

## THOUGHTS ON COMMUNITY ARRANGEMENTS

### 1. Time

- whilst a permanent grouping of people is psychologically desirable, and should be aimed for, it is important not to be dependent upon this possible eventuality. People change and move on; others may take their place.
- whilst a permanent physical location is psychologically desirable, and should be aimed for, it is important not to be dependent upon this possible eventuality. Interim locations may be necessary and final locations may prove non-viable.
- a group of people defines for itself a rhythm or cycle, which may be relatively fast or slow. Some may not adapt to the rhythm satisfactory to most, and which effectively organizes them in time
- a group of people has a life cycle which may be shorter or exceed the lifetimes of individuals in it. This may create problems.

In the light of the above, it is useful to consider the activity as a temporary experiment which may, if it is successful, become permanent. A 3 to 5 year experiment is preferable to running the risk of disappointment from over-commitment to the psychological security of a "permanent" community.

### 2. Space

- individuals need their own physical space to survive in a community and it is important to agree on needs in this respect. The space should offer total privacy (both from direct interruption and from indirect interruption through noise, community pressures, etc.)
- individuals need a certain amount of psychic space to survive in a community, aside from any private domain to which they may retreat. Over-crowding or excessive interaction with others (or their "things") may dangerously erode this.
- groups of people (whether defined as families, like-minded individuals, groups of children, etc.) also have their own physical and psychic space needs
- common spaces are required for a satisfactory sense of community to develop and be maintained
- the above spaces have to be provided by viable compromises with the physical structures available, which generally tend to erode them. Such structures should preferably be set on an adequate area of land to take care of the needs for a "roving territory" or psychic space

Communal life, in the sense of one building, may increase tensions where conflicts can emerge uncontained by the above spaces (e.g. over noise, décor, privacy, duties, cleanliness/tidiness level, luxury/necessity level, etc.). The difficulty increases with the number of distinct groups and interests in the community. At some stage a better solution is an appropriate (and slowly changing) mix of communal living (i.e. most facilities shared in one building), partial communal living (some facilities shared in one building), and community living (buildings in the same area, separated by distances varying from metres to kilometres, according to the preferences at a particular time).

### 3. People

- the mix of people makes or breaks a community. Little is known about how to make a fruitful mix happen. Too many people of a similar type finally result in a sterile, predictable or unhealthy environment. Too many dissimilar types finally result in internecine squabbles and fragmentation. Compatibility binds together; incompatibility stimulates new structures and syntheses. "Obvious" participants may not be appropriate; "unlikely" participants may be most significant to the life of the community.
- as an experiment, an effort should be made to absorb people of very different types so that their special attributes contribute to the stability, fruitfulness and growth of the community

#### 4. Relationships

- formal: tasks have to be performed and individuals have to perform them. Whilst role rotation is desirable, it is not always possible, so that role conflict emerges just as in any other organization -- in which role conflicts are used as vehicles for the expression of personality conflicts  
Such difficulties should be contained by de-organizing community life as much as possible so that tasks are selected and performed within and by self-selected groups within their respective spaces according to their own times. The space/time structuring is therefore a container for potential conflict.
- informal: these develop naturally. It is not useful to formulate rules and restrictions until cases present themselves. These should be handled flexibly rather than rigidly and conventionally.

#### 5. Financial participation

- the commune movement seems to make a big issue of community of property. This is a rather unnecessary and (melodramatic) step. A mixed system of private and joint ownership seems more practical.
- given that any community may well be of a temporary nature, whatever the desires of the participants, it is illusory to attempt to pool all financial resources, particularly since participants have different levels of assets and income. It is preferable to contribute equally to different budgets or to participate unequally through a form of shareholding in certain activities (e.g. purchase of a building, or rental of parts of it). All projects should be realistically costed and financed so that the minimum of tension results from the inevitable inequities.
- such an attitude towards financial matters has led (in other instances) to the conclusion that at some stage, for financial and tax purposes, several bodies can be created to manage the community activity:
  - a property company to own and control the land and building
  - an operating company to control any profit-making enterprises of the community
  - a non-profit association to relate the members of the communityCommunity members can participate to different degrees in these bodies.
- the implication of the above possibilities is that individuals can participate financially in the community to different degrees, depending upon their willingness and ability to do so. For example, at the lowest level of participation, an individual may simply sub-rent a room in the building. (This level may be sufficient for all when launching the enterprise and during the early phases.)
- clearly individuals may leave the community (or never physically join) without withdrawing their financial investment in it immediately. This ensures greater financial stability and continuity.

#### 6. Economic viability

- whilst it is neither necessary, desirable, nor possible that all individuals should contribute equally (or even sufficiently to cover the cost of their presence and use of facilities), it is important that someone (or some grouping of individuals) should be financially responsible for anyone in that position who does not contribute in full measure. For example, children would be the responsibility of the parents, unless some others wish to assist in case of special need. Non-financial contributions to the community should be taken into account in any assessment.
- individuals (or family groups) may finance themselves by external economic activities or subsidies (conducted externally or within the community building as a workplace)
- similarly, groups of individuals within the community may well engage in external economic activities (conducted externally or from the community as a work place)

## 7. Control

- the ultimate control of the community should be in the hands of the permanent members (as reflected by their financial or equivalent commitment) and not in the hands of those just passing through, even though they may be in a majority at any one time.
- the community life should be under-organized rather than over-organized. The organization required should relate mainly to the spaces occupied by the individuals or groups occupying them. (Relationships emerge naturally to safeguard the stability of the community; a community should have no more need of a constitutional document than does a family.)

## 8. Reason for existence

- the reason for the community is to create a living (and possibly working) environment which is:
  - meaningful and stimulating
  - creative and fruitful
  - economically viable (and possibly advantageous)for those who participate.
- the argument is that by combining the economic and psycho-cultural resources represented by the potential mix of participants, a much more organic and adaptable grouping can emerge than is the case with the simple nuclear family
- such an environment may prove suitable for:
  - an alternative work environment, where suitable economically viable activities can be developed. More meaningful work activities may thus become possible, or else desirable activities which would otherwise be uneconomic may become feasible
  - a meditation/retreat/re-creation environment may emerge as a central function which makes the community a focal centre for outsiders
- it is of great importance that the subtle range of skills and attributes necessary to bring about the right kind of organic community should be given every chance to emerge and bear fruit, for the benefit of the individuals concerned and for the community as a whole

## 9. Purpose and principles

- it would have a straightjacketing effect on the community to live by an explicit code or set of principles -- particularly when the implications are implemented to the letter in daily life. This is even more true given that such a set of principles would have to be somewhat artificially elaborated as an activity of the intellect, which does not necessarily respond to all the needs of human beings in a community
- it is preferable that the binding purpose of the community, for those who need one, should emerge from meditation and reflection in silence -- possibly as a group. Rather than be expressed in words, this purpose should preferably be expressed in activities which different groupings of those participating could each initiate and organize, if they so wish, in the light of their own understanding of the needs and possibilities of the moment and their own potential.