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Community explorations

– Voices from Brazier's Park

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- Voices from Brazier's Park

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Abstract

This Bachelor Thesis within the subject of Rural Development aims at exploring a specific community and how it works as alternative way of living. The community, Brazier's Park, is located in the Southern countryside of England, near Oxford. Here there is a group of people living and working together in a community. This qualitative study is based on six semi-structured interviews with long and short time members, in aims to understand what community means for them. All took places during one sunny week in April. To live with other people and share much of waking life may be considered alternative compared to the more individualized lifestyle predominant today, since our beginnings man has lived a majority of the time in groups as a necessity for survival. To live this way today for survival is perhaps an outdated concept, and even though we interact daily with society we come home to solitary living, possibly without ever wondering why. However people in communities choose to live together, why? What is it that drives these people to continue living this way and what have they learnt?

Keywords: community, a sense of community, utopia, communitas, developmental communalism

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1. In-between

I'm sitting by the emergency exit and the flight attendant has just briefly instructed us of how to open the exit door if something would happen. As we start accelerating down the runway the short yellow lines on the asphalt below blurs into one big line and then we're off. As I look out the window I see forest and small red cottages and farms diapering and as everything turns into clouds.

A wind park in the ocean reminds me that parts of society are not only concerned but actual wishes to proceed in making the changes that we need to make if we are to save or prolong the life of the species who makes Earth habitable, along with ourselves. I feel a slight tremble of optimism for the future, that society and nations at least feel obliged to change in some ways, but then again there is a lot we as individuals can do. Maybe we need to rethink our attitudes towards some aspects of life, or at least acknowledge and review the alternative structures and ways of life that already exist in some places. There might be a need for many of us to reconsider the way we live our lives.

As I walk up the small gravel road following the big handmade sign reading Brazier's Park, nestled in between two big agricultural fields drying in the sun, I am intrigued. It is one of England's oldest secular communities and where I will spend the coming week, working, sharing the life and trying to understand what life in a community is about, a topic that has fascinated me for years.

Finally I discover a grand building, reminding me of a castle with adjoining wonderfully well-kept gardens and village of small houses well complimenting the main house, surrounded by a forested birdlife sanctuary.

1.1 Background

Modern society is partly a creation of the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and an ongoing, but uneven globalization and it has raised the living standard for many people. Most people in western societies have access to all basic necessities and a bit more, the upper and the middle classes are able to buy almost anything they want from anywhere else. Many of us in western society can travel across the world, experience other cultures and bring parts of it back into our lives. Food (as much else) is produced where cost are the lowest, often leading to monocultures in Southern countries, where farmers themselves need to import their food from other regions and countries as the market demand for crops more or less dictates what is grown (Shiva, 1993). This reduces our cost for food that has been transported across often great distances and is a constant source of pollution. Only two decades ago we did not have internet, yet it is hard for us now to believe we could be without it; we have got friends and acquaintances from all over the world in social networks, yet, as pointed out by Robert Putnam (2001) in his book 'Bowling alone' people in western societies also interact less and less with each other. One can compare to Ferdinand Tönnies (1957) distinction between the so called 'Gemeinschaft' of preindustrial life based on a tightly connected community with the 'Gesellschaft' of modern life in socially loosely connected society.

There are groups of people who try to resist this decrease of social interaction, who choose to live differently and thus form communities, where they can develop sub alternative lifestyles. In pre-capitalist societies life was mostly organized around close-knit dense social relationships, in the form of kinship, groups and tribes (Pitzer, 1997); thus one might argue that notions of community is of old human inheritance. There is no longer a need of such socially close-knit groups for survival; still a remnant such social groups are to be found in team sports, work groups and friendship. Since early Western civilisations imagined paradise, Plato's Republic and Thomas More's 1516 island of Utopia out of Greek Outopia (no place) and Eutopia (the good place) (Ibid.), utopian thinkers have evolved theories and strategies and people have been dreaming of it. In America utopian communities started to evolve soon after the pilgrims had arrived in the 17th century and formed communities, the first one was established in 1663 (Sreenivasan, 2008). Many deliberately created communities have come and gone since then, religious or secular, urged on by social reformers and seekers for causes of good, or forced on the people like Soviet collective farms or Maoist Peoples Communes (Pitzer, 1997). Today the communal impulse lives on in many forms and for many purposes:

cohousing; communes; ecovillages; social movements; camping communities; people who want to live in the company of others, and this is what is motivating this study done at Braziers Park, England during a week in April 2015.

1.2 Research question

Across Western Europe groups of people distance themselves, move away from mainstream society and create communities where they live in smaller units, spanning from shared living quarters to those who try to form their notion of an ideal society. These communities are reactions towards a number of issues, whether or which its members want to escape from or overturn: the environmental destruction; lack of dense social bonds, and or the overall aim to accumulate capital and possessions. The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the members of such a community, Brazier Park, perceive their community, its role and position in relation to the external society, and the members' own notions and perceptions of the community. In short, the thesis attempts to grasp the members' own narratives of the community and their own relations and perceptions to it.

- 1) How do the members of the Brazier's Park community perceive their role within the community and how do they present their own perceptions and relations towards the external society?
- 2) What form of life do the community's members perceive as important, and to what extent can they develop that form of life within the community?

2.1 Method for interviews

I wanted to learn more about communities and communal life, spurred on by different living situations I experienced that gave me so much more than I could have imagined. I was also very interested in social movements, especially those focused on environmental aspects; this led me to an interest for ecovillages. Eventually I found the Global Ecovillage Network homepage where I discovered a map over Europe with communities and project pinpointed. I started looking through a vast number of homepages, documentaries and literature. I started writing to different communities, naïvely I thought they would like to share their story, but I came to discover that many of these communities have been a subject to studies earlier by student or scholars before, in most cases this seem to have taken a negative turn. Some were not at all happy about how they were portrayed, in some of the mail replies I got back I heard of great tensions in communities brought about by studies, “wounds that have taken us long to heal”. Most of my letters were not responded to, so I started calling but were refused or denied a visit. Many of the communities aspire for a better world and strive to share their story, but seem to have lost trust that their stories will be spread by scholars in the way that the community wish for.

At last I found Brazier’s Park on the map over England that allowed me to come for a week to interview and observe their community, as well as partake in the volunteer work. I allowed myself two days of getting a feel for the place before approaching and asking for interviews, by then I and the community members were comfortable together, which allowed for very open interviews of much interest for me. My only regret is that I have no space in this thesis to approach much of the material.

