

# COMMUNITY OR COMMUNITIES? -- A DILEMMA

## FOR STUDIES OF COMMUNITY POWER

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### ABSTRACT

The great majority of writings in the field of community power tend to use an undifferentiated concept of the community, classifying together social units performing widely differing functions. This paper argues that in order for the field of community power to advance toward developing comparative propositions, it is necessary to formulate a more differentiated classification for communities. Approaches to this problem utilized in other areas besides community power are reviewed, and an abstract typology for classifying communities according to their functions is presented. Indicators for measuring the various functions are suggested. The utility of the typology is demonstrated in several comparative propositions concerning community power. Twenty-six items on which it is suggested that future community power studies collect data are listed.

### INTRODUCTION

One observation that can be made with reference to studies dealing with the problem of community power concerns the concept of community: by far the great majority of such studies employ this concept with no regard for possible -- and necessary -- differentiation among the entities designated by the single generic term "community." Isolated rural hamlets, small college towns, major industrial centers, state capitols, exclusive suburbs, and resort towns -- all are lumped together in the same category. And it is perhaps such undifferentiated usage that has given methodological legitimation to so many isolated studies of the power structure of a single community wherein the author concludes that the power structure found to exist in his particular community (regardless of the specific techniques utilized) is representative of, and therefore generalizable to, if not all at least most other "communities." (Some qualifications may be offered - contemporary America, modern industrial society -- but these are still too broad to be considered differentiation in any true sense.) Does not this procedure flout the principles of both logic and scientific methodology?

It is the thesis of this paper that before significant further progress can be made in the study of community power, the undifferentiated concept of "the community" must be broken down into a number of types of communities. Study of the power structure in these typologically differentiated communities will ideally lead to the development of a series of propositions relating the different types of communities to different types of power structures. Phrased somewhat differently, it is no longer useful to begin by asking (following Hunter) "Who constitute the power elite?" or (following Dahl) "Is there a power elite?" Rather, to constitute a significant advance in our present knowledge, an analysis of community power must grapple with three successive questions" Who governs? -- what is the nature of the community power structure? Where? -- in what kinds of communities? and When? -- under what conditions?

After briefly reviewing some of the previous approaches to analysis of the concept of community (generally not by students of community power), this paper presents a relatively abstract typology to be used for classification of communities. Next, a number of possible empirical indicators on which data is relatively easy to gather are discussed in relation to the abstract types. One use to which the present author has put the typology is outlined briefly as an example of a direction that might be taken by future work in the field of community power. The concluding section proposes twenty-six variables as research areas for future community power studies.

## COMMUNITY

Despite the diversity of approaches to the community as a subject of study, in the majority of analyses a number of common elements tend to recur. In his 1948 review of community literature, Hollingshead classified studies<sup>1</sup> according to their central focus as ecological, structural, or typological. A 1955 review of the literature concluded that most students were "in basic agreement that community consists of persons in social interaction within a geographic area and having one or more additional common ties."<sup>2</sup> Parsons has recently advanced a similar conception of the community in emphasizing 1) territorial location and 2) social interaction among community residents.<sup>3</sup>

A slightly different approach to community was taken by MacIver when he used as his basic criterion of community the fact that a person could spend his entire life there.<sup>4</sup> This criterion emphasizes the community as a functional entity, but, curiously enough uses the individual as the reference point.

A somewhat broader concept of the community than most of those currently in use, is that of a functionally autonomous social unit. The majority of community studies focus primarily on the functional autonomy of the political system with its particular geographical limits as the criterion for setting community boundaries.

From the present point of view, however, a two-fold conception of the community appears more useful, first, following the more traditional usage, as

a relatively autonomous political system, but second, and generally encompassing a larger social unit, as a relatively autonomous social system. Here the additional criteria for autonomy are the economic, educational, religious and other systems that together with the political system can be viewed from an analytical point of view as comprising a single autonomous social system. For present purposes, this larger social unit will be termed a "community complex."<sup>5</sup>

To be considered functionally autonomous in this broader sense, the social system would have to perform the four categories of functions designated by Parsons as adaptation, goal-attainment, integration, and latent pattern-maintenance and tension management, (or AGIL) on the community level.<sup>6</sup> (What is meant by "on the community level" will be developed in the following paragraphs.) Since 1953 these functional categories have been applied by Parsons and others to total societies, bureaucratic organizations, families, and even individual personalities.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the functional categories have a broad range of applicability. However, the consequent looseness of fit underlines the necessity of specifying as precisely as possible the exact level of analysis to which the concepts are applied. Practically no social unit in industrial societies is entirely autonomous, but for analytical purposes, various social units may be conceived of as relatively distinct from others and analyzed as comparatively separate if not totally isolated systems.

