

THE COMMUNITY.

CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS AND ANALYSIS OPTIONS

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Abstract

The option to write a text¹ about communities, from a sociological point of view, brings the author in the situation to choose a development path, the most suitable one in terms of the aimed outcome. The starting point consists of the following questions: (1) what are the elements that consistently facilitate the understanding of community? (2) Are more relevant the ones that entitle a mental perception of community, or on the contrary the ones that can be directly observed?

In this study we analyze community in an antithetical manner. Specifically, we present approaches supporting one type of analysis or another, with the note that they tend to be complementary. We continue with a typological analysis in the world of community, with the intention to emphasize the complexity of the approach and not necessarily to make an inventory.

Keywords: community, typologies, thesis, perception of community, understanding the community

Résumé

La possibilité de construire un texte sur les communautés du point de vue sociologique apporte l'auteur dans la position de décrire un croquis du progrès, de choisir la voie la plus appropriée en ce qui concerne le résultat en question. Le point de départ est constitué des deux questions suivantes: (1) Quels sont les éléments qui facilitent la compréhension de la communauté? (2) Les plus pertinentes envoyées à la perception mentale de la collectivité, ou plutôt à ceux que l'on peut observer directement?

Dans ce texte, nous nous pencherons sur la communauté d'une manière antithétique. Plus précisément, nous allons présenter une thèse soutenant soit un type d'approche ou l'autre, précisant qu'ils sont largement complémentaires. Nous allons continuer avec une incursion typologique dans le monde de la communauté, destinée à mettre en évidence la complexité de la démarche, et non de faire un inventaire.

Mots-clé: communauté, typologies, thèse, la perception de la communauté, la compréhension de la communauté

Rezumat

Opțiunea construirii unui text despre comunități din punct de vedere sociologic aduce autorul în ipostaza conturării unei schițe a desfășurării, a alegerii traiectoriei celei mai potrivite din perspectiva rezultatului vizat. Punctul de pornire se compune din următoarele două întrebări: (1) Care sunt elementele care facilitează în mod consistent

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înțelegerea comunității? (2) Sunt mai relevante cele care trimit la perceperea mentală a acesteia, sau dimpotrivă cele care pot fi observate direct?

În textul de față vom aborda comunitatea într-o manieră antitetică. Mai exact, vom expune teze care susțin fie un tip de demers, fie pe celălalt, cu specificarea că acestea sunt complementare în bună măsură. Vom continua cu o incursiune tipologică în lumea comunității, cu intenția de a sublinia complexitatea demersului, și nu neapărat pentru a face un inventar.

Cuvinte cheie: comunitate, tipologii, teze, perceperea comunității, înțelegerea comunității

Towards the comprehension of community

In order to precisely identify those elements which lead to the comprehension of the community, we take into account the community as a concept, as an archetype, but also any possible community, because only these are real. Every community may come close, more or less, to the archetype. However, it has a unique profile depending on a series of specific traits.

The attempts to define it are more than difficult, maybe because some Western schools from the mid 80s announced "the end" of the community, thus showing a symptom of irritability, caused by endless attempts of delimitation. For example, in the introduction of the editor to Cohen's work, Peter Hamilton doubts the term community has indeed the properties needed in order to be called a concept. To some extent, *people believe in community as an ideal and/or reality*. We face the same problems as others sociologists, in the attempt to identify the structural dimensions of the community.

"This duality of the concept represents the core dimension of the confusion it raises. The reality of the "communitarian spirit", the sense of belonging which people show within a social and cultural entity, at a lower scale, which is more comprising than «the family», yet more impersonal than bureaucracy or the workplace." (Hamilton – in Cohen, 1992, p. 8)

The starting point is exactly this ambiguous positioning between family – in a reduced and personal dimension – and the workplace for example, larger in scale than the community, and essentially impersonal. However, in order to delimitate the concept, we use part of those elements which ease the *comprehension of the community*, keeping in background the natural dissociation between tangible indicators and those which show a mental perception of it.

In the sphere of intangible elements, we find the interesting concept of *the community conscience*, as explained by Constantin Rădulescu Motru, who sees in it a key aspect of society in general and of the ethnic dimension in particular. Even if we speak about the community in a broad sense, when connected to the whole

ethnos/nation, we keep in mind the ability of the *community conscience* to manage “society’s actions towards unity and continuity” (Rădulescu-Motru 1998, p. 577). The manifestation of community conscience comes as a response to threats and dangers, interfering only when necessary. However, precisely these threats and dangers are the ones responsible for deepening and strengthening the sense of community conscience.