For this thesis I have used a qualitative lifeworld approach; trying to understand the world through the perceptions of my informants, in an attempt to find reasons and meaning through their experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). The interviews have thus been as close as possible to an ordinary conversation, and in that the knowledge produced is intersubjective, established through me as scientist and my informant my part required as much of listening and latching on to things, connecting pieces, knowing when to move on to another subject, as anticipating, waiting and hoping for things to be told based on hunches and delicate signals. The interviews differ on the specific interaction with the interviewees. Each interview is a unique speech event (ibid.). I made six open ended interviews that were conducted in a semi-

structured form. The red thread of the interviews was the main theme of community. As I lived and participated in the work with the community and shared the meals I interacted with the members closely, which facilitated relaxed interviews.

2.2 Theory

Friedrich Engels described the utopian socialist as creating illusive designs for future society without explaining how their plans might be brought into the world (Beecher, 1990). Therefore Robert Owens and Charles Fourier was both utopian socialist in their production of detailed designs for ideal society, based on intentional communities. Owen maintained (Leopold, 2011): (1) individuals do not form their own character; instead it is entirely formed for them by the environment they interact with; (2) those individuals are thus not accountable for their own feelings and behaviours. Owen meant that with the use of right means, education of character and reasoning, any personality could be created and sustained in a community. Progressively Owen recognized the small communal settlement as means to and final institutional form of, “the rational and humane future” of which he found it hard to imagine any potential disadvantages of communal living. Owens practical concerns, of the transgression time into the ideal commune, was the time needed for this non-confrontational new form of living to be established, requiring a gradual leaving of the old order of thought. The community rule would be a kind of gerontocracy, elder rule based on experience and age. (Ibid.). Fourier positioned his utopic communal organisation in intentional communities called Phalanxes (albeit of grand architectural ideas, believing a new social order requires new architecture (Beecher, 1990; Engels, 1999)). Work was creative and fulfilling, attractive enough for individuals to partake in, central to self-realise, develop and organise essential human characteristics. Work voluntarily carried out by small hierarchical and socially diverse groups, unified by preference for the specific job. The work was the context for education, where the wider community teach each other through the daily task and activities, and exclusion of the community constitutes the harshest punishment. (Beecher, 1990; Engels, 1999; Leopold, 2011). I will use Owen and Fourier as a backdrop for and reference point to the utopian aspects I have found in the visited community.

There is not one single definition of community, but it can be viewed as of dynamic sets of relationships between people in a certain place, dynamic in its subject to change as interpersonal relationships differ in form. McMillan & Chavis (in Bruhn, 2011) highlight four

aspects that are necessary for a sense of community, which I have used as a framework for dividing my analysis into chapters, they are: *the sense of membership; influence; the integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection.*

Community can also be regarded as an arena where everybody is working together toward a mutual goal, or being part of an activity or event that require everyone's cooperation (Bruhn, 2011). The community members' share specific common goals, values, and a way of living that strengthen the social bonds by establishing a supportive safety net of trust and care for each other, resulting in mutual commitments of responsibility. There are many forms of communities: global, imagined, virtual, and locals. The term itself implies common notions, values, norms, and identities. It also involves a degree of dependability on comradeship and a sense of belonging among its members who choose to associate with, or connect to, each other. We create our connections and disconnections with others by the kind of lifestyle we choose. (Bruhn, 2011). Scott Peck (in Ibid, 2011) argues that a community should be restricted to individuals who share honest communication and deep relationships, where an empathic understanding of the feeling states of others is nurtured through shared emotions in a trustful environment. Sarason (in Ibid.) states that the community becomes important and meaningful for the individual when she feel valued, safe, and when there is access to external resources making the community a less isolated experience. Iscoe (in ibid.) talks of the competent community as "the kind of community that each individual believes fosters healthy connections for them", allowing the members personal development and growth in accordance to their preferences. Individuals choose the settings they believe is most suitable for them, physically, socially, and psychologically (Bruhn, 2011), but they also differ in their tolerance of social closeness: their tolerance of community. There is no single environment that can satisfy every person's need, and their needs also change with time, and communities differ in their capacity and willingness to adapt to the changing needs of its members. (Ibid.). Thus different community environments develop different goals and achievements depending on their structure. What they often share, however, as Putnam and Feldstein (2003) writes in an communities study across the USA, is an internal community development of valuable social capital referred to as "social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trustworthiness".

Victor Turner (1975) distinguishes between three types of so called "*communitas*" for considering social bonds that can be useful here. They are: (1) *existential* or *spontaneous* communitas, experiences instant and full confrontation of human identities, usually making

those subject to it think of mankind as a homogenous, unstructured and free community, the original existential *communitas* is organised into a continuous social system (2) in *normative communitas*, over time, there is a need to organise and form resources to keep group members alive and well, there is an inevitable need for social control among those members in undertaking collective goals, the *normative communitas* began with a non-utilitarian practise of brotherhood and fellowship, something which the resulting group tried to preserve; and (3) *ideological communitas*, applicable to a variety of utopian models or blueprints of societies believed by their authors to exemplify the optimal conditions for *existential communitas*.

Donald Pitzer (1997) writes that the developmental communalism depends on three assumptions. (1) Communal living is a universal social mechanism available throughout the ages, for all people, movements and governments. (2) Communal structuring is usually implemented in an early stage of development (or during a crisis) for its promises of solidarity, security, and ease of experimentation. (3) If communal arrangements are not adjusted over time to changing realities or left completely for ways of organising more in tune with the long-term aims this may contribute to the decline or demise of the original movements, governments, or peoples that chose them. Resulting in all communal utopias, Pitzer explains, are facing a double-edge threat. Either the founding movement make needed adjustments away from communal living disbanding the commune. Or if movements chose communal living as a permanent structure (or religious principle), the rigidity as a result may cause the stagnation or death of the movement and commune.

2.3 Braziers Park

Brazier's Park, often called simply Braziers, is a great old estate going back to the 17th century. The estate resembles a castle with many nestled in small houses of different appearances and behind the main estate. Old sheds filled with outdoor tools, an old barn that has become a music stage, small workspaces for art and woodcarving, cottages for housing, some caravans turned into homes and two wood pellet burners heating up the house. There are gardens surrounding the estate and a bit further in on the property there is an orchard of apple trees, a south facing walled fruit and vegetable garden with plums and pears and beans and peas. Close by is a hundred year old greenhouse revitalised by sprouting salads and herbs. There are sheep, pigs and cows on the fields. The big campground is surrounded by old oaks and many different kinds of birds; this is where I put up my tent for the week.

