”, and achieves a *community-like quality* through completing phases that can be traced in the different dimensions of its existence. He differentiates between the various phases of group development. Among the preliminaries he lists the precedents of group formation, the group forming factor and the consequences of group activity.

János Rudas prefers practical and methodological factors.¹⁶ He deals with the world of the so called *self-knowledge groups*. He pays attention to those groups in which the goal of the members is personality and self-knowledge development. They are formed intentionally, not spontaneously, nor according to external conditions. They involve the main phases of the human life cycle in a predictable, often organised way: the realized goal by the individuals is the interaction with each other itself.

Ágnes Heller approaches the world of communities from the moral side.¹⁷ She calls it a traditional community, if people develop a *moral community* presenting norms for the individual to live up to. Heller finds that as the pillars of the traditional communities are shaking and their foundations are showing cracks, a new phenomenon is beginning to unfold.

On the one hand people are violating norms, do not care for virtue, and place personal interests above common interests. Norms, obligations, and virtues held fundamentals become problematic.

On the other hand moral norms are becoming even more universal. Actual fundamental norms are replaced by abstract norms. The common contents and elements of the various actual communities become the norm.

In the view of Heller people can see their own communities’ moral pillars shaking, because *more and more of them adjust themselves to the general norms of human decency*, too. Moral communities demand that we consider everyone immoral who does not go back to basics.

Iván Vitányi’s views on communities – including also some Marxist points – present a specific approach.¹⁸ At the beginning of the 1980’s he stated that in Hungarian community theory the differentiation between *primary and secondary groups* had become the most generally accepted, which was mainly – though not completely – identical with the classification of Ferdinand Tönnies (*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*). In Vitányi’s view, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* should be translated as *first and second degree communities*, as the expression

16 Rudas, János (1990): *Delfi örökösei. Önismereti csoportok: elmélet, módszer, gyakorlatok*. Budapest, Gondolat.

17 Heller, Ágnes (1998): *Költészet és gondolkodás*. Budapest, Múlt és Jövő.

18 Vitányi, Iván (1985): *Egyharmadoszág*. Budapest, Magvető.

“secondary group” can suggest inferior value of these groups. Here we are really referring to degrees as in the case of first degree and second degree equations, as they do not differ from each other in their importance, but in their complexity. A second degree equation in fact includes more first degree equations. This is exactly the case with second degree communities. For example, in a bigger workplace several small, first degree communities (circle of friends, kinship, work group) may exist.

First degree community. Little can be added to the properties of primary groups as summed up by Cooley.¹⁹ All group members are members of the community in all their acts. The individual joins the community with his or her *entire personality*, adopting its value system. The individual lives according to this system and represents it. The *identity* of the individual is clear and bound. Dual, multiple, or contradictory identity systems cannot exist. Group members feel themselves being one with the community in a naturally given way. According to Marx a natural community is where the individual has not yet become detached from the umbilical cord of community because the existence of community follows from the natural conditions of existence: kinship relations, domicile or neighbourhood communities, communities based on common work – or later occupation – activities. *Yet the individual is not autonomous.* Community processes are characterised by *undifferentiated* unity. The relationships are warm and close, though they can be cold and cruel if the traditional regulations make it so. Going against tradition is not tolerated, i.e. following tradition is a command to be obeyed unconditionally. Human relationships are of a personal nature in which often felt hierarchy within. Karl Mannheim describes this feature with the concept of distance as opposed to alienation.

In traditional societies the lord and the peasant are not alienated from each other. On the whole they have the same culture, they can understand each other’s language, it is only that they are keeping the inevitable distance determined by their social positions. In modern societies the upper and lower classes are alienated from each other. Here it often happens that they cannot even understand each other’s words (because they use “different speech codes”), even though they are formally and legally equal, and they consider themselves as such. Primary communities are indispensable, and they are ever reproducing. The family is an example of such a community. In every workplace primary communities are formed.

