

# COMMUNITARIAN VALUES as AMERICAN LUXURIES \*

There are different ways to view the effort to build community. One view, that our only choices are chaos or community, suggests that building intentional community is a necessity in order to assure our long-term survival. A less fatalistic view is that building community, of any kind, is the effort to create luxuries that can not otherwise be enjoyed. These luxuries can also be called “communitarian values.”

As fifty years of the post-war housing industry has shown, communitarian values are luxuries that we do not absolutely need if all that we are trying to do is acquire housing. Today, however, the challenge is to build a social fabric that provides, in addition to mere shelter, a culture that engenders in the individual an appreciation of others and a sense of responsibility for the environment we share.

Communitarian values focus upon providing a safe and nurturing environment for children and seniors, community food service, and other collective services, such as building and auto maintenance, where people work together for mutual advantage and efficient resource usage. Communitarian values are experienced in neighborhood forums where people resolve disputes or discuss opportunities or challenges from within or from outside of the community. Communitarian values are supported by architectural and land use designs that encourage the random kindnesses and senseless acts of beauty that encourage interactions among people, and the development of friendships and other primary and secondary social bonds.

As the effort to build community must seek to counter the generations of acculturation to the paradigm of home as moated castle, a new paradigm may be created in order to replace the materialistic American Dream and the paternalistic “domestic mystique,” with a more transcendent American Dream focused upon the egalitarian “community mystique.” Presenting communitarian values as a set of luxuries that money alone can not buy can serve this end.

Consider the priceless value of the peace of mind that comes with knowing on a first name basis everyone in your neighborhood, because you talk and work with them regularly in day-to-day living. This we might call the “trust luxury.” The informal ambience of the common spaces, serving to facilitate interactions among people, we might call a “social luxury.” Consider too how the fellowship of community respects the spiritual ideals of brother- and of sisterhood, of living by the Golden Rule, or of practicing a love-thy-neighbor ethic. The opportunity to conform our lifestyle to our spiritual ideals can be cast as a “spiritually-correct luxury,” while the focus upon sharing and ecological design is presented as a “politically-correct luxury.” And more than mere luxury, intergenerational community where both young and old are encouraged to care for the other, in comparison with the usual pattern of age segregation in America, is cultural elegance. Visiting other communities around the world is a “holiday luxury.” All of these and more are communitarian luxuries available to everyone.

\* Edited from, “CoHousing as an American Luxury,” by A. Allen Butcher printed in *CoHousing*, Summer, 1996.

# A PHILOSOPHY OF HAPPINESS

In the pursuit of happiness, many people realize that good health, a personal outlook of optimism, personal control over one’s own life, physical activity, and the quality of relationships we enjoy are all more important than personal wealth alone.\*

Through interweaving our concerns, cares, sadnesses, joys and loves with those of others, all of the elements of happiness, including health, optimism, control, activity and relationships, can be concentrated into a mutually supportive dynamic. Communitarianism then becomes a philosophy of happiness as the individual realizes that the well being of others is important to the securing of their own personal happiness. \*\*

This introduction to communitarianism presents ways of understanding how people have collectively expressed and are living various philosophies of happiness. All communitarian designs share basic values of mutual aid, sharing and cooperation, yet their methods run the full spectrum of social and cultural designs. This brochure offers a set of definitions of terms and a classification structure for various intentional community designs.

\* John Stossel, “Happiness in America,” *ABC*, 20-20, April, 1996. See also: Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: The Reinvention of American Society*, Touchstone, 1993. The Communitarian Network, 2130 H St. NW, Ste. 714, Wash. DC 20052, (202) 994-7997.

\*\* See: Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, Van Nostrand, 1968, and, Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1790, as quoted by Francis Moore Lappe in “Self and Society,” *Creation*, March/April 1988.