We identify another series of intangible elements when we refer to Elisabeth Frazer. The author brings together the social and the spiritual dimensions in the community, using the elements which comprise it. Thus, community would first of all represent a value, an ideal. Secondly, it would be a descriptive category, a set of variables. However, community is a notion which shows an entity (“the community” or “a community”) including persons or institutions, at a micro, mezzo or macro level. In other circumstances, it is seen as a relation (“in community”), a set of moral and social relations between the community’s members or between its members and the others. As the first two are connected, the latter ones are also linked

Also, within the community we find relationships patterns – consistent, multidimensional, comprehensive (economic, spiritual, cultural, social) types of patterns. When referring to the tangible or symbolic delimitations of the community, the implied idea is that in it we find a set of unstructured relations, but at the same time the community is seen as an organized set of relations.

Depending on the direction of their own research studies, some authors favour a dimension or another, while others refer to both of them. The solution proposed by Frazer is that of the distinct separation between social relations (structured) and the spiritual ones (unstructured) from soul to soul, both of them being present in the community.

Although we do not believe in the existence of a set of criteria and tests both necessary and sufficient for something to be considered a community, we identify in Taylor three characteristics held by all communities. The traits identified come to complete the features related to bonding within community, but also to the social and spiritual dimension.

The first of the criterion and the most important one is that the persons comprising the community *share the same beliefs and values*. Nevertheless, the communities highly differ depending on the type of beliefs and values taken into account, their emergence, development and systematization, the degree in which the individual internalizes them.

The second feature is given by the relationships between community’s members, *relations which must be direct and involving multiple dimensions*. The connections are direct when they are not mediated by representatives, leaders, institutions like the state, or by codes, abstract elements and so on. Even if a number of individuals share certain common beliefs and values, if they interact solely within formal structures, being isolated one from another, they do not

comprise a community. Nevertheless, for these types of structures the term “local communities” is often used.

The third feature is *reciprocity*. The term represents here a series of arrangements, relations and exchanges, including mutual help, some forms of cooperation and different manners of sharing with the others. In a reciprocity system, every action implies a combination of altruism on short term and personal interest on long term. Thus, the communitarian relations are defined as close, emotional or intense. However, if it became necessary for all the persons within a community to be engaged in these types of relations, we would find very few communities worldwide, and even these would not resist on a long term. In secular communities individuals search for a sense of friendship, fellowship. The meaning is specific, by fellowship understanding mutual attention, the act of doing something together (not only being together), without taking into account benefits and costs and who gives what. Fellowship also requires certain equality. Given its traits, the community makes possible the emergence of friendship.

The spatial dimension of the community

Based on the same distinction between tangible and intangible elements for describing the community, we analyse the inventory of the key conditions, as showed in different approaches. These include territory (spatial dimension, the place), localization, the traits of the physical borders linked with the mental representations they generate, the number of its members, and the specificity of the inside relations as well as the connection with the others. Besides these there are also some other features, but what makes the research more complex is the manner in which the mentioned elements are combined, plus the complexity given by the feature considered most important.

Currently, the most common sociological definitions present the concept of community as an aggregation of individuals, who share common interests, in a certain location, thus becoming a microscopic example of the society. The social memory refers to the village or the small town, but we figure out from the emotional dimension involved in the concept of community that it is more than a place. It is about a special feature of the human relations within a community, the latter one being more an experience than a place.

In this case *localization and space* are seen as an unequivocal option in the dispute localized/delocalized – on the limit even virtual². However, the tendency to define community through the dimension of space is entitled mainly because this is the most appropriate condition – even if not the only one – for the emergence and support of communitarian life.

² In a short version, my own opinion on this topic is related in Pitulac, Tudor, Chapter 4 – “Communities”, in *Sociology*, Part I Sociology and social organization, Lazăr Vlăsceanu (coord), pp. 132-168, Polirom, 2011, Iași.

The common activities and/or shared beliefs may also represent grounds for communities to develop. However, we must not mistake the most appropriate condition with a defining and essential feature. The place, considered by many implicit, is not as important as the networks of relations established within the community. When taking into account the emotional dimension implied by the concept of the community, we realize this is more than a place. It is about a special quality of human relationships within the community, seen rather as an experience than a place.

The place is significant in different manners, depending on the individual. Each one “marks” a different map of the area, dependent on the favourite areas and other elements of this type. The communities as entities could be identified in different ways: as geographical areas; as groups based on kinship; as groups restricted by shared values and/or a common history.

Thus, we come close to a meaning which exceeds the plain spatial delimitation or the mere identification of the place, respectively the idea of *symbolic borders*. In completion to the tangible elements, the human environment is also mental, comprising ideas, traditions, feelings, norms. In other words, it is what Redfield names “the shared mental life”.

“Human mental life has its own structure. It is difficult to describe it in connection with the land, the rain and the trees. The individuals’ thoughts and feelings are partially linked to the adaptation for survival. The manner in which the meaning of the land and the sky significantly enter the individual’s mind is not directly connected to the idea of adaptation to the environment.” (Redfield 1960, p. 31).

