

Rural Land Planning **What is Community?**

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Key Concepts in Urban Geography **Social and Political Organizations**

- **Community:** What is community? Community is a word with a pleasant tone. It suggests friendship, connection, cohesion, mutual support. Cups of tea over the back fence, friendly gossip, neighbors looking for each other. Warm pints of bitter sipped around a pub fireplace, soccer mums cheering for their kids, PTA meetings, church events.
- Community conjures up images of a world in which things fit together. It is something that just about everyone is in favor of. And who could be against it?
- Yet for all its apparent simplicity community is one of the most ill-defined and argued about concepts within the social sciences.
 - What is community?
 - Community lost
 - Community saved, community liberated
 - Imagined communities, community and exclusion, light sociality

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 - **What is community?** So, what, conceptually speaking is community? There are three principle ways in which the term is used:
 1. **Community as place (town) or neighborhood:** In its most common usage community simply refers to the population – and the interconnections of that population – in a particular area. [Community Character falls here as place based. What is community character or a 'sense of place'?]
 2. **Community as a set of shared values, practices, and ways-of-being-in-the-world:** Community as a set of common characteristics, social practices, values and beliefs, among a group of people. For example, 'Muslim community', the 'gay community', or the 'elderly community'.
 3. **Community as shared interests:** A group of people that are defined by a shared set of interests. For example, sports, professional associations, video gaming, or Facebook.

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- **Community:** What is community?
 - **Community lost:** Early concerns with community focused not on community at all, but on its absence. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century social thinkers drew sharp distinction between the emergent 'modern' societies that confronted them, and the supposedly traditional feudal societies from which that modern society had been born.
 - Accounts were organized around the decline of 'traditional' community on to a rural-urban, pre-modern-modern, dichotomy – rural society stood for tradition and community, urban society for modernity and individualized society.
 - This was a theme that was taken up and elaborated by early twentieth-century urban reformers in the UK, North America, and elsewhere. They argued that the industrial city was a cancerous social form that precluded the development of real community.

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- **Community:** What is community?
 - **Community saved, community liberated:** The problem with these accounts of modern cities as graveyards of community – popular and pervasive though they are -- is they are quite simply wrong. Modern, industrialized societies, to say nothing of modern (or indeed post-modern) cities, are different to traditional societies (and cities) in all sorts of ways. But this does not mean that they are bereft of community.
 - Jane Jacobs, the problem of cities is not whether they have community or not, but how the community that is there is organized.
 - Community has been transformed and remade in all sorts of interesting ways.
 - Communities for many urbanites is defined through personal networks of friends, co-workers, neighbors and kin – networks that often do not have much spatial overlap.

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- **Community:** What is community?
 - **Imagined communities, community and exclusion, light sociality:** Having discovered that community has not been lost, that it is not necessarily bound to place (and in fact may be entirely unbounded from place), what is left of community for urban geography to explore?
 - Imagined Community, Mass Communication, and Mass Consumption
 - Community, Exclusion, and the Good City
 - Passion, Light Sociality and Everyday Connections

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 - **Imagined communities, community and exclusion, light sociality**
 - **Imagined Community, Mass Communication, and Mass Consumption:** Urban geography can explore how community is imagined. Perhaps the biggest conceptual challenge to recognizing that cities could in fact maintain and nurture community was the fact of their size. Cities represent an enormous problem of social coordination. If community is thought of as being principally about direct face-to-face interaction then the idea of cities as repositories of community seems an absurdity.
 - But if we recognize that all communities beyond the smallest involve an imaginary dimension that allows its members to see beyond the bounds of their immediate experience, then it becomes more straightforward—indeed logical—to think about community in such large scale situations.

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 - **Imagined communities, community and exclusion, light sociality:**
 - **Community, Exclusion, and the Good City:** In contemporary cities these pre-existing modes of integration have been overlaid with a range of technologies of mass communication – newspapers, magazines, poster hoardings, cinema, radio, television – that in all sorts of ways facilitate the imagining of community and connections.
 - Newspapers and other forms of mass communication do much more than just facilitate the spread of information. The simple practice of newspaper reporting lends a certain weight to everyday urban experience—they are produced so regularly much of what they report focuses on the texture of everyday existence. Along with the sensational ruptures in everyday events – fires, accidents, criminality, exceptional luck or ill fortune – they narrate the 'natural' rhythms of a city – its festivals, sporting and political events, and so on.

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 - **Community, Exclusion, and the Good City:** To argue that mass communication helps form community is to recognize that community is not spontaneous (or not only spontaneous) but is also 'constructed'.
 - A great deal of recent urban writings has focused on how this mediatization of urban life has turned cities into a kind of mass spectacle describes how the form of postmodern cities like LA is being increasingly determined by the demands of spectacle and consumption.
 - Although a prevalent trop in much contemporary urban writers this argument is problematic. It draws heavily upon the community lost narrative.
 - Many assertions of local community cohesion are organized around the expulsion of those defined as 'dirty' or 'impure'. In this sense, community can be defined through the presence of walls, gates, and security guards designed to keep the confusions of the city outside from intruding on tranquil atmosphere inside.

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 - **Passion, Light Sociality and Everyday Connections:** These arguments about community and social exclusion tell us a great deal about dangers and limitations of community. They act as a warning to the great majority of politicians and policy makers who see community – and the associated notion of social capital – as a panacea for solving many of the problems facing the contemporary city.
 - Nonetheless, they do not tell us very much about the ways that connection does actually occur within cities. As we have seen, cities teem with connections, with all sorts of sociality and interaction, some intimate, some anonymous, some formulaic, some enduring, some fleeting.
 - Rather than considering the ways certain interactions add up to something larger such as community, writers like Amin, Thrift, and Latham have focused on the small interactions, and simple moments of connection, through which much urban sociality is organized.

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Key Points

- **Community:** What is community?
 - Urban theory has long been shaped by the idea that cities are defined by an absence of genuine community.
 - Scholars from sociology, anthropology, and geography have shown that community is not 'lost' in modern cities. Rather it has taken on a range of new forms.
 - The media plays a central role in the construction of community in the contemporary city. It helps generate a sense of connection among otherwise diverse urban populations.
 - The idea of 'community' is not just about inclusion. It can also be employed to exclude those who are seen as different or other to the majority.
 - Rather than focus on community, many urban geographers now prefer to consider the dynamics of social connection, or communion.