Second degree community. The relations of participants are not *face to face*. Individuals take part in communities not with their complete personalities, but only with that part of their personalities which happens to belong to that given

19 Cooley, Charles Horton (1902): *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons.

community. The *autonomy of personality* becomes possible, and the various forms and kinds of groups are having autonomy as well. As a result of the individual belonging to more second degree communities and being in contact with many people, *the ties of social interactions are weak*. Second degree community organisations are causes and consequences at the same time of economic and social development. Modern technology, mass production, urban life could not have developed without them. While first degree communities can unite only a few people, second degree communities enable many people to be attached to organically cohesive integrative communities. (For example, according to Ilona Fonyó, an urban person knows more than a thousand people personally and for a long time past. – Of course, that person will know many more but will also forget most of them. – Out of this thousand he or she considers some hundred people significant acquaintances, and about ten or twenty of them is of outstanding importance and they play an intimate part in their lives. These people are not from the same circle but from manifold communities.²⁰) *Behaviour* is no longer regulated by eternal (or revelation-like) norms and laws. The person *has to choose and decide* time and again. The unambiguous structure of the *connections between individual and society ceases to exist*. The *unambiguity and the bound nature of individual identity cease*: the individual can take part in various communities, which can be at loggerheads with each other, and they can be even in direct opposition. The person has to choose between them. The *umbilical cord* connecting the individual to the community is cut off for good. Group identity extends personal contacts, bridging both time and space. *Emerging communities are larger* than the natural ones: the nation, the world, European Union or humankind. The enormous increase of second degree communities poses problems to *significant social strata*. Many cannot find their place. While people are losing the warmth, traditions, and security of first degree communities, they are unable to learn the complex relation system of second degree communities. They lose their identities and escape into deviance.

Third degree community. Is a third degree community possible? According to Vitányi it is only a theory. *Firstly*, there is *no autonomy yet for the individual* in first degree communities, whereas in second degree communities *the individual already has autonomy*. In the case of the third degree autonomous personalities deliberately organise into a community on the basis of common interests. *Secondly*, first degree communities have a one-dimensional structure, while second degree communities have a multi-dimensional structure. In third degree communities each *dimension may be formed by a multi-dimensional system*.

20 Fonyó, Ilona (1967): *A személyközpontú társas mező vizsgálata kontaktometrikus explorációval*. (Bölcsészdoktori értekezés.) www.tankonyvtar.hu › ... › Szociológia › Szociálpszichológia – Letöltve: 2012. 04. 04.

László Szabó examines community from ethnographic viewpoint.²¹ He considers community – similarly to István Dékány – as basically and in the first place *direct and intensive community*, in which the members know each other and they are in contact. The peasantry examined by ethnography is divided into such communities. *Peasant communities* are marked by being strongly place-bound, whereas their contacts are personal. Not only do people within the village know each other, they also know people from other villages through marriages, by using the same dialect or because they have a common value system. László Szabó does not regard a broader circle than these a true community. Beyond the main known community forming features, he focuses on six important constituent elements of the peasant community's nature and functioning, his arguments are based on ethnographic research findings.

1. *The community's interest/s/ and goal/s/.* László Szabó disputes Elemér Hankiss' statement that common interests and goals are the two determining and most important constituents of a community. Ferdinand Tönnies does not use such criteria either. He derives the community from *volition*. In his view community theory originates from *the natural state of human will*. It has vegetative roots and it is realised through birth. At the same time he sees that being rooted in human will is not only a feature of the individual but also of the society. But there it becomes conscious, and talks about the *allied will* being realised at the community level. According to István Dékány, having a common interest and a common goal is the characteristic of *associations*. A community does not necessarily get to the point where it has a known goal. *Organically developed communities are characterised by wholesomeness of life. As a result, the community in point of fact has neither interest nor goal; if it would have it, then the question is whether the community can exist.* With the Péter Veres's words, the *law of reproduction* applies. Olga Nagy describes four traditional community models existing in Transylvania. (1) True community, which looks inward. Internal laws are strict. Breeding shows up well. *Here the community's goal and interest concur.* (2) Community denial appears. *Goals beyond the community take purchase.* The community's closed character breaks down. Naturally concurring interest and goal break down. (3) Somebody no longer wishes to be member of the community. *Their interest and goal is to get out of the village, or become free from the peasant life form (which is also the community's life form).* (4) Living at home is good, because it goes with all kinds of advantages. According to Mária Kresz goal and interest are both part of *being socialised into* the community. The expression "being socialised into" exactly covers the community's original essence. *The goal falls within a circle, just like the interest that covers it.*