Nevertheless, we cannot separate in a definite manner the shared common mental life from a certain place, because the solidarity relationships, exchange relations etc., are highly related to it. Although it seems that in the case of the modern industrial and post-industrial societies, most connections are not local. We encounter here other examples which would be the grounds for community, in counter example to the process of overlapping the symbolic borders on the physical, tangible ones.

Therefore, the studies on communities realised in United Kingdom are mainly focused on the importance of kinship relations, rather than on the thoroughness of social relations in the territory. The connection between kinship and the public allocation of dwellings (which maintained the kinship relations in the British cities) represented the community’s infrastructure. The overlap of the kinship relations on the living space enhances the mutual support, which is otherwise weakened.

Other authors identify community’s grounds not necessarily in kinship, but in occupation, religion, race, showing that these variables could support community as viable social policy. Further, even if questions regarding the community are linked to the degree in which the place or the people are friendly, the studies show that the relevant variables are not linked to the people in the area, but to the spatial distribution of kinship relations, religious or ethnic identity, or to the occupation.

Localization vs. Delocalization

Once we have established the borders, whether they are tangible and/or symbolic (intangible), we find ourselves at the next level of analysing community's dimensions, respectively the relations within the community. In other words, we refer to *interaction and manifestations*. In this case we identify two main questions: how extended is the community/ in how much is it comprised? And how are the relations within structured?

For the first questions, we refer to the degree in which the community includes aspects representing individuals' lives. How much, what part and what aspects of someone's life must be included in the community for its existence?

MacIver's idea, which practically includes the whole life of an individual in the community, is quite attractive for many thinkers. Although community is part of a more comprising social aggregation, it remains a distinct social grouping, characterized by solidarity.

Unlike communities which include the individual in all their dimensions, the local, friendly but mainly random social relations generate what is called the community of limited obligation. The modern neighbourhoods include only the domestic dimension within the family – the family life and necessary services. This manner to locally identify the community, but with random association, redesigns the concept, linking it to its historic and widely known meaning.

For the second interpretation of the first question – in how much is comprised the community – it is not possible to identify even a slight agreement upon the proper extension of a community. Some say it has to be limited – like a locality or an ethnic group; others say that even a small enterprise (if the employees interact in different ways) or a Church, or even whole state could be communities! The community is analysed on all levels: micro, mezzo, and macro. For Etzioni communities include families, neighbourhoods, professional or occupational groups, small localities, towns, cities, nations, even the European Union.

Given the fact that the community is more than "I" – if we should have a certainty, at least this one we can accept – the manner in which we define the "we" pronoun becomes essential for the definition of community. Knowing the members of the community means knowing the parts included in the "we". However, if it is generally established the family's, friends', neighbours' place in the "we", there are different and divergent opinions upon the issue when related to the whole humanity.

Therefore, what can we do to alleviate the tendency to extremely see the whole world as a community? The unlimited inclusion strategy quickly leads us to a point where talking about the community is as meaningless as talking about a community in one person's case. Is there any sense in the idea of the extended community, comprising the whole world? If we were to include everybody in the community, what would be its purpose in the absence of a particular group of people, with a

unique identity? Moreover, the community is also about cooperation, about promoting shared interests. But if we are linked to everyone, and the resources do not allow the promotion of all interests and goals, which criterion should we use to decide whose interest to promote or not? Afterwards, even if we identify the dimension of the “we” at some point, there still is the problem issued by those who come to and leave the community. The importance of those who join the community is almost always greater than the importance of those who leave it. Which would be then the grounds upon which the obligation towards the others is built? Why would I support another in the achievement of his/her goals and interests? Steeves believes it is wrong to see the one who joins the community as an addition. The new members would rather be updates than additions, and their image of the *well being* is not a “well being” to be added to our *well being*, but new experiences of the communitarian Well Being, which includes *well being* as well. Everyone gives a personal meaning to the shared Well being (the intersubjective well being) in our specific well being, but it remains similar to the others’ sense of well being. However, the fact that we cannot define this shared well being does not have to be an impediment in accepting it, once our personal interpretation of the well being only makes us see the shared well being in a specific manner.

The answer to the second question (how the relations within the community are structured?) starts from Dumitru Drăghicescu’s idea. When analysing communitarian structures, the author introduces *the social factor*, besides elements related to race, physical environment, and climate. This consists of historical events, economic conditions, social institutions, the number and density of the population from a demographic point of view, as well as of “social density, meaning the degree in which society’s members have repeated, multiple and varied connections, and are in touch with one another in many and different or few and constant circumstances.” (Drăghicescu 1996, p. 32) Heterogeneity and homogeneity of society’s members are also crucial factors for the profile and the force of communities.