Brazier's Park School of Integrative Social Research is described on its webpage as a conscious experiment of living together to explore how a group could develop harmonious relationships and group structures. Thus it forms a community with specific intentions. Braziers publish research focusing on techniques of discussion, where sensitive attention is fostered by acknowledging the importance of feelings of the group, which aims to widen the viewpoint for integrating initially opposing ideas (Brazier's Park, 2015). The community experiment was originally set up to find a way of merging two social types: conventional thinkers acting on their decision, with unconventional thinkers unable to act due to seeing too many angles of the problem, into a leadership model that would benefit the world. This goal is not evident today, nor talked of much, but for some it is still important and interesting for others not.

Braziers is home to 15 residents at present and at any time two to four volunteers. There is an external membership of about 50 people, who have been involved over time and who receives the group's newsletter and return to the property once in a while. It is an authorized society of charitable status, allowing for donations and certain tax reductions, and is governed by its members through a Committee of Management.

The residents work part-time in exchange for their lodging. Some work part time outside the community or are retired. The ages of the residents range from 20 years to 90 years old, with some young children. The residents have their own room, in the main building or in the Garden cottage, alongside national and international volunteers working for their food and accommodation, and participating in the life of the community.

Becoming a resident takes time and only if everyone in the community agrees to accept an applicant a 3 or 6 month trial period is offered, which may lead to residency.

“Applicants need to demonstrate an interest in Integrative Social Research as well as experience and skills in the required areas of the role they are filling, but more importantly, an ability to contribute fully to our shared life, willing to learn about problem solving and conflict resolution and take part in community building, teaching and learning.”(Brazier’s Park, 2015).

The work is divided into areas of responsibility (cf. Fourier’s work units, ref Beecher, 1990) so that each work task has one or more residents as main organisers, though others can also help out and give their inputs. Each day starts with a 9 AM morning meeting, assessing the mood of the group and deciding who shall do which of the required tasks of the day; often cooking, cleaning and gardening dominate. The resident responsible for a work area get help from the volunteers and involve them in what they do to make the job easier and faster. Residential volunteers work 6 hours a day, 5 days a week with much house cleaning, food preparation and some work outside in the garden or estate.

Maintaining a big old estate requires income and is financed by an enterprise structure of hiring out spaces, for festivals and weddings, and big rooms for courses in Yoga, other kind of meetings and some educational courses where people subscribe and pay for courses. The largest proportion of the income derives from the guests; in effect the community is dependent upon the hospitality work of the residents and volunteers that is generating the income, connecting to Sarason (Bruhn, 2011) making the community important for the individual, feeling valued as they are necessary elements for the extraction of external resources, here capital income.

3. Voices from Brazier's Park

Here follows a presentation of the six people I had interviews with, as well a backdrop for where the interview was conducted. The interviewees are a few of the people who play an essential part for the reproduction of the community; they are the life-breath that together shapes the life here. For that reason it is important to try and portray who these members are, and to describe their life trajectories that made them decide to reside in Brazier's Park, to obtain an understanding of how this community works. First there will be a brief presentation of the interviewees. After each person a small narrative will be started, signalled by the first word appearing in bold, for the reader to connect or not.

A table up the stairs

When coming up the main red carpet staircase leading upstairs from the inner hall to the housing areas for the guests, on the first and main landing there is an old oak table with a green plant and three big chairs. It is a secluded area in an open space of the house, as made for nightly talks and contemplation.

Woody

My first talk is with Woody, the time is already past ten at night, and we have participated in an evening talk in regards to an upcoming independent university event the following day. We are both a bit tired, but as it is the timeslot most suitable due to his busy schedule we both grab a cup of coffee from the dining room and head up for a talk that stretch into the silent hours of the night. He is a slender, but vibrant man in his seventies with blue eager eyes, brown hair and sideburns. He radiates warm energy, and is full of emotion and motion.

Woody does not live here permanently as he also resides in another community, but he is very involved and lives and works at Braziers a few days each week. He has now over 40 years of experience living in communities of different shapes.

He refers to his youth as anti-intellectual, politically mindless and no school interest except for engineering and drawing. Through mandatory military service he got into the army. The service end was more appealing to him, requiring a signing on for three years. It offered better pay and instead of infantry he could choose a regiment and trade. He enjoyed the comradery in the regiment bringing fond memories of boarding school. In time he signed on for another three years and became an electrician the Royal Engineers. He got stationed outside of London for six years becoming a senior electrician and upon finishing an intensive work course was promoted. When marrying he got transferred as staff sergeant to Germany, experiencing the Cold-War paranoia of the British troops on the Rhine, leading toward the

first stages of his radicalization in three steps. First, the rank transfer led him to partake in a completely new scene, overseas. Second, he went from single to married life. Third, in the new environment, in his words, he discovered the concepts of *class* and *alienation*, by how higher ranking officers' wives would act and treat his new wife and *cultural imperialism* seeing how the British soldiers behaved towards and talk down of the German people.

When transferred to Ghana he witnessed the gulf of wealth and poverty. He was head engineer leading a team to laying cables, lighting and fixing generators for a massive airstrip, eventually revealed to be in preparation for refuelling and reloading for proposed attack starting another great war. After years as peacetime soldier naïve of military intentions, now he knew the world was wrong.

After the Army he entered politics, but experiencing the structure and workings on the inside he became politically disillusioned. He briefly became a revolutionary, but was disillusioned by the high ranking revolutionary intellectuals concerns of their career futures.

“So meantime there’s a Woody who realize that reform doesn’t work, revolution doesn’t work, not in England, and therefore it has to be the plentiful society looking for something credible.”

In early 1970s he worked as a power station engineer, but searched for communities to join who would share his views on the ills of the world, in hope of finding answers and solutions. When his marriage dissolved he left for a clean start. He found a group moving from the squatting movement towards buying the cheapest property available and for him this was a starting point of something viable and he committed. He and a few others got settled as a sub-group in another town to this bigger group who wanted to bring power back to the common people, but the sub-group got separated and left on their own. They remade the group too fast, big division and problems occurred. Eventually they realised an all-in community did not fit a city situation so they devolved into different structures of cooperation. It was always people first, until quite recently when the ecological questions became immensely important to him.

Through his life story, a certain rhythm is evident, as if everything happened in chapters that crystallise in a few life lessons linking on to the next chapter. He calls himself radical, and seems from early on moving away from what he sometimes calls “the system” in (negative) reference to top-down control by state or army. Little things keeps him moving on, the companionship of boarding school turns to army comradery, an interest in engineering leads him on to advancing a career circling that interest that allows his to travel and see new perspectives of the world; he is part of “the system” until negative aspects of it manifest in front of him, then he navigate away. “The system” may here be summed up as: a villain, the

wolf in sheep's clothing, trying to hide its motives until ill will becomes clear, a big entity that neglects to view the individual, whereby the individual can navigate through relatively unseen. The social concepts he came to discover, according to Woody, then explains this system. One could position his life story as a heroic fable of struggle for redemption of the individuals, recently turned a struggle for the ecological issues, but still spurred in much by "the system" that has always been of corporative or economical (negative) interests.