A problem of this sort for community analysis is posed by the fact that national and regional governments as well as national and regional private corporations are taking over many of the functions previously performed at the community level. International ties with other countries are also much more important than in the past. Still, the modern nation state, for many purposes, is a relatively autonomous unit. Likewise, in large communities and cities a relatively high proportion of functions is still performed for inhabitants of these large communities by other persons within the boundaries of the same social unit. However, this is not the case for many smaller communities, of which extreme examples would be the dormitory suburb and the resort town, for both of these are almost completely dependent on extra-community systems for vital input and output functions. Using the concept of community-complex as delineated above, it is possible to conceive of an industrial center together with its functionally specialized satellite suburbs as a single autonomous social unit. This is to some degree the case when one speaks, for example, of the "greater" New York area. The rationale for this designation in such instances, however, is generally based on the territorial proximity of several political units. While in most cases territorial and functional autonomy probably overlap to a large degree,<sup>8</sup> from the present standpoint it is the relative functional autonomy as opposed to territorial demarcation that will serve as the criterion for establishing units of analysis.

The question can still be raised of just precisely how great a degree of autonomy must exist before a community or community-complex may be classified as autonomous for present purposes. It would be possible to set an arbitrary quantitative criterion of 75% or 90%, for example, but any theoretical meaning that such a criterion might have virtually disappears when one confronts the enormous difficulties involved in its empirical application.<sup>8a</sup> However great, such difficulties are not especially relevant in the present context where the germane point is only that the concept of community, for certain purposes,

can be used in the second sense of community-complex. It is this broader concept that serves to call attention to the functional integration of a number of smaller communities that together comprise the community-complex as well as to the possible consequences for the distribution of power resulting from such patterns of interdependence.

The added analytical insight which results from the introduction of the AGIL categories derives from the fact that social units similarly classified as "communities" from the political standpoint are frequently diverse entities in many other respects.<sup>8b</sup> Some of these units fulfill primarily economic or adaptive functions, such as an industrial community. Others primarily fulfill latent pattern-maintenance and tension-management functions, such as a dormitory suburb.

A problem that should be dealt with at this point concerns the identification of the four broad AGIL categories with structures in the community that perform each of the four functions. It should be strongly emphasized that as the four functions are specified in purely analytical terms and do not perfectly "fit" any specific empirical structures, there inevitable results a certain amount of overlap. Nevertheless, applying the scheme at the community level, there is a general correspondence between goal-attainment and the polity; adaptation and the economy; integration and the legal profession, political parties and interest groups; pattern-maintenance and tension management and the family and educational system.<sup>9</sup>

The amount of structural differentiation between the different units performing these several functions is a variable of utmost importance for the analysis of community power structures. An extreme case, and yet one not uncommon in modern industrial societies, would be the situation where a single family unit resides in one community, the children go to school in a second, the father works in a third, and the parents vote in a fourth. Using the family unit as a reference point, some of the four AGIL functions are dispersed among each of four different communities. Of course, these four communities might very well perform different functions for a second family unit; that is, the same community may perform different functions depending on the observer's frame of reference. Nevertheless, if one aggregates the various types of functions performed by a single community in one way or another for all individuals associated with it, varying patterns will doubtless emerge for different communities. It is, moreover, possible that different types of community power structure are more likely to be associated with different types of communities depending on the range and type of functions performed by the community. Dormitory suburbs, for example, may be more likely to have pluralistic power structures than more isolated communities with a single dominant industry. Of course, practically every empirical community probably performs all four functions to a certain minimal degree (restricting in all cases the level of analysis uniquely to that of the community), but some communities are bound to perform certain functions more than other communities. To simplify the situation for the moment, a community may be considered as performing or not performing one or more of the four AGIL functions. A typology of communities can then be constructed by classifying communities in terms of the primary functions served (see Figure 1).

As can be seen, only a limited number of the logically possible combinations are presented, namely those that appear to be empirically most frequent and analytically most useful. The typology could be further elaborated in a number of ways, but they will not be considered at this time.