At this point we must assign the meaning of social relations, meaning translated in the relative percentage of “I”, respectively “we” in the area of a certain place (independently of the borders we draw – symbolic or material). In this case we frequently must promote the need to cross over the selfish approach. However, filling the pronoun “we” with all the qualities, makes it vulnerable to become “the dangerous pronoun”, as Richard Sennett calls it.

“The place is geography, a location for politics; the community shows the social and personal dimensions of the place. A place becomes a community when people use the “we” pronoun.” (Sennett 1998, p. 137)

We further aim to include in our analysis elements to help us answer to the question related to the relevance of symbolic dimensions of the community, to the

disadvantage of the material once, or the other way around. The helping questions would be: What do we believe to be a community? How is a community founded? What are the community's borders? We showed above how in time the emphasis changed from the morphological dimensions to the relational ones, from the materials features to the spiritual ones. A further step in this direction shall show more clearly the relative importance of every criterion and dimension.

We find ourselves in the era where distances are easily travelled through, and it becomes difficult to manage the location of different activities and the people involved. Therefore, another type of approach towards the community emerges: community seen as a place, but also from the point of view of its borders and the relations it comprises. However, in Bauman's opinion, the place's value increases today when the institutional safety disappears. Society – an imaginary space, but to which people referred in the past as to some sort of community taking care of its members – does not represent anymore an equivalent of hope. Defending the place is thus a responsibility of the community, presented as "...local community, physically tangible, the «material» community, a community incarnated in the *territory* inhabited by its members" (Bauman, 2001, p. 84).

When taking into account the relationship type, community is firstly seen as a feature of the human relations. "It is not necessary for the individuals to live close to one another for this quality of the relationships to appear. It is probably necessary for them to physically meet. But maybe not even this." (Frazer 1999, p.141). Good examples are the recent groups which have a self-acknowledged communitarian identity, like the gay's community, the feminist community, or the business one. Their emergence might be enhanced by the *media*, which offers the proper background for the existence of forums exceeding the local dimension. The required self-regulation and sometimes preached by the communitarians is present in the case of many voluntary, professional, or commercial associations, which do not require a local dimension.

In the same interpretation given by the pair material – non material, it comes into attention the importance of the place and localization, even if in some approaches this could be easily removed from the analysis. Therefore, even if the communitarians refuse the accusation of being nostalgic, that they propose a return to the social order where individuals were relatively stationary in a community centred in a given place, they emphasise in their analyses the importance of the place. This is noticeable in their incentive to strengthen the local government and in their recommendation to build local organizations and within neighbourhoods.

Moreover, we find the localization mentioned in each of the three types of communitarianism identified by Frazer (*vernacular, philosophic, political*). In the first case, the place (the workplace, the school, the home etc.) is the one that generates conflicts and anxieties, leading to actions which imply the return to the community. Also, the place is the object of these actions.

In the case of philosophic communitarianism we refer mainly to Alasdair MacIntyre, who is not very precise when referring to the place, the territory. In the

examples of communities which offer social identity and the inheritance of places and obligation, he mentions the guild, the profession, the clan, the tribe, the nation, the family, the city, the neighbourhood. In most of these cases, the territory or the collective space has a powerful symbolic value (for the family, the house etc.) It is also true that for MacIntyre, the communities are social formations which commit the individuals at the level of their identity and not only in terms of preferences. The commitment depicted by MacIntyre can exceed the place.

In the third case, “the political communitarianism sees the places as being powerful, benefiting from powerful families, well established institutions, such as schools, hospitals, businesses, all connected through the community relationships, presenting them as the adequate infrastructure of the modern states.” (Frazer 1999, p.143)

The place and the territory are central pieces of the political communitarianism. Authors such as Etzioni, Tam, Atkison mention the communitarian family, the communitarian school, and the right of the communities to defend and govern themselves, while focusing on the rights, the needs and the obligations of the local communities. The neighbourhood, together with the family and the members of other institutions represent the main source of the meaning and the identity of the individuals.

Even if the local dimension is utterly important for the representatives of the political communitarianism, the local communities are not the only ones taken into account. They also refer to the communities which exceed the local dimension, reaching in a populist manner, the dimension of the nation or even the whole world. Of course such an approach can be generous in some situations, as it is in the case of Mircea Vulcănescu. The author sees the community at the level of maximum generality, comprising all the Romanians worldwide, “the ones we are related by blood, by country, by language, by occupations, by law or by faith, the ones who live with us or lived before us” (Vulcănescu 1991, p. 97).

The time’s dimension in defining community

We established above those elements which in a general manner would define the community, based on its spatial dimension, respectively on localization and delimitation, whether it is about its physical or symbolic borders. A complementary perspective in the comprehension of the community would be the one taking into account time dimension. The first reference is to Selznick, who proposes a complex set of variables, on whose grounds the community emerges and perpetuates. These variables are: historicity, identity, reciprocity, plurality, autonomy, participation, and integration. A complete community is defined by the consistent and balanced presence of all these elements.