His entry into communities (1970 onwards) could be compared to Turner's (1975) distinctive *communitas*. The first real community he joined came out of the squatting movement and became a sub community guided by a main community, one could argue to be positioned as *ideological* concerned with and motivated by ideas of social equality etc., which in time necessarily evolved into a *normative* one requiring more organisation and structure for its continuation. When the community became left on its own, abandoned by the main community, it instead became more of an *existential, spontaneous* kind, but eventually they too realized the necessity of devolving the community into other structures. One could couple this with the two latter stages of Pitzer's (1997) developmental communalism, arguably the early community development followed the second assumption of communal structuring that Pitzer states as often set on by a crisis stage, here being left alone, demanding a structuring and promise of solidarity and safety. The very reason the sub community was disconnected from the main could connect to Pitzer's third assumption that communal arrangements are either adjusted over time to changing realities or discarded for other organisational strategies corresponding better with the long-term aims, which again resurfaced as the sub community in turn devolved their communal aspects. My empirical material thus suggest and support Pitzer's claim that either the communal visions are abandoned to continue the overall vision of the movement, or the communal vision is made into a permanent structure eventually becoming so rigid it terminates the movement.

Colum

The following night, after lengthy talks and discussions with invited guests spanning various levels of art and theatre education as well as university academics regarding the future of establishing Braziers as location for an independent university; a subject that has been up for discussions before and is becoming ready for serious discussions and planning taking place over a weekend event that happened during my stay, I have my interview with Colum and we sit down in the same spot as the previous interview. We have just finished dinner and decide to squeeze in short and more sporadic interview, completely different to the previous. He has white hair, beard and blue eyes with

Colum does not live at Braziers, but came in 2007 originally for a position that was advertised for but which he didn't get, though it got him involved with the place. He wanted to become part of Braziers and the ideas of the community fascinate him.

"Although I am not one of the community residents here it matters enormously that I am part of the large community".

His feelings towards Braziers depend on his mood and the general emotional temperature of the place that constantly goes up and down. At the moment spirits are high, the weekend event in regards to an educational proposal, has got most people involved very excited, he exclaims. The talks regard a proposed independent university education here, connecting with the original vision of the Braziers being a Residential College. He wishes to appoint someone to look after research and teaching, in a low level pastoral and management role, he says, with the potential to help people resolve interpersonal difficulties. The educational possibility, he says, would be something to engage in and an ideal to work towards something similar with the potential of developing a unique educational program backed up with integration between education and the life lived here, so that education benefits from residents like they benefit from the education.

From a statement like "the spirits are high", coupled with *Colum's* feelings for the community corresponding with the mood in the community, it can be understood that it is not always so, suggesting emotional ups and downs within the community. The remark of attaining a pastoral figure may imply that some guidance is missing at present and that people at times need someone to turn to for advice and problem solving. This could also be interpreted as the people here having different levels of tolerance for social closeness and community as acknowledged elsewhere by Iscoe and Sarason (in Bruhn, 2011) suggesting a need for someone in a supportive role to confine in would be useful if not necessary to any diverse community. In Owen's utopian society (Leopold, 2011), this role was arguably filled by his favoured elder rule, where age and experience allow for a different understanding of people and things. It could also address a lack of empathic understanding that Peck (in Bruhn 2011) holds as important for the community. That the spirits are high in regards to the education event could point towards a hope for a common cause, an ideal, the people could join together in, which in turn may suggest that there is at present a lack of a common goal and values, which Bruhn(2011) believes are important for the functioning of a community.

Yet the community is important for Colum which could, according to Sarason (1974, in Bruhn, 2011), connect to him feeling of value to the community.

The Old Library

After more stairs and some small corridors an anonymous white door opens to the Library, and the smell of old books. The library is jam packed with books spanning from Plato; Jung; history books of England as well as archived papers produced by the Braziers members during the years. There is a circle of comfortable chairs and a table surrounding a small fireplace, behind only books but close to the fireplace a window looks out over the garden.

Hugh

I find Hugh in the afternoon and he leads us up to the Library for our talk. We sit down in two comfortable chairs and I agree it is a really suitable place for conversations like this. Hugh is an elderly man in his eighties, tall with white hair, wise eyes, dressed in shorts and a short-sleeve shirt. His voice is delicate and slow, as if each word have been turned and weighted before spoken, a very sensitive approach.

Hugh came to live at Brazier's five and a half years ago, now he is partly retired, with a background in building and engineering, he sometimes help in solving different task. He puts great value in what some would call menial task, like washing up and cleaning, as he feel western society has lost track of appreciating and doing the small but necessary tasks. "No factory could ever survive if no one ever swept the floor" he says.

He was a lonely child growing up in a rural area, many of his childhood friends were temporary evacuees from the big cities during the war years. He always wanted to be in a community, or rather in a group with others, perhaps spurred by his solitary childhood but he had a genuine interest in communities that broke down the class distinctions and for being part of a group. He had his first community like experience working on a big farm that employed many workers who lived in a purpose built hostel. He married, but his wife did not want to live in a community. They raised a family of four children but money issues forced them to pursue a simpler lifestyle but as he himself grew up during the war he was used to struggle with minimal resources. They lived in different places and some were abandoned cottages that he upgraded and fixed as best he could. When the children were grown up, he and his wife separated, and he started in living in community. First he joined a nature club where he lived for ten years; a group of people who co-owned their own land. After that he joined a genuine community, and eventually he happened moved on to Braziers when there was a vacancy.

The metaphor of menial task echoes the hollowing out of meaning in search for efficiency and the separation of things and task that are important and those that are not. Putting this together with the urge for breaking down the class distinctions, his growing up with limited resources, the simple lifestyle and the unwanted houses he fixed up, he could be understood as revolting against all injustice of social inequalities. As if he could attach or rebuild meaning where meaning have been forgotten, as a small outcry against the wasteful lifestyle (of attitudes and ways) he has witnessed. One could compare to Owen's thinking (Leopold 2011) of the individuals character being formed by his environment, and then say that Hugh is revolting against (perhaps in his mind) a worsening environment having a worsening effect on the characteristics of the individuals. Perhaps the reason why Hugh places and highlights the importance of menial task could also be connected to Fourier (Ibid.) in work as the context for education, as creative, fulfilling and self-developing, and that he has found even the most basic of task having positive effects on character building or being important to know of. He knew from early on that he wanted group living and he define his childhood as lonely; company could in that regard, for him, be positioned as source of goodness. The community life he found in the nature club, as I gather, could be positioned as Turner's (1975) *existential* community, homogenous and unstructured and of few rules. The later ones, and Braziers, appear more of a *normative* community where structured work and organised resource use was needed in order to sustain the people.