Figure 1

Partial Typology of Communities Classified  
According to Functions

Function and Approximate Empirical Correlate

<u>Example</u>	<u>A</u> (Economy)	<u>G</u> (Polity)	<u>I</u> (Legal profession, Political parties, Interest groups)	<u>L</u> (Family, Education system)
Functionally Autonomous Community	+	+	+	+
Residential Com- munity, Politically Autonomous, Economi- cally Dependent	-	+	+	+
Residential Com- munity, Economically and Politically De- pendent	-	-	-	+
Residential Community, Politically Dependent, Economically Autonomous	+	-	-	+
Non-residential Com- munity, Economically Autonomous, Politically Dependent	+	-	-	-
Non-residential Com- munity, Economically and Politically Autonomous	+	+	+	-

## POSSIBLE OPERATIONAL INDICATORS OF COMMUNITY TYPES

As emphasized above, the four functions of adaptation, goal-attainment, integration, and latent pattern-maintenance and tension management are analytical types, and although on the community level of analysis a local institution may be seen as performing primarily one function (e.g., that of adaptation for a factory), the analytical strength of the concepts is necessarily weakened when they are identified with specific empirical institutions. The same general problem is confronted in application of the concepts to an empirical community in order to classify the community as a whole as primarily performing one, two, three or four of the AGIL functions. Nevertheless, as long as the necessary limitations are borne in mind -- that no empirical institution or community is restricted to performance of a single function -- it is possible to suggest certain criteria as indicators for the classification of communities.

To measure the extent to which the community fulfills the adaptation function, one could use the ratio of the number of occupational positions in the community to the total number of residents in the community.

A measurement of the goal-attainment function could be the degree to which the political institutions within a community's boundaries make important political decisions. The term "important" as used in the last sentence, is of course relative, given the decreasing amount of autonomy for the individual community in most industrial societies. The researcher can probably cope with this problem most effectively by examining the legal documents delimiting the amount of autonomy of the local community, or interviewing informed community residents for the same type of information. A general index of community autonomy could be constructed based, for example, on such functions as taxing property, maintaining a police force, regulating commercial activities, zoning land, and so forth. Once an index was devised, communities could be ranked according to the amount of legal and political autonomy which they possess. It would not be necessary to investigate all prerogatives of the local government, but only to inquire about a sample of types of decisions that are of approximately the same level of importance. To construct a scale for ranking the importance of all functions performed in a community would be a Herculean task, but to establish the comparative amount of autonomy in two or more communities would not be so difficult. In a comparative situation one need only establish the relatively limited range of decisions that one community performs and another does not. For example, one community will have its own police force, while another will not; one will maintain its own roads, and another will not, etc., etc. By searching out such borderline cases, it would be possible to develop a detailed index of functions ordered from most to least important by which communities could be ranked according to their degree of local autonomy. In studying only a limited number of communities, however, the researcher would need only to determine the differences between the communities, and on this basis rank them according to their relative amount of autonomy with respect to goal-attainment.<sup>9a</sup>

The degree to which a community performs an important integrative function could be roughly determined by the number of voluntary organizations per resident in the community and establishing both the range of activities and the number of the local political parties. The existence and number of community newspapers and radio or television stations could also be used as a positive indicator of the integrative function.

If the latent pattern-maintenance and tension management function is identified primarily with the family and its primary territorial nexus as the place of residence, the ratio of the number of community residents to the number of non-residents who hold occupational positions in community institutions would provide a crude index of the intensiveness of the L function performed by the community. In addition, the density of educational facilities, which could be measured by the ratio of students enrolled in community educational institutions to the number of community residents of school age, could serve as a second index of the L function.

#### APPLICATION OF THE TYPOLOGY AND POSSIBLE FUTURE RESEARCH

The distribution of power within the community is naturally affected where different structures perform each of the AGIL functions. The author has elsewhere analyzed the implications of different situations, considering various structural alternatives for the performance of each of the functions -- for example, local or absentee-owned economic enterprises, non-partisan versus partisan electoral procedures, etc. A series of thirty-four interrelated statements in propositional form has then been delineated relating, as independent variables, different types of community structures to the dependent variable of the type of community power structure. Grouped by the type of independent variable, there are demographic, economic, political, integrational and cultural structural variables related to the dependent variable of the type of community power structure. Examples of propositions are:

1. The larger the number of inhabitants in the community, the more pluralistic the power structure.
5. The more autonomous the political institutions of a community the more pluralistic the power structure.
12. The more diverse the economic structures within the community, the more pluralistic the power structure.
22. The higher the degree of industrialization in a community, the more pluralistic the power structure.
23. The larger the number of governmental statuses in a community filled according to non-partisan electoral procedures, the more monolithic the power structure.
27. The greater the number of effective competing political parties (or factions within a single party in a one-party community), the more pluralistic the power structure.