The strength or the weakness of the communitarian bonds depend (also) on the degree in which they contain elements of shared history and culture. These ones are

extremely weak, given their dependency on very general interests and extremely abstract ideas. The historical determined features such as dimension, geography, and demography are well reflected by the manifestation of a community. Also, the specificity of the customs, the language, the institutional life, or the inheritance of a crisis or significant events are well shown by the characteristics of a community. The common historical background gives birth to the communitarian sense, which expresses itself also through a distinct identity, formed by means of socialization.

To some extent, this *shared history* could be the correspondent of a “story”, a criterion which would help the identification of the community, as some authors mentioned by Peter Steeves say (1998, p. 94 and the next pages). A community would be a group which produces a collective story, comprising also the personal story. Thus, there emerges the “I”. The process of sharing a story comprises and defines a community. The idea remains valid even when instead of a “story” we take into account a historical tradition. In other cases, the story and the tradition are combined, presenting the community as the narrative embodiment of the tradition. In other words, it is “a community based on shared memory”, a shared history, the most obvious and often the most important connection of the community. Any kind of history needs anniversaries, legends, and other manners of remembering, independent of its character (mundane or sacred) or its quality (special or modest). This is the mechanism which designs identities.

We come close here to the concept of common mental life which we mentioned above, as long as both of them (the common mental life and the community based on shared memory) fit into the approaches that consider symbolic aspects to be highly determinative for the community (if not totally).

The reciprocity and *the interdependency* represent the initial grounds and the ingredients which support communities. These elements refer to voluntary and rational components of the community. Communities cannot resist (if they even manage to emerge) in the absence of cooperation between its members, if there is no gain from cooperation. However, in order to concur to the emergence of community, the reciprocity must go beyond simple actions necessary for certain common purposes.

For groups and individuals to form communities, they must be involved as complete entities and the relationship must be continuous. The modern contract is based on mutual help only for absolutely necessary and essential common goals, which are nevertheless minimal. Thus, it would be difficult to sustain the community solely through the contract’s principles. The position of limited obligations must be abandoned, and individuals must assume high responsibilities, not as clearly specified obligations, but in terms of attitude and intention. It should not be forgotten that establishing clear obligations tends to alienate people, rather than to bring them together, among others because “the realities of association may claim unequal contributions, and not a carefully balanced reciprocity.” (Selznick 1992, p. 362). As long as communities resist in time, the contract’s model loses its

relevance. The change from association to community makes reciprocity to be more important than the exchange implied by the contract. It opens the ground for relations based on commitment and mutual care to emerge.

Each one of us belongs to a *plurality* of groups. Even the vital force of a community is given by the so called intermediate associations or corporatist groups. These are a sort of restricted groups, with members who are intensely involved and are collectively protected. Due to this belonging, the relation with the wider community can be enriched.

However, sometimes the plurality has a regulating origin. Moreover, it is desirable to have a healthy differentiation of the institutions and of different groups (personal, family, ethnic, local, and occupational), each one maintaining its specificity and fulfilling its functions.

The essential weakness of the pluralist philosophers is the belief that the individual well being is automatically ensured by the group's autonomy. Given that subsidiary groups can be even more oppressive than the state, individual independence should be as well protected within the associations as the freedom of association is. Autonomy can be ensured only by means of social participation. Social engagement may present itself in many forms. Some encourage rationality while others undermine it, some are equalitarian while others require subordination. „The most rudimentary (and the most important) forms of social engagement are closely related to key elements of life continuity: procreation, nursing, work, kinship, friendship” (Selznick 1992, pp. 363-364).

Social involvement on a larger scale relies on and requires the assurance of these elements, the main feature of a thriving community being a high degree of multidimensional social involvement. Due to the strong connection between democracy and community, in the nondemocratic systems there are strong attacks against the communities. Social integration is achieved with the help of the official institutions (political, legal and cultural), as well as of regulations, religious beliefs and practises. The quality of the communities is closely connected to the nature of these institutions.

What can/cannot constitute a community

The first idea that comes to mind when searching for a typical example of community is the family. When considering the family model, all the conditions presented above seem to be met. But can family be considered an example of community? We believe the answer to this question is negative, at least when referring to its modern, restricted form. The types of relationships established within a family, the particular feelings that exist between its members do not allow the exercise of specific forms of social control that characterize the actual communities.