Mark

I find Mark in the office and we choose the library for our interview as well. We talk a bit about the value of the library and the treasures it holds. Mark is around 50 years old; stoutly built with brown hair and three-day stubble on his chin. He is casually well dressed in ironed shirts, suspenders and dark trousers. He is a reader and seems to mention yet another book each time we meet. He is not soft-spoken; rather his voice carries a storyteller's rationale.

Mark has lived in quite a large share houses before, not only as a student, but also in houses in London, but he says that was more of a parallel existence, where everybody had different places to go for work and lived different lives. But as with everything, he adds, it is up to the individual how to live and integrate with the people that are around.

Here at Brazier's he is a new resident, and tells me that he and many others that come to the community initially have many ideas and vision of what can be done, until they realize much has already been done, tested and could be ready to be tested again. These thoughts also seem to coincide with the external expectations people have when coming here.

“We are often accused of not completing something, or that it hasn’t made its mark. But of course it has, otherwise it wouldn’t have been here, it has done enough, it is sort of worthy in its own right. We have big ideas but we also have the practical reality of the day to day and how things go on.”

We broach on the subject of Braziers being a Residential College in connection with the weekend event and how they try to structure a different format of education here. He hopes this education would become more ambitious and substantial if some sort of university was formed or courses held, because he feels that it would tie back to the roots of the community. He says there is hardly a meal without some kind of lesson involved, usually a language question brought up by an international volunteer. Sometimes members hold lessons or courses for other residents sharing skills and knowledge.

”So these are just spontaneous classes that spring up in the inner hall, an example of Braziers naturally being a college without necessarily having a big curriculum with published classes”.

We come to talk about patience and the need for it for this way of living. There is a lot of meetings and conversation and instead of talking about personal expectations there is more of shared expectations and likewise with frustrations, and that life here is about being in a group of shared objectives where it is known and felt the responsibility of being a part of the team.

His view that people gets different things from the environment depending on how their interaction, disagrees with Owen’s (Leopold, 2011) belief that the environment shapes the person and contrary to Owen’s view, the individual is assumed to be accountable for his feelings and interactions. Mark’s early community experiences would if anything be coupled with the *existential/spontaneous* communitas, unstructured and made up of people that just happen to end up together (Turner, 1974) where the different communities are as diverse as the people in them. He is positive to the prospected education and that it could bring more substance and ambition into the education, although he states that there is always ongoing education. Here lies a possible connection to Fourier’s thinking again, where work is the context for education, and where the wider community teaches each other through daily tasks and activities (Beecher, 1990, Engels, 1999; Leopold, 2011 as volunteers learns new skills, residents may learn new ways of doing tasks more effectively, if one remains open for it. But also an opening for Owenian thinking, that of moulding personalities out of the environment they are in, where an education of character and reasoning reproduce new members who are sustained by the ways of the community (Leopold, 2011). When we talk of the responsibilities of being part of the team it seems required of each person here to *find* a role that benefits the

whole group, by recognizing his or her own strengths and skills, and for the other members to be patient of others, while they search for their roles.

Nonny's bedroom

In what once was the main housekeeper's self-contained apartment resembling a sort of built-in cottage in the servants' quarter lives Nonny and has done so for 32 years as part of the community. It is a two-room space in the north-eastern part of the house surrounded by a garden that were her life-project here, still called Nonny's Garden. Her quarters have a small kitchen in the inner room, a toilet and her bedroom. There are some photos on the wall and by the bed she has a table with everything she needs within reach.

Nonny

Nonny is the eldest member of the community and at age 93 she now spends her time in bed with a window view over the garden she loves, with her cat Alpha always in close proximity. She has blue sharp eyes and is by now quite small and I almost mistook her for being frail until she grabbed my hand demonstrating her strength. She is very active with her hands and gestures while talking, and she is continually on point and comes back to things and reconnects.

Nonny found Brazier's when she was in her late 40s. She found out about the place from a little weekend guide bought from a newsagent. After a few temporary visits she was offered to work for her stay, instead of paying, but she paid half-price for her youngest daughter who she brought with her. So she started helping out with cooking, cleaning, washing and gardening. She had been a lonely child always wanting people around her, here she found the company, and loved the countryside and the garden.

When the Second World War broke out she was at the University of Cambridge, but instead of finishing her degree she went into what she calls war work as linguist and with a group of other women studied to translate Japanese military transmissions into English. During the work they lived together close by, housed by local people in the area.

After the war she finished her degrees, met her husband, and had children. Tragically she lost her husband a few years later and kept up the family on her own until she and her youngest found Brazier's Park through the weekend guide. Today Braziers is her home and instead of a nursing home, she has been allowed to stay with help of her employed caregivers and her daughters who come and help out.

"I said I wanted to come home when I was out of the hospital and Braziers said if you have your carers to look after you, they wash and dress me and everything else, we'll feed you and keep an eye on you."

We talk of how helpful people are, going out of their way buying something in town or repairing something, the little things that makes everything easier for her. The people at Braziers also take turns visiting her five times a day to check up on her.

I would use these visits as an expression of people seeing and realising the needs of others. The members are granted the role of helper, helping Nonny with tasks that are very important for her. I collect that everything is of different value and importance to each individual, based on physical ability alone. In my own experiences, when helping somebody there may be a reward in the gratitude from the person and also a gratitude and satisfaction in the helping. Emmons and McCullough (2004) writes gratitude broaden people's way of thinking; strengthen social bonds and relationships and fuels reciprocal and creative altruism. Nonny may thus, however immobile she is, have that role for others here at Braziers, making them feel needed and appreciated. That she may live in the place that has become her home could contain a double positive effect in her enjoyment and peace, and possibly also the last living connection for the community back to an older era that may be viewed as a time of purpose and direction that may postulate an example and core of the community.

Her work during the war is such a lasting memory, a plausible reason for that could attune to the strength, camaraderie and rewards of the collective cause, and staying together in hard times. If coupled to Owen's environment shaping the person (Leopold, 2011), then the need for people to help out, as a lot of people working tightly together in army headquarters and bases(environment), would push individuals towards incorporating or becoming a collective person. The war work community itself was structured as a response to a crisis (war) and may link to Pitzer's (2011) second assumption of developmental communalism, implemented here national solidarity and security.