Introduction to

# Communitarianism

Cohousing, Ecovillages, Communal Societies  
and other Intentional Community Designs

A. Allen Butcher, March, 1998

For more detail on these concepts, see: *Classifications of Communitarianism*,  
Fourth World Services, PO Box 1666, Denver, CO 80201, 303-355-4501.

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# THE ROLE of COMMUNITY in CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

As many intentional communities are created in response to problems perceived in the larger culture, these may be seen as small-scale, experimental societies, developing innovations in architecture and land use, governmental structures, family and relationships, and other aspects of culture that may provide viable alternatives to our global, monolithic, consumerist society. As crucibles-of-culture, intentional communities tend to attract many of the new and hopeful ideas of the day, develop them in living, small-scale societies into useful innovations, and then model successful adaptations of these ideas to the outside world.

Although some intentional communities become very doctrinaire, closed societies, frozen in time like many Catholic monasteries and Hutterite colonies, others are open, encouraging an ongoing exchange with the larger culture. Open communities like cohousing, ecovillages and egalitarian societies provide insights into the direction of the larger society through their successful cultural innovations. In this way, intentional community serves to anticipate, reflect and quicken social change.

## DEFINITIONS of TERMS

**COMMUNITY** - a group of people sharing any common identity or characteristic, whether geographic, economic, political, spiritual, cultural, psychological, etc.

**COMMUNITARIANISM** - the idea and practice of mutual responsibility by members of a society.

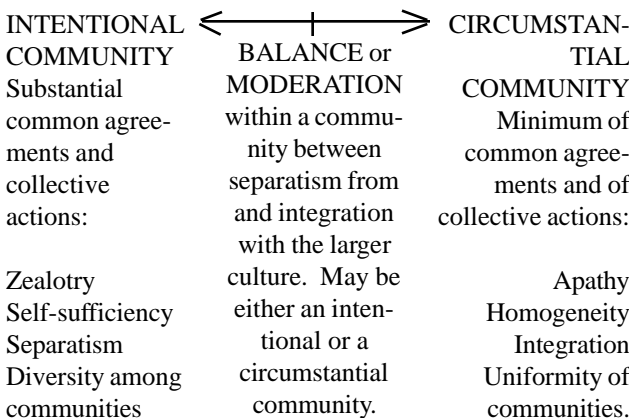
**CIRCUMSTANTIAL COMMUNITY** - a group of people living in proximity by chance, such as in a city, neighborhood or village, the residents of which may or may not individually choose to be active participants in the pre-existing association.

**INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY** - a fellowship of individuals and families practicing common agreement and collective action.

Either circumstantial or intentional community can function as the other. For example, an intentional community may abandon its common agreements, causing the people to drift apart, or a town may pull together in collective action to respond to a common threat.

# The COMMUNITARIAN CONTINUUM

Describing different communities according to their degree of common awareness and of collective action.



## TWO METHODS of DESCRIBING INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES:

<p><b>DESCRIPTIVE TERMS</b> - focus upon the primary shared concern, value or characteristic held by a particular community. Examples: "Christian community," "Yoga society," "activist," "back-to-the-land," etc. Those that are part of networks use a categorical name, such as "land trust," "cohousing," "ecovillage," or a network name such as "Carmalite nunnery" and "Emissary community."</p>	<p><b>CLASSIFICATIONS</b> - compare socio-cultural factors in different communities. A relative measure, such as a continuum, presents a range of different approaches to particular issues. Example: governmental forms may range from authoritarian to participatory decision-making processes. Continua can be arranged in two-dimensional matrices, such as for political-economic structures.</p>
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## PLURALIST-to-UNIFIED BELIEFS CONTINUUM

Beliefs include spirituality, religion and

philosophy, but not economic processes. Thus, very different economic systems can have the same belief structure. Complications: cross-overs exist between "Pluralism" and "Few Common Beliefs," and these may use either consensus or democratic decision-making processes. Communities with uniform beliefs often have authoritarian governments.