But what about the groups formed at the workplace, the so called professional communities? They comply with some of the requirements mentioned in the various approaches presented, as well as in the definition³ we have suggested. However, they can only be taken into consideration as pseudo-communitarian forms of association. They should play the same role as the communities by integrating, controlling and sanctioning the activities that do not comply with the generally accepted requirements within a particular professional group. The existence and effectiveness of such structures depend on the general social context. In the case of our country the obvious tendency is to consider that a number of specialists in a certain area of expertise and a few workers specialized in different activities can be automatically grouped into a “professional body”, invariably called “community”. In fact there are few occupations characterized by real communication and a sense of guild solidarity.

The importance of a community must be considered from the point of view of the value it has for every member in part. The contribution brought by community to the society can be at least inferred by the generic identification of the aspects the latter one needs in order to exist in a particular form. If we consider that needs are a mere characteristic of organisms – and that failing to satisfy the most urgent ones would lead to the physical disappearance of the organisms – , than societies should have functional necessities. The difference is that societies will not disappear if these necessities are not met. They would probably suffer some changes. This is also the chance of Romanian society, because societies disappear with great difficulty even when they are heavily mutilated.

Typological attempts

Even without explicitly identifying them in an exhaustive inventory, one can notice the extraordinary variety of the community types, of community aggregation forms. We are talking about linguistic communities, communities formed around clubs or associations, religious, national, moral, ethnic, partial natural, open, close, empirical, normative, dispersed types of communities, intermittent communities (such as the ones that gather according to agricultural rhythms), communities of ideas, of memory, of crisis, of blood, of kinship, professional communities, etc. communities of inclusion and of various aspirations. There also exist other types that only estimate the community or falsify it and so on. Our intention was by no means to achieve the full inventory of the types, this short presentation including only the more relevant types of community.

³ ”a social group resistant in time, gathering a relatively small number of individuals, who have a common cultural background and similar social statuses, that live in an area less extended, who develop well established and persistent cooperation relationships, through these relations being manifested the social control upon the members of that group.” (Pitulac, 2009: p. 72)

In our country the strategy used to overcome the low impact real communities have on people's lives is a fraudulent process. The phenomenon is also present in other cultural areas, although the motivation is different there. This situation may radically change the meaning attributed to this process until now. In the areas where community exists in various forms, the individuals that can make it on their own discard the community because as a member they would have the obligation of sharing with the others. The same type of phenomenon can be observed in Romanian society. The absence of spatial aggregation determines similar individuals who do not know one another to relate to an abstract community. Bauman, while referring in a surprisingly non-specific manner to the “ones with means” talks about “a «community» of those who think and behave alike” (Bauman 2001, p.48).

A person could “join” such a “community”, fluid by nature, by relating and adopting a certain type of identity. This is the case of the majority of spatial segregated communities. The best example is undoubtedly the aesthetic community type, as it is presented in Kant's Critique of Judgment. The aesthetic community is the mere result of an agreement and it exists as long as it is experienced. When relating to the others, who are also alone, there becomes obvious the idea that while there are common factors that bring us together we are not alone: “... fighting on their own turns them all into a community.” (Bauman 2001, p. 51). “Idols make a small miracle come true: they make the unconceivable happen; they invoke «community experience» without real community, the joy of belonging without the discomfort of binding. (...) Communities that form around them are prepared, instant communities that should be consummated on the spot – they are disposable.” (Bauman 2001, pp. 52-53). There are communities that offer the illusion of autonomy while bonding with the others. Other aesthetic communities emerge in connection with public events, with everyday life issues such as an addiction on something and the fight to overcome it by removing the object of addiction, a process that involves meeting with others alike. Aesthetic communities are also known as “hook communities”. These communities do not determine (in addition to the extended duration) the individual to become ethical responsible, and thus they do not induce long-term commitment.

The **ethic community** is radically opposed to the aesthetic community. The power of the ethic community makes it the only one able to provide the required certainty, security and safety that cannot be reached by isolated individuals only on the basis of personal resources. The other types of community cannot create the social political framework, promote the principle of helping one another or other such principles. Community insurance against the errors and misfortunes that are an inevitable part of life is only possible within ethical communities. Due to the fact that the members act together in order to promote their own interests in relation to other opposing categories, this type of community can be also perceived as one based on self interest. It is a very effective manner of seeking collective solutions to individual problems.

Another particular manner of presenting the dynamic communitarian types can be found in Taylor's studies. In an attempt to balance the relationships established between individuals and the state, the development of "anarchist" community forms would represent the best solution. In this case the term anarchy is employed not necessarily with the meaning of opposed to the state, but of independent from the significant coordinates. Although aware of the risk of potential critiques, he emphasizes the experience of the "primitive" communities that were not organized in states, of the "intentional" quasi-anarchic communities and of the peasant like communities related to the close, corporate type. The reason is that these types represent the most important, if not the only empirical cases of anarchy and quasi-anarchy, elements that no community analyst can ignore in his studies.