The Inner hall

The Inner hall is where most meetings take place, and it is the place where all the morning meetings I have partaken in during my stay have been. The room is clad in dark wood three quarters up the walls. The upper parts of the walls are wallpapered in a pinkish shade and the western wall is old glass doors leading out to the ground floor. There is a collection of odd old couches surrounding a great big fire place, opposite the glass doors there is a Grand Piano and up on a dresser two busts of the founder Norman Glaister and his wife Dorothy.

Will

I sit down with Will on one of the old couches. He in his mid-twenties, he is a cricketer, a philosophy graduate, and a gardener. He is tall with blue eyes, brown hair, a groomed beard and glasses. His is dressed in soil-stained, sun-faded clothes. As we start to talk he is a little bit on his guard but after a few minutes we are already engaged in an intensive conversation.

Will first came to Brazier's for a month of volunteering two years earlier. When finding out that there was a vacancy for resident workers he applied for the position as the gardener.

Community life was never on his mind, nor did it attract him; rather it was the work and clean air for thinking that drew him in. Outside of Brazier's he studies a horticulture course, which also inspired his coming back. His earlier volunteering introduced him to the place, the people and living together with others which perhaps made the transition easier, becoming a resident and it is not what he expected it to be but much more complete and rewarding.

We talk about how this experience of community life can change people, how doing things you normally would not, forces you to engage in previously unknown activities and skills, placing the individual outside her normal comfort zone into situations that might be completely new that allows for more instructive experiences. That there is a lot you learn about yourself living with others, how the way you act within that group can lead to unexpected realizations about yourself. For him this living has made him more in tuned with the ways of how people feel affects how they act. He says that here, he has been brought into close contact with all types of people of different ages and backgrounds, which has nurtured and evolved his empathy. He believes that being in this setting has influenced and expanded his thinking; he now appreciates just how delicate people can be, their minds and wellbeing, and how much that depends on their relationships to the group. This emphatic understanding achieved by community life has made him more interested in the way people feel and act.

He was drawn in by the environment and the space to think clearly for a while, in that sense this community at least could be talked of as a refuge of sorts; he was also attracted and motivated by working in the garden, here also confirming Fourier's notion (Beecher, 1990; Engels, 1999; Leopold, 2011) of work as creative, fulfilling, attractive and central for self-realisation. Will states that the community has expanded his empathic understanding, which agrees with what Peck (in Bruhn, 2011) states about community as a place where relationships become more deeply developed, in turn increasing the empathic understanding of the feelings of the others in the group.

4. Community

Academics have defined four aspects of the sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, Bruhn, 2011). First is *the sense of membership*, of being a part of collective (see finding others). The second is *the sense of influence*, feeling the possibility of as a team member at having a say or making a difference to the outcome (see decision making). Third is *the integration and fulfilment of needs*, the individual can contribute with personal skills and abilities (see Group life and other reasons). Fourth is *the shared emotional connection*, where it feels good to participate in a joint effort and where one enjoys acceptance of the others (see identity), often by conforming to a general will or a strong authority. All of these I have fitted onto themes I have found, in an attempt to show how the community at Braziers covers these.

Finding others (the sense of membership)

Of the people I interviewed there is a range of reasons of why and how they came to arrive at Braziers. Some came for manual work, for the company of others, for a social experience or experiment and for a place to be for a while. Some people want to live here forever, some only a year of experience that might help them in the future. They all share, though, an intrinsic feeling of valuing the company of others. All of them share experiences of living with people; all of them have affectionate memories that seem to prevail. For most, the early school years are connected companionship and possibly this is also the first big or more significant stage in the development of a sense of self. The time when put into possibly a first, bigger setting of other people to take into consideration.

From there on their life paths might part, Hugh for example went on to work for six months away from home, which was as he puts it a very appropriate time of growing up for him, “working with all sorts of Yorkshiremen”, suggesting, also by his tone of voice, that he learnt possibly as much, or more, from the people as from the actual work. Woody entered the army and expectantly or not enjoyed the comradery, bringing back fond memories of boarding school, memories I estimate as far likelier based on relationships than education. This comradery I believe was a big driving force for him staying so long in the army.

Nonny left her studies for war-related work, but her narrative is told in a we-perspective, showing that she emphasizes a collective experience, to be a part of something alongside others, and that this collective aspects perhaps was bigger than the work itself. Will, Colum and Mark remarked about enjoying university life and of being part of the student crowd. Will came here to volunteer, enjoyed the people and held it as a big experience. Mark lived

together with other students while studying, but has also shared various flats with many people. Thus in a sense all these people of very different backgrounds and stories still share some experiences that points to the significance of spending time with other people or being part of a collective. Some have come to escape loneliness, whether from relationships that have terminated or leaving solitary apartments behind. Most of the community members, though had participated in some form of communal living before joining.

Identity (the shared emotional connection)

The atmosphere at Braziers is very open for any field of discussion, most seem prepared to listen and partake in conversation; perhaps it is attributed to the range of nationalities that come here to spend time, get to know the people and share stories or news from their homeland; presenting different perspectives. The impacts of the founders' legacy of ideas and thoughts vary quite a lot. For some these ideas attracted them to the community and they still developed and study the ideas, while for others the founders only represent names affiliated with the beginning. The history thus is an important feature for the identity of the community, but does not determine evolution of the community. The community members seemingly attach their own meaning to the place, thus there is no one single static meaning, but many attach their own sentiments and understanding of the place, however it is based on how someone recognizes the place that shapes how meaning, relations and togetherness are created (Bruhn, 2011). Therefore if there is a wish for closer social bonds within the community, it would be necessary to find shared aims to develop a common purpose (*values, social cohesion* c.f. Bruhn, 2011) which would clarify the broader meaning and a common identification of Braziers, that may then work to strengthen and unify the community further. Values are beliefs of what is important in a culture; beliefs are reflected in the ideas and behaviour of its members (Bruhn, 2011); the ideas and behaviour strongly affects how and what is done. Therefore without shared values it is hard to find solutions and processes with consensus agreement, which then reduces feelings of working together towards something; the results (if reached) might be unsatisfactory to many ending up in loss of members, course of action and meaning (cf. Bourdieu 1979). The community should thus give people a sense of direction and purpose from a shared set of moral values that they can uphold despite their differences (Wilkinson, 1996 in Bruhn, 2011). Self-interest or solitary communities meet the needs of some people, but the strongest communities are the ones that create opportunities for many different categories of people and find areas of common interest (Morse, 1998 in Bruhn, 2011).