2. *The size and extent of the community.* One of the most important features of community is directness, which is closely linked up with the size of community:

21 Szabó, László (1993). *Társadalomnéprajz*. Debrecen, KLTE.

i.e. *the community has to be of such a size and extent that can be effortlessly comprehended by the individual in the course of his or her daily activities.* It can be observed that if any settlement grows too large, then it will fall into horizontally and vertically divided smaller local communities. The most intense and at the same time the smallest complete community is the family. In the broader village community the peasant never appears as individual, but as a representative of a family. Community size largely depends on subjective factors. The age of community members is essential, because age (small child, youth, young adult, adult, senior) determines the extent of organisation the given person is able to comprehend. Adolescent boys and girls of school leaving age organise into groups of six to eight persons, adults form groups of six to fifteen. On the whole *a larger community where people know each other personally divides into families, kinship and smaller groups, and these build up the community itself.*

3. *The complexity of community.* According to László Szabó it means that the community provides the members with *a complete spectrum of activities*, scope of activities covering different fields of life, and an outlook on life based on this. Community members are open to each other, they know almost everything about each other, there are no secrets especially within given age groups. All these make connections very tight, and at the same time they lead toward other relationships.

4. *The roles of the leadership and membership of the community.* There are talented leaders in peasant communities, too. The selection of the community leaders depends on the character of the given task. *The right man gets the leading position because the complexity of the community makes it possible that almost every act and activity of every community member is known and recorded.* Leadership is based on suitability. For example, the leader of the harvesting crew is selected not on the basis of his social position or wealth, but on his skills with the scythe.

5. *The natural characteristic of community.* The true community has a natural effect. *For community members community seems to be eternal. The natural order of life is that people are born into it, grow up into it and inevitably become a member of it.* Peasant communities are formed locally within village communities. The individual automatically ends up in the group organising in that area. No one hits the idea on joining a different company formed in another part of the village.

The natural order of the community and its slow change does not promote extremely talented personalities but rather tailored to those of average or even below average abilities. The community's main task is to look after everyone.

A member may be of a lazy nature, not work, be debauched or prodigal. However, this is not done publicly in front of the community. Such a person will get warning signs: rumour, gossip, jokes on his or her behaviour. As soon as that person changes his or her behaviour, after reintegration into the community, their past will not be held against them.

The natural characteristic of community ensures that even its poorer members have all the rights, and may get roles appropriate to their age or other circumstances.

The natural characteristic of community reveals itself in providing stability for its members. It seems that it has existed forever.

6. *Community and the individual.* In traditional agricultural communities the individual in the bourgeois sense does not exist because there are no individuals present in the community. This social structure helps even those with moderate abilities to give themselves without risks.

People never fit into the community as themselves, they are not present as individuals, but as a member of some other community. In a peasant community people can be members of several small communities in the course of their lives simultaneously or subsequently: he or she can belong to the wealthy or the poor; can be the member of the locally organised groups of young people, adults or old people; can be differentiated by sex, by religious denomination or by kinship in the village.

In Hungary at the beginning of the 1990's the coexistence of the traditional and the new community theory endeavours can be observed. Following the Western example, since the end of the twentieth century there has been growing emphasise and attention for *regional considerations*. Pál Beke and his colleagues focus on practice oriented formal (associations) and informal (non-official) grass-root communities developed after the political transition.²² Since 1989–1990 not only the somewhat isolated – sometimes leisure or hobby-like – activities occurring in the island like terrains of local government or in local cultural centres they have considered as community activity, but the cultural formation of the narrower or broader environment, a type of civil voluntary activity characterised by the joint participation in life enriching processes of education and cultural stimulation.

Published: Tamas T. Kiss (2007): *Theoretical Issues in Cultural Transmission*, Szeged, JGYF Publisher, 101–121. p.

22 Beke, Pál (2005): Mindannyiunk művelődési otthona. *Civil Szemle*, 2. sz. 13–30. p.