# SHARING--to-PRIVACY CONTINUUM

When considering what kind of community to build or to join, the issue of sharing versus privacy can be the most helpful. In communities which **share private property (collective)** as in cohousing, one begins with the assumption of privacy and asks, "How much am I willing to share?" In communities which **share commonly owned property (communal)** one begins with the assumption of sharing and asks, "How much privacy do I need?"

The difference is in the often expressed conflict between individuality and collectivity, and each community design finds an appropriate balance between these levels of consciousness, such that neither the individual nor the group is submerged by the other.

	Communal Intentional Communities	Mixed-Economy Intentional Communities	Collective Intentional Communities
<b>Inter-personal Relationships</b>	The community is the primary social bond	For some people the family may be primary, for others the comm.	The family is the primary social bond
<b>Family Structure, Child Care</b>	Shared parenting, serial monogomy, polyfidelity	Mutual aid child care, diverse family designs	Some mutual aid child care among nuclear families
<b>Architectural Design, Land Use</b>	Common land & buildings, group residences	Private living spaces with group housing & common space	No or some common spaces, single family houses
<b>Labor Systems, Management</b>	Labor credit systems, Community businesses	Individual income labor with community labor projects	Private businesses, some group labor projects
<b>Property Codes, Equity</b>	Commonly owned assets/equity	Some common, some private property	Private property & equity

**Pluralist Belief Structure:** Secular; Open society; Inclusive; Integrationist; Expressed individuality; **Participatory**. Examples: cohousing, land trust, egalitarian community.

**Few Common Beliefs:** Group has a shared belief but is tolerant of differences. Ex. ecovillages (ecology), Kibbutz Artzi (Zionism).

**Unified Belief Structure:** Dogmatic; Closed/Class society; Exclusive; Isolationist; Suppressed individuality; **Authoritarian**. Examples: monasteries, Hutterites, Kibbutz Dati (Zionism/Judism).

# WAVES of COMMUNITARIANISM

- 1st Wave - 1600s and 1700s, spiritual and authoritarian German/Swiss Pietist and English Separatist.
- 2nd Wave - 1840s secular: Anarchist Socialist, Associationist, Mutualist Cooperative, Owenite, Perfectionist, and the religious: Christian Socialist, Adventist.
- 3rd Wave - crested in the 1890s (50 years later) Hutterite, Mennonite, Amish, and first Georgist single-tax colony.
- 4th Wave - 1930s (40 years later) New Deal Green-Belt Towns, Catholic Worker, Emissary, School of Living.
- 5th Wave - 1960s (30 years later) peace/ecology/feminism.
- 6th Wave - 1990s cohousing, ecovillages, various networks.

## OWNERSHIP-CONTROL MATRIX

	Common Ownership of Wealth	Mixed Economic Systems	Private Ownership of Wealth
<b>Consensus process control of wealth (win-win)</b>	Egalitarian Communalism. Sharing common property, and income.	Egalitarian Common-wealth. (land trusts; communal cores)	Egalitarian Collectivism. Sharing private property (cohousing).
<b>Majority rule and other win-lose processes</b>	Democratic Communalism. Common equity (some Israeli Kibbutzim).	Democratic Common-wealth. Capitalism & socialism.	Economic Democracy. All cooperatives. (Mondragon)
<b>Authoritarian control of wealth</b>	Totalitarianism Complete social control. Communism.	Authoritarianism. Theocracy. Patriarchy.	Plutocratic Capitalism. Corporate Fascism.

The two aspects of society and culture that combine to create distinctively different patterns are: decision-making structures and methods of property ownership. Together these are called a "political-economy," and they can be explained by placing the two continua, government (beliefs or control) and economics (sharing/privacy or ownership), at right angles to each other, forming a matrix.

The political-economic matrix can be used to model the entire range of human organization, from community to city to nation-state to global civilization. It can also be used to track the changes in a given culture over time, since when a group or a country changes its economy or form of government, it would move from one cell in the matrix to another.