32. The more pluralistic the value system of members of the community, the more pluralistic the power structure.<sup>10</sup>

Other researchers can, and hopefully will, develop further propositions of the same nature as these in the near future.<sup>11</sup> Assuming that further propositions of this type are developed, however, there still remains the problem of creating a bank of empirical data for the testing of such propositions.

A certain amount of evidence has been marshalled from the existing community power literature as support for most of the propositions presented above. Nevertheless, the great diversity of techniques and of contrasting theoretical orientations found in previous studies renders comparison extremely difficult in many instances.<sup>12</sup> This, of course, constitutes a difficulty above and beyond the more easily remedied problem of the lack of information afforded on a number of important independent variables in different community studies.

What is needed to help remedy the latter problem is some sort of Community Relations Area Files that have been developed for use in cross-cultural research. Before such a file can be assembled, however, it is imperative that community researchers agree to collect a minimum of especially important data on each community studied, so that some sort of comparison with other studies of different communities might be attempted. It is suggested that subsequent studies try to collect as much as possible of the following pieces of information on the communities studied (even if the researcher prefers not to publish all the details in his report).<sup>13</sup>

1. The number of inhabitants.
2. The characteristics of the community population on as many of the following variables as are available:
  - a. income
  - b. education
  - c. sex
  - d. race
  - e. religion
  - f. occupation
  - g. place of birth
3. The number, types and membership of voluntary organizations.
4. The number, types and membership of religious organizations.
5. The number and types of economic enterprises.
6. The total number of occupational positions in the community.
7. The place of residence of employees working in the community's economic enterprises.
8. The place of work of community residents.
9. The ownership of economic enterprises (per cent local vs. absentee).
10. The membership patterns of economic enterprise executives in community organizations.



11. The geographical source and degree of immobility of principal raw materials for major economic enterprises (e.g., local coal and iron ore deposits for steel industries, oil deposits for oil companies).
12. The geographical location of principal markets for major economic enterprises.
13. The number, types and memberships of trade unions and labor organizations.
14. The amount of autonomy in decision-making of local economic enterprises, labor organizations, and government. (E.g., are wages set at the local factory level or by a single national, industry-wide decision?).
15. The number of full-time employees in community governmental institutions.
16. The number of governmental positions filled according to election.
17. The number of political appointments.
18. The type of governmental institutions and electoral procedures (e.g., city manager biannually elected in non-partisan election, city council elected triannually in non-partisan election, etc.).
19. The scope of activities of various governmental institutions.
20. The number, type and membership of political parties.
21. The organization, financing and membership of political parties.
22. The number, ownership, editorial policy, and circulation of newspapers.
23. The number, ownership, and orientation of radio and television stations.
24. The number and type of educational institutions and their enrollment.
25. The percentage of children from different economic and geographical sectors of the community attending community and non-community educational institutions, in grade school, high school, and college.
26. The percentage of non-community residents attending community educational institutions.<sup>14</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES

1. August B. Hollingshead, "Community Research: Development and Present Conditions," American Sociological Review, 13 (April, 1948), pp. 135-156.
2. George A. Hillery, Jr., "Definitions of Community Areas of Agreement," Rural Sociology, 20 (June, 1955), p. 111.

