15. Human communication and community life

15.1. Revival of community life

The revival of community life was only the romantic ideal of some town planners so long as society was largely bureaucratized. In such a society the overwhelming trend was towards privatization of existence, dissociation.

People will gain a new sense of dignity and self-assurance from de-bureaucratization of work and education. As this happens they will increasingly assert their right to participate in decisions that affect their locality and increasingly seek common ground for face-to-face interaction with others. We have moved so far away from community life that it is worth reminding ourselves of what a community is:

‘Community: a social group that provides its members with, or provides them with access to, instruments for the satisfaction of some of their analogous objectives – instruments that some of its members are responsible either for producing and maintaining or for providing the group with the means of acquiring and maintaining them, and that all its members are responsible for using in a way that does not reduce access to them by any others in the group.’ (Ackoff and Emery, 1972, definition 13-15).

It is this sense of community that we have been spelling out in our discussion of matrix organization. However, this kind of sharing, usually requires geographical contiguity both for ease of access and for sharing responsibility. Just how many people can be so involved depends on what is being shared but without such sharing geographical contiguity can imply no more than a potential community. An important sub-set of community interests are the cultural means available to them. By cultural we do not mean ‘high culture’ but the historical evolved forms of group problem solving. Thus the questions one would ask are, do these people have a way of articulating and identifying their community problems? Do they have ways of tackling them as a community? In the revival of community life people will be concerned to make them variety increasing for their members; to increase the choices open to people. The basic directions in which this can be done, and hence we predict

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will be done, are those directions that modify the parameters of everyone's choices:

1. **Probability of Choice.**
   That is, increase the likelihood that members choose as a matter of custom or personal preferences the same courses of community action. An observable consequence would be more co-operativeness and what is usually referred to as community spirit.

2. **Probability of Production.**
   That is, increase the effectiveness of the community's instruments, facilities and services and reduce the proportion of members with inadequate access to these facilities.

3. **Probability of Outcome.**
   Increase the outcomes that are possible and probable for members of the community; in particular by increasing the range of probable outcomes for those unduly constricted.

4. **Relative Values of Different Courses of Action.**
   Increasing the range of relative values would by itself create a 'tower of Babel': dissociation into a multiplicity of private worlds. Community benefit would follow only if there were increasing unity in the increasing range of specific valuations: if the specific motivation were embedded in the pursuit of wider objectives and ideals that were commonly and explicitly shared. Such a development would reflect itself in a community which was both more tolerant and supporting of ideal seeking members.

There seems to be little in these directions of development that would suggest a new mass market for the mass media to replace the decline of the individual home as a market.

It could be that communities would want to project themselves to distant communities by access radio and access television. We suggest that this is unlikely for two reasons:

1. the dominant pressures for development will be centripetal, at most engaging in specific areas like sport with neighbouring communities.
2. the most attractive means for the occasional distant communication will be the video tape.

Already the Canadian experience with community access radio has revealed these drawbacks. The area served tends to cover a number of communities