Chapter 1
Sense of Community: Perceptions of Individual and Group Members of Online Communities

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ABSTRACT
This chapter addresses the relation community-society in the case of Web-based constellations; how is society represented if we meet Web-based communities? Why are Web-based societies kept invisible while Web-communities emerge as a quasi-natural consequence of Web presence? Did Web-communities flourish because society is absent on the Web? How can we expect the equivalent of societies to penetrate life on the Web? Will there be rules on pre-emptive strike of cyber hackers? etc.

INTRODUCTION
The “Digital Divide” and “Equality of Access” can be seen as the top agenda for the full societal integration of Web-applications. Any other efforts to make social networking and social media integrative seem to be obsolete if not citizens have a fair access and mindset for Web presence. Web communities may already resonate the ideals from for instance Emile Durkheimer’s concern on how societies could maintain their integrity and coherence in modernity. Durkheimer’s early idea on sociology developed in the late 19th and early 20th century. One hundred year later, the murky perspectives of segregated societies are intimidating; even for those who fought for anti-monarchy and lifting religious barriers; they would hesitate to welcome the so-called networked society.

At the arrival of Web-based communities the question arose in how far the attribute “community” is at stake. Traditionally, community sense is based upon “membership” and “relational patterns.” Being in a “central position” would legitimate that a member has a crucial position. Dropping out when being in a central position causes the community structure to fall apart. However the targeted “sense” goes beyond structure and status; Faith, commitment, consensus, mutual belonging and a shared sense of purpose. As the essence of community gets in focus, the clearer it distinguishes from society, especially as the notion of community grew on the evolv-

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ing individualism (Etzioni, 1993). The answer to the question “Can communities develop without societal context?” seems to be affirmative, as we the answer to the question “if societies essentially need communities?”

BACKGROUND

“Community” refers back to “commune” (in common) and thus contrasts with “Society” that is closer associated with urban aggregations: Divisions of labor, class awareness and the invention of “collective consciousness” (Durkheim, 1997). Sarason (1974) declares sense of community as the willingness to comply with what others expect from them; being a member of a larger structure. Gusfield (1975) discerns the territorial and the relational. We can say that through the Web and its virtuality, the relational aspect of communities have conquered the territorial; even the superimposed topology on relationship patterns seems to fail. Besides family relationships, proximity and adjacency have ruled community membership. “Close friendship” was often misunderstood and led to the notion of “real friendship.” Its basis was that despite a community contours two persons found mutual affinity. It leads to suppose communities as intermediate stage between society and friendship. The “networked society” characterizes as escaping from spatial of ideological proximity; any momentary criterion for making a relationship is valid, as long as there is a mutual sense of sharing or trusting. The fascination was that 2nd and 3rd order relationships developed so well in SNSs (Social Network Sites). Transient networks derive power from its “you, me, here and now.” It is like meeting a person at the bus station, who asks you to share a taxi; the conversation and affinity develops just around this shared need to arrive at another location, without any obligation to ask “why” or “what if.” In a certain way this transient togetherness could be seen as the most pure format for joining as the legitimation to sit together is completely in the incident of location and time; no question on history or ambition.

SHARING SPACE AND TIME ON THE WEB

Place and space: Web presence allows closeness without further obligation. In terms of browsing and anchoring, Web-meetings are sharing a transition: meeting and farewell are destined by earlier meetings with those who were linked to those of one contact before. Social media add to the traditional face-to-face meetings as it allows to see the longer chains of episodes; who were meeting just before and just after my meeting? What remarkable events typically happen at a certain fragment of the week? Time and duration: what episodes are good candidates to organize a party? Which group suffers from a long timeout? Etc. Sharing space and time means: invest in common awareness; the fact that both you and one of you community members spend efforts in (re)defining values, means that you both recognize each other in later plans. In other words: increase the chance that you mention each other in future project plans. So: sharing is more than common ownership. It implies mutual advocacy for each other’s potential. The notion of space seems to be convertible with attentional salience. In terms of marketing potential this is a seed for curiosity and recognition in case of parallel candidates. In terms of sense of community it is an early step towards altruistic attitude: those who

LOOKING GOOD: THE ROLE OF BEAUTY IN WEB COMMUNITIES

Recently a study in social networking revealed that users tend to make new connections via attractive friends (Jaschinski & Kommers, 2012). The experiment intended to understand better how relationships develop online. “Social network sites
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