3. Talcott Parsons, "The Principal Structures of Community: A Sociological View," in Carl J. Friedrich, editor, Community (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1959).
4. Robert M. MacIver, Society: Its Structure and Changes (New York: Ray Lang and Richard R. Smith, 1933), p. 10; Robert M. MacIver and Charles H. Page, Society: An Introductory Analysis (New York: Reinhart & Co., 1949), p. 9.
5. The concept here termed community complex is similar in many ways to Hawley's concept of "ecological organization": "the complex of functional interrelationships by which men live," which is contrasted with his territory-bound concept of community. See Amos H. Hawley, Human Ecology, (New York: The Ronald Press, 1950), p. 178-180.
6. These four concepts are to be found in most of Parsons' theoretical writings following the appearance of Talcott Parsons, Robert F. Bales and Edward A. Shils, Working Papers in the Theory of Action (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1953). See esp. Chapter 5. For a recent general but concise formulation, see Talcott Parsons, "An Outline of the Social System," in Talcott Parsons, et al., Theories of Society (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1961), esp. pp. 33-40.
7. Especially interesting, in addition, is a recent application to the study of strategic elites. See Suzanne Keller, Beyond the Ruling Class (New York: Random House, 1963).
8. See Talcott Parsons, The Social System (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1951), pp. 90 ff. and Parsons, "The Principle Structures of Community: A Sociological View," in Carl J. Friedrich, editor, Community, op. cit. on the interrelations between territoriality and the performance of social functions.
- 8a. For a consideration of some examples of criteria that have been used in urban research for specifying boundaries, see Jack P. Gibbs, "Methods and Problems in the Delineation of Urban Units," and the four other articles in Chapter 2 of Jack P. Gibbs, editor, Urban Research Methods, (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1961).
- 8b. A number of functional classifications of communities based on census data are reported in Howard J. Nelson, "A Service Classification of American Cities," L.L. Pownall, "The Functions of New Zealand Towns," both in Jack P. Gibbs, editor, Urban Research Methods, op. cit.,  
 Chauncy D. Harris, "A Functional Classification of Cities in the United States," Geographical Review, 33, 1943, pp. 86-99 and Victor Jones, "Economic Classification of Cities and Metropolitan Areas," The Municipal Year Book, 1953, pp. 49-54.
9. See Talcott Parsons, Robert F. Bales and Edward A. Shils, Working Papers in the Theory of Action, op. cit., pp. 163-269; Talcott Parsons and Neil J. Smelser, Economy and Society (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1956), pp. 39-100; Talcott Parsons, "'Voting' and the Equilibrium of the American Political System," in Eugene Burdick and Arthur J. Brodbeck, American Voting Behavior (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959) pp. 80-120; Talcott Parsons, Structure and

Process in Modern Society, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960), esp. Chapters 1, 4,5; Talcott Parsons, "An Outline of the Social System," loc. cit., as well as Suzanne Keller, Beyond the Ruling Class, op. cit., esp. pp. 88-106 for discussion of empirical correlates of the theoretical categories.

- 9a. The advantages and disadvantages involved in the use of various criteria for ranking community functions is directly analagous to the problem of ranking community decisions. This latter problem is discussed in detail in Terry N. Clark, "The Sixteen Faces of Power," (dittoed, Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, 1964).
10. Taken from Terry N. Clark, "Power and Community Structure: Who Governs, Where, and When?", paper presented at 1965 annual meeting of American Sociological Association, Chicago, Ill., forthcoming in revised and expanded form in The Sociological Quarterly.
11. Some of the more recent studies in the field of community power are moving in this direction. See, for example, David Rodgers, "Community Political Systems: A Framework and Hypothesis for Comparative Studies," in Bert E. Swanson, editor, Current Trends in Comparative Community Studies (Kansas City: Community Studies, Inc., 1962), pp. 31-48 and Robert E. Agger, Daniel Goldrich and Bert E. Swanson, The Rulers and the Ruled (New York: Wiley, 1964).
12. An attempt to synthesize some of the conceptual and methodological controversies may be found in Clark, "The Sixteen Faces of Power," op. cit., and Clark, "Comparability in Community Research," paper presented at the Sixth World Congress of Sociology, International Sociological Association, September 4-11, 1966, Evian, France.
13. Important progress along these lines is reported in Terry N. Clark, editor, (provisional title) Community Organization and Decision-Making: Comparative Analyses (forthcoming).
14. This paper has not chosen to deal with the complex problems involved in measuring the distribution of community power; it is treated in Terry N. Clark, "The Sixteen Faces of Power," op. cit. It might be suggested within the scope of a footnote, however, that the larger the number of techniques used, the better the possibilities for comparison with other studies. This point is discussed in more detail and empirical findings from a number of studies using more than one technique are compared in "The Sixteen Faces of Power."

Process in Modern Society, (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1960), esp. Chapters 1, 4,5; Talcott Parsons, "An Outline of the Social System," loc. cit., as well as Suzanne Keller, Beyond the Ruling Class, op. cit., esp. pp. 88-106 for discussion of empirical correlates of the theoretical categories.

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