Decision making (the sense of influence)

Here at Braziers there are many persons and ideas competing with each other, the community has decided that they will make decision through a consensus democratic process, requiring the acceptance of all. The proposition is turned and viewed from many angles, seeing more difficulties or ways of implementation; here, the process appears beneficial. The decision making process is divided into two different meetings: *sensory* and *executive*, with a three layer structure of decision making instances, “*Community*”, *Residents* and *Committee of Management*.

The *sensory* meeting takes place three times a month and is open every other week for all. It follows listed questions or problems, open for additions during the week. It entails talking through the problems, looking for solutions and alternatives in a space where everyone feel safe. All major issues are thoroughly discussed and reflected on before decisions are taken at *executive* meeting. The meeting starts with a round where everyone can inform the others about how the person is feeling and how that may affect the meeting, or if the person is very keen on something or has personal experience of the topic. This method makes the group construct a long term identity, to trust each other, gain support and courage (Brazier’s Park, 2015).

There is a *sub-executive* meeting each week for the management of the different work areas (cf. Fourier in Beecher, 1990; Engels, 1999), attended by mainly those residents involved.

The *executive* meeting takes place once a month, the day after a *sensory* meeting and it is the meeting of the *Committee of Management* as the overseeing body attended by the Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, and trustees and one or two residents. It receives feedback from the Community and Sub Executive meetings and the will of the members. The decision is made by consensus and if unable to reach, the matter returns to *sensory* for further discussion. From the *sensory* meeting the day before the residents are informed of different views and solution, thus the decisions have gotten a bit more time to mature and some issues might no longer be a problem anymore, others have become more complex.

This dual system of *sensory* and *executive* is the basis of the theory and practice of governance since the beginning. The function of decision making is shared by two committees, instead of one executive body of overall power. It makes different people, personalities and strengths work together effectively, allowing for reconsidering positions.

So the *Community* that also includes members who do not live at the compound may affect decision by ventilating their thoughts and feelings in *sensory* the day before *executive*, thereby they might not have the same ultimate decision making power but can heavily influence or inspire, the individual may influence the outcome. Residents then have decision power through *executive* over how to solve and proceed with all matters, related to the community. Financial matters and other major issues are decided at the highest level, *Committee of Management*. The trustees are important as the people here live on a property, which they pay no rent or mortgage for, as it was left it in the founders' will to be used as he did, legally requiring trustees to continue things according to the wishes of the owner.

It can be a hard and slow process to reach an agreement the group can accept, I gather, but that decision is the outcome of a long, reflective process. Tasks are done under the principle of shared responsibility and this collective process has several advantages. Hugh states that "it stretches people and creates situations where people learn a lot more than they would if they were told what to do all the time".

Will believes residents become more aware of alternatives, differences, benefits and limitations because of the collective decision making process than if they would only make a decision suitable for themselves. The reason he says, is because it is not possible to do the first thing that comes to mind, but rather it requires you and the group together to think through the issue. The decision process involves a lot of people and takes at least a week but he thinks it improves the decisions and makes the members more reflective on the decisions.

Compared to non-communal living, it thus seems that the life at Braziers is more complicated with many more things and people to consider, than when it only regards the individual. Yet, in spite of differences and difficulties, most informants show reluctance to miss meetings and not being part of everyday life as when involved in the processes, not many actively distances themselves from being part of the decision making process and come with ideas although some do, putting time into private work or family. The next quote exemplifies well what I have come to see and hear of, decisions allowed growing into a format all can agree upon, reducing the interpersonal conflicts of implementation.

"No I favour a sense of community and a need for community and I think Glaister was right in that we are social animals and we have a need to be in groups and not just groups we choose but groups that highlight the differences between us as well as the similarities, groups that don't always make us feel comfortable and groups where we don't always agree with the other people in them. I think that at the moment, in Western society, the individual thinks he would prefer to make

the decisions just for himself but there is only so much you can achieve by that and many of his decision would benefit from being decisions that he would share with others as opposed to just himself, because if you decide things for yourself then you always get what you want and you never consider fully all the decisions that you might not want or might not think you want but actually they are quite good for you or you might realize that what you would have preferred. To make a decision with other people about other people is more of a decision.” – [Will]

Group life and other Reasons (the integration and fulfilment of needs)

I ask my informants why they want to be part of a group and what they get back from it, Will holds that group of people has more potential power than a single individual, a group of people in agreement or appreciation of each other will always achieve more than a discontented group. And he agrees that group decisions are in many ways better than individuals' decision as they become more powerful and have a more set foundation. He says that it is a pleasant feeling to be part of a group, especially when there is no obvious reason to form a collective, like for example in a sports team. All have different reasons for being here, ranging from a quiet and peaceful place to live, distanced from the mainstream society, to people who want to make the community famous, attract people here and make it successful. Some people want to live here forever, some people just want to have a year's experience here and use the community as a tool of self-help for the future. “(T)here is no reason why we are here as this group other than the fact that we are just here as the group, we're here as people not as anything else” Will says, confounded why people outside these groups are repelled by that idea. The size of the community does however makes things more complicated, the history can be interpreted and assessed differently, and some suggest that the community does not share a goal or idea that otherwise could have simplified the attraction of likeminded members.

Most people, if they have to be in a group, prefer being with someone who they can to choose, who they want to be with, where there are commonalities and a reason to be with them “when really there is no reason because everybody is a person and you can gain probably even more from someone who you wouldn't have chosen to be with and someone that you would” Will states. Group life can be regarded as a limitation of freedom, and in the community if there are disagreements the involved people cannot just walk away; tensions have to be confronted and resolved.

Mark discusses how much faster social processes are in the community, compared to the city. He makes a comparison with a friendship, or a skill or learning a new instrument and how much time goes to finding times fitting your schedule, the trips there and back and the input time required. Whereas at the community you engage in a whole series of activities that will carry on during the day, ten minutes after you get out of bed, a solution to a problem you had in the morning can be presented by mealtime from a person you never thought of asking.

“So really by four weeks you are in a friendship or a relationship or you know somebody in a kind of way that it might take a many months to get to know a person in a job or work. The more people engage in something and strive and put effort into something, the more they connect, the more they have a common purpose, the more they sort of realise that they see themselves in other people and other people see them as themselves.” – [Mark]

That is also the general opinion of the ones I have talked with, even though people are always experiencing and going through change brought on by daily life, it may be that these processes are faster and more intense here at Braziers than elsewhere, but arguably this depends on the diversity of the community and could so be the complete opposite in other places. There is also generally held belief here that being in a group of people, dissipates social fear, the person becomes more confident in talking with people of different backgrounds and nationality and even rethink how they act and why they do so in the group.