Some local communities that belonged to the peasant like community type were quasi-anarchic, the community being the one responsible for maintaining the internal order and for settling the disputes between its members. It had a certain degree of autonomy from the feudal and the state. We are talking about the closed peasant like community "which maintains a well-defined boundary and relatively impervious to the world, has a rigid concept of belonging, restricting the involvement of non-members in community matters and issues regarding land ownership and has partial control over the land, preventing the sale to outsiders by the private owners and redistributing it periodically between its members in the cases of joint ownership" (Taylor, 1989, p. 36). These characteristics could also be encountered in the 19th century in Eastern and Western Europe.

Intentional communities represent another group of historical examples. They include Fourier-type communities, Israeli kibutzim etc. Much like the peasant communities, they are also located in societies organized within the state. Whether as a result of a decision or because they had to, some of them are almost self-sufficient from an economical point of view. They are also quasi-anarchic. Intentional communities usually attempt to build a completely alternative way of life compared to that of the society from which they have partially retired. What is less clear is the place of institutions such as monasteries, for example in such a vision. In a sense it can be inferred that it is part of the utopian communities group.

Currently, in American political thinking, the community involves three types: 1. **community based on ideas**; 2. **the crisis communities** – for example the Earth community, emerged as a response to the environment issues; 3. **the communities based on memory**. In the first category we encounter examples based on democratic or republican models of participation. Here is the debate upon the goals of the participative community or the republican one. For the community based on ideas it is important the process of decision making, the debates, the conversation etc."Its promoters believe the participative community will encourage a greater individual self esteem and civic engagement through the increase of communitarian satisfaction and unity." (Fowler 1996, p. 89) People use in their lives only part of their ability to get involved, to think etc. Thus, some believe, people would want to be more than mere selfish beings, but do not have the opportunity to act as such.

The crisis communities are forms of communities which appear due to a specific context, and are not linked to intellectual elements. A great example is the ecologist movement. The attention they rarely receive is not necessarily a declaration of approval, but rather the expression of the impossibility to be ignored. There are also numerous examples of communities based on elements which come close to the “tribal” concept, such as nationalism, ethnicity, and race. These would be “the tribal communities” as named by Fowler. These are present worldwide, but mainly in USA. Another specific expression of this type of community is the concern regarding the ecologist movement. It becomes obvious that this example of community cannot be imagined more reduced than to the scale of the whole planet.

Finally, by the communities based on memory we understand the current ideas about the communities, ideas which derive from well established system of beliefs, connecting the present with the past. A good example is given by the religious and the traditional ideas about the community. The most relevant representations are the family and the religious communities, with all the changes they suffered in the contemporaneity, especially in the case of the family.

The Romanian author Petre Andrei was one thinker who considered, from different manners of aggregation of the human beings, the normal ones to be communities and societies. The community is a group based on blood connections, kinship, customs, beliefs, while the society is a complex of purposes, based on interests and rational understanding. Tönnies identifies three types of communities: based on blood, the local, and the spiritual ones. For Vierkandt (*Gesellschaftslehre*), Petre Andrei finds a typology of communities from a psychological point of view: “1) *the life community*, which implies shared satisfactions and pains, religious and profane celebrations, common meals etc. An example of such a community would be the family. 2) *The emotional community*, emerging from shared identical feelings, like the revenge desire, the shared hate etc., which is mainly exemplified by the tribe. 3) *The community based on purpose and action*. All these three types may be superficial or profound, depending on how they influence different parts of individual’s life, letting them free to behave differently or to be totally absorbed within it” (Andrei 1936, p. 510)

The local community, based not on common ancestry like the family, but on the spatial closeness between people, would be the most appropriate example for our analysis. However, Petre Andrei shows that “it is not about a momentary or accidental spatial contact, but a durable one. Only such conditions create customs and shared life rules. *The village* is an example of community, where the territorial dimension links people together, along with the kinship” (Andrei 1936, p. 512). The village has common interests, sometimes opposed to other villages’ interests. He shows how the loan of household items is nowhere else more developed as in the village. Only in the city’s suburbs is encountered the same practice, thus the suburbs being another type of community. As for spiritual communities, they would include the religious associations, the sects, the classes, the corporations,

and the professional unions. The relationships here are rational, and not organic. The most powerful type of spiritual community would be the nation.

“Communities seem to be more developed in former structures of the society. Once with the evolution of the society, the community seems to withdraw little by little. Instead of unconditioned solidarity between people from a group appears a solidarity based on interest, in which is clear the individual dimension and the appearance of other life modes. However, the community never disappears. Now it does not wholly absorb anymore the different types of society. This makes its area of action more reduced than in the primitive forms of social existence. The society itself (as the whole of active social groups, based on interest and purpose) coexists with the community, as this fact is obvious in all its development stages.” (Andrei 1936, pp. 512-513)

Professor Ioan Mihăilescu (2003), using the already classical communitarian typology rural-urban, presents a model proposed by R. Frankenberg in the writing *Communities in Britain* (1966). Of course, there are authors who do not consider this kind of approach an enough analytical instrument and prefer the idea of a *continuum* rural-urban. Also, more and more authors introduce in the typology a third landmark, which refer to mixed structures.

