Functional analysis, which deals specifically with the systemic needs of social organizations, is utilized here to specify the structural necessities of communal groups. The adaptive and goal attainment functions of social systems are the principal foci of this research. The present research is based on a content analysis of literature dealing with the communal movement in America. A snowball sampling technique yielded 58 communes for which data on the variables of interest could be obtained. Two organizational features, financial situation at the time of a commune’s formation and type of social organization, were selected as independent variables and were examined in order to ascertain their effects on the duration of communal groups, the dependent variable. Both gamma and chi-square indicate that financial situation and type of social organization significantly influence the duration of communal groups. Sufficient finances for the stabilization and maintenance of the communal organization, and a type of social organization which adequately coordinates the activities of the group, seem to be systemic problems with which communal groups must deal in order to endure for an extended length of time.

SYSTEMIC REQUISITES OF COMMUNAL GROUPS

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The establishment of utopian communities, or communes, represents a marked trend in American history. Since the late eighteenth century, communal experiments have flourished in many diverse forms providing alternative modes of work, worship, socialization, and human interaction for those individuals who have found the more conventional lifestyles to be either undesirable or dissatisfying. Disenchantment with existing social life has always been prevalent, and it is from the critical examination of society that the desire for and efforts to create different and better
ways of life have originated. Communes have often served as "laboratories" for the experimentation of societal reorganization. Throughout American history, communal creativity has attempted to revise or discard many of the social institutions, policies, role behaviors, values, and norms which predominate in the larger society. As a viable alternative lifestyle, communal living has played a significant role in American society and continues to offer an option to those persons who wish to explore nontraditional paths.

There appear to be more similarities than differences among the communal movements of the past and present. Despite the enormous amount of diversity that exists with regard to the organization and intentions of various groups, the communal group members of today share numerous beliefs and doubts with their predecessors. Those aspects of social life which are viewed as problematic today and from which commune members seek to escape are, in many instances, quite similar to features of society which were deemed questionable almost three hundred years ago by some communitarians.

Feelings of political powerlessness, occupational alienation, and personal loss of human significance are often cited today by individuals as reasons for their retreat from the larger society into communes (Bestor, 1970; Cogswell, 1975; Kinkade, 1973; Marx and Ellison, 1975; Veysey, 1973; and Weiss, 1974). These same issues were voiced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Curtis, 1961; Fogarty, 1972; Loubere, 1974; Noyes, 1961; and Tyler, 1944). The isolation, exclusivity, and repressive nature of the nuclear family have received a great deal of attention recently in social scientific literature (Cogswell, 1975; O'Neill and O'Neill, 1972; Skolnick and Skolnick, 1971; Streib, 1973; and Thamm, 1975); however, the inadequacies of the nuclear family unit have been under attack by commune members since the communal movement began (Fellman, 1973; Hillquit, 1903; Lindt, 1969; Noyes,