“I think unless people want to live communal there is no way you can make them, and it is quite a big assumption to say that communal living is better than non-communal living. You are always going to be working with a biased sample but some things are just good ideas that never seem like good ideas until you do them. Of course those are the ideas that are the hardest ones to get people to try; people want to have a good reason for doing things and for that reason to be apparent.” – [Will]

Hugh has come to discover the value and need for trust, to have a world of less fear so that people would be more secure in themselves and with the people around them, opening up for conversations where parties fully listen and take in what the other is saying.

“Trust seems to be probably the most important thing and the most difficult thing to procure. It is a very funny thing trust, a very strange thing; it has to be earned, it is not a human right, but it is like a muscle, you either use it or you lose it! If you don’t trust other people, other people won’t trust you. If you have trust, you have a good chance of having love and love has this wonderful power the more you give away, the more you get. “

He tells me of when Braziers accepted wayfarers, people hitchhiking around the country on nothing, had a caravan available for any who came along and decided to trust them, he thinks the wayfarers gained from being trusted by the community which had them act in a reliable manner, like Braziers learned the power of trust, and how trust affects people by believing the wayfarers would not take advantage of their openness. Bruhn (2011) writes that trust holds

communities together; it is the anticipation that people interact in a cooperative manner that benefits each other, and trust helps community members agree on what is valuable for them. The social resources such as trust that are constructed within a group, the mutual benefits that emerge from the interaction and the realization of goals through shared resources are emphasised as social capital (Field, Schuller, & Baron, 2000, Bruhn, 2011), of social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trustworthiness (Putnam, 2001, Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). Trust is the bedrock of social cohesion (Bruhn, 2011) and a cohesive community is a supportive community aiming to do good for its members. However, social cohesion is not a static condition, rather the communities' norms and values must constantly be reaffirmed and strongly supported to overcome the internal challenges that could surface if values and motivations alters during generational changes, internal disputes or from external forces. Social cohesion is created and established when people share beliefs and values, creating bonds between the members if a purpose, vague or strong, is felt. The well-being of the others will then be felt as a sense of responsibility, as it will affect the whole community. What is essentially required for cohesiveness of the community is a mutual purpose, honest open communication internally, reciprocity, and trust. (Bruhn, 2011).

Another frequent subject is the possibility of solving things or getting help with expertise of someone in a community, coinciding with the level of helpfulness and cooperation over competition experienced here. People help out and extend their hands for doing favours or sharing something, but also help out with unattractive jobs that need doing. Life at the community seems to me to consist of a learning process, living together with all these people where you learn about people, yourself and constantly reevaluate your thoughts.

Remaining problems

In all social context problems occur, people don't understand others' views, neglect to pick up signals about how other people experience the events, or have become so used to speak their mind that it becomes hard to understand other people's opinions. This miscommunication and misconception is a common difficulty in all relations. In a community, in addition to obvious factors like lack of skills and resources, and a number of different problems occur as well. There is a need for mental and physical space for a functioning community. Communities tend to focus inwards, Woody tells me, which builds up social pressure, the closer people are jammed together the more tensions risk being created. Feelings and opinions needs to be communicated outwards rather than inwards so the people's energies are focused on aspects affecting the entire group, rather than on interpersonal grievances.

Most interviewees mention how the constant flow of people, the in and out transient life, makes it hard to have time and make time for getting to know all the new people, only deepening the relationships with the few who stays long. I wonder if this at times may be used as an excuse to not put in effort to get to know more than the core people. Undoubtedly it has also to do with time limitations and how much of it you want to or can afford to spend getting to know somebody. Not all people are talkative and get to know new people again and again require much effort. This transient life may have other down sides too, Bruhn (2011) states that continuous social change is the enemy of social cohesion, which rather requires stability; a continual change of residents is destabilising. High mobility works against engaging in the community and investing in its goals and become less well integrated. (Ibid). This means that the values and norms or purpose of the community may be lost in the transition, a bit hollowed out while there is less and less energy for restating them.

I picked up on elements of separation between the residents, the volunteers and the membership network that often come and attend meetings and events. At times it felt like three sub-communities within the community trying to fit the description of one. The residential community, living and sharing daily life, have the time to develop the closest bonds. The volunteer community share a cottage, work and day-to-day life together for a limited time, develop a perhaps less rooted community. The diasporic network community (of ideas says Woody) keep reading the news, partaking in events, meetings and reunions, maintain in some way connection with the place they have been more or less involved with.

The slight division between residents and volunteers was mostly visible at mealtime in the dining hall, where the two big wood tables often became a volunteers table and a resident one. I was told that much depends on the volunteers and how engaged they are, still an obstacle could be that many volunteer were younger non-native English speakers. I suspect knowing the transient life's in- and outflow puts limitations on the energy to engage in someone new. However, if wishing to expand the social experiment of Braziers and appreciating the value of the volunteers for them, perhaps more effort should be put into opening up the conversations earlier. Normally time does its work and talking begins, but if the conversation starts sooner it can get further and more things can evolve. Putnam and Feldstein (2003) state that connecting people by building personal relationships remains one of the most effective strategies to build social capital at the individual, community, and societal levels. Mark mention asking the

volunteers about skills when they arrive; yet other things than skills could be heard early on as common interests may lead to interesting discussions and projects.

Conclusion

At Brazier's Park you find many different personalities, with distinct interests and reasons for joining the community. There are for example persons who wish to care more for the earth and nature than is done in mainstream society, and who desire to live in a more sustainable way and to inform others of its importance. You also find people who feel left out, put down or just plainly dislike their social life outside the community, and long for stronger bonds and relationships. There are also people who find the capitalistic consumption society distasteful. These types of persons are also to be found in many other places in contemporary society, however. There is no way to categorize the people that belong to the community or the community itself with a single encompassing term, because it is as diverse as its members. There is a constant flux of people coming and leaving; thus new ideas and new issues and aspects are continuously introduced and discarded. What the members do share is a common social bond and security, and a constant social interaction with others, which they did not experience as intense in their lives outside the community, fuelled by the trust and care of its members.

Those that apply to the community share the longing for social belonging and trust described above, but when they live at the community they will also be part of a process of creation of common values and a shared identity. The community is thus constantly created and re-created by the social interaction and activities of its members. The creation of mutual social trust also seems to offer most members a place where they can find their particular roles. Personally, I am convinced community living enriches the life development of its members, even though living at the community might also be tough sometimes and the persons who choose it must be ready to sacrifice aspects which were part of their lives outside the community. For those who feel that lives in mainstream society is lacking of social interaction and mutual social bonds life within a community might definitely be worth trying.

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