We come close in this case to the interpretation which identifies the community solely in the rural areas. Thus, the rural societies have a communitarian ground, a dense networking, and the power is based on local values. However, in the urban areas we identify the association, urban societies with an associative character, relationships based on partially assumed roles, a weak networking and the power is based on cosmopolite values.

Occupational communities enjoy a greater attention from authors, due to their importance in the emergence of group relationships specific for the communities. In this regard, Salaman identifies two types of communities. The first one is represented by the so called “quasi” occupational communities, “the communities which emerge based on a specific area or workplace, geographically isolated and spatially segregated, under the influence of a single business or industry” (Salaman 1974, p. 20) In this cases, the networking specific for communities willy-nilly appear. Anything else which shall diminish the self-support for the community will further lead to disintegration. However, Salaman focuses on the second type, which he considers to be the real occupational communities, which emerge based on its members’ activity, and not only by mere geographical delimitation.

The defining elements of these occupational communities are: its members perceive themselves in terms of their occupational role; their self-image is focused on their occupational roles (thus they perceive themselves as policemen, typographers etc.) and as people with specific abilities, qualities, and interests; the members of these occupational communities share a reference group; the members of occupational communities associate and make friends more often with other

members of the same occupational community. “The members of occupational communities feel satisfied from their work and see it as an activity within which they show creativity, responsibility and intelligence.”(Salaman 1974, p. 28) There is no borderline between the professional and the non-professional activity. Thus there is no known occupational community which is not characterized by at least two out of three determinants mentioned above.

Finally, Merton distinguishes between the local occupational communities and the cosmopolite ones. The local ones focus on the immediate issues, on the local world, whether it is the city or the work place. The cosmopolite ones are oriented to the worldwide, interested in the national dimension and even more, or focused on the occupation itself as a whole. Of course we can identify intermediate types between these two. A cosmopolite occupational community comprises, at least in theory, all the members of the same occupation.

Focused on the dual nature of the individual – biological and social – Durkheim underlines that the social being is superior to the biological one. What we learn since before we are born, through genetics, can be valued only in social context. What human beings learn after birth is dependent on the environment they grow up in, on the cultural model they live in, on the degree they are part of the community – and this highly determines the biological tendencies. When he researched the phenomenon of suicide, Durkheim showed that suicide depends in inverse proportion on the integration degree of the groups to which the individual belongs. Nisbet, while referring to the selfish and the anomic suicide, shows that in summary, the anomy is a damaged *moral community*, while the selfishness is a damaged *social community*.

Simmel presents a complementary perspective to the macro-sociological one depicted by Durkheim, using the concept of *molecular community*. Besides what we can directly observe in the society – groups, associations – we also identify the core infrastructure of these ones, respectively the primary models of relationships. The so-called formal sociology of Simmel is more than a mere effort to classify types of behaviour. He seeks the smallest possible units (dyads, triads) through which institutions and associations can be analysed. He knew there is an important connection between basic elements of association from an epoch to another. No matter how great would be the differences between institutional and cultural models in given historical periods, the dyads and the triads as structures continuously give the sense of identity, and indestructibly influence the bigger structure of the society. Together with other social structures of the same type, they represent since always the constituent elements of social relations. As Everett Hughes shows, when he is mentioned by Nisbet, Simmel could be considered as the society’s Freud, seeking the “subliminal” relations. “These ones, the same as the unconscious mind of the human being, have a more profound influence upon the change of the society and upon the greatest association’s structures.” (Nisbet 1993, p.98).

Conclusions

This study represents an attempt to identify precisely those features and elements which enable us the comprehension of the community, from a sociological point of view.

Firstly we showed what community can be, based on localization and time dimensions, but also through the lens of tangible and intangible elements.

However, we also gave counterexamples, based on the principle that one can find what something is based on what is not. Thus we showed those types of associations which easily may be taken as communities. Sometimes these one fulfil the communities' functions, but this does not mean they can be seen as communities.

The dimensions, the criteria and the elements identified in the first part, regardless of their nature or the perspective upon which they were analysed, lead us to some typologies of the communities. The idea of drawing a typology did not aim to propose a hierarchy. Anyway, when taking into account some elements instead of others reveal us a certain optimal portrait of the community, depending on the positioning in this system. In fact, this is the purpose when profiling a community, with the observation that choosing a certain series of features determines the whole analysis.

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