

# Enriched Communities



A little **inspiration** for individuals who  
want to add: dancing ahead together

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## **How do you want to live?**

The past fifteen years have been, at least among my friends, a time of increasing isolation. In the '80s many of us lived in apartment shares and some formed more or less functional small nuclear families. Many experienced an uncomfortable sense of claustrophobia in those settings, a feeling that is often still present, now that they live alone.

## **Day-to-day life**

We live in cities in excessively expensive apartments or in a countryside that seems culturally empty. We can't get together with friends without an agenda and appointments. Spontaneity has become a rare experience.

Raising children in such an environment is quite complex. It requires an immense logistical effort for single parents and the adults in small nuclear families to coordinate their own needs and those of their children. So, more and more often, we decide against having children, and yet we aren't happy with this decision.

## **Personal development**

We have good experiences as members of groups in courses and workshops. These "communities" are short-lived, but they give us the opportunity to experiment with new ways of communicating. In addition, because we carry less ideological ballast than in the past and because it is now more important to us to have peace of mind than to be right, practical solutions to challenging problems are more accessible than they were in the past.

Thanks to our familiarity with various therapies, we can use conflicts and tension as a chance to grow. We love to celebrate and have opened up to the spiritual dimension of collective experiences. We don't simply interact in a "nice", distanced way anymore; we have become better at establishing real relationships.

## **Economic development**

Some of us are extremely privileged financially, and yet our money seems to vanish as quickly as it comes to us. At the same time, we feel more and more uncomfortable with being directly and helplessly exposed to an increasingly globalized economy, in which some have well-paid jobs in interesting areas but don't find meaning in their work, while others (especially in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa) have little or nothing at all. Although these are completely different fundamental situations, in neither can we manifest our gifts appropriately, and we often feel burned out and unhappy.

## **Appalling alternatives**

We still know some of our friends from the old days who continue to live on rural communes, often barely at the subsistence level, or even below it. We don't find that alternative appealing, and besides, we don't want to cut ourselves off from the developments of the world. We don't regard society and the economy as our enemies; we just don't want to be involved in some of their mechanisms. We want to widen our range of decision choices and contribute more actively to the shaping of our world.

## **Growing older**

As we grow older, it becomes unimaginable that we will spend the last decades of our lives alone or in a conventional retirement home.

## **Enriched communities**

That's why we have been dreaming more and more intensely of "enriched communities".

Enriched because:

- we live very autonomously in these communities and can actively co-create our environment

- we develop external and internal spaces possessing beauty and nourishing our senses
- we create a living culture and need less “second hand” culture [e.g. films, recordings etc.]
- we work less and have more leisure to enjoy life
- we thrive materially, by making intelligent use of the global economy/society while developing a high degree of subsistence in other areas and taking advantage of the cost-efficiency of community life
- our communities are large enough (50 – 200 people) to allow a diverse and exciting network of relationships in one’s immediate neighborhood.

Since life in enriched communities is also characterized by social solidarity and simplicity, it is fundamentally very different from life in the security-obsessed ghettos of the super-rich.

### **Where can enriched communities be formed?**

Thanks to the global economy there is no place on earth where enriched communities cannot be established. If these communities are close to metropolitan centers of international finance and industry, they will need more capital – which is usually easier to get there. On the other hand, if they develop in marginal regions, they can greatly contribute to economic development there.

### **How do enriched communities work?**

Enriched communities are based on two fundamental elements:

- a synthesis of freedom and commitment
- a synthesis of small businesses with a high degree of openness to the global market

### **The synthesis of freedom and commitment**

It probably takes a degree of spiritual awareness to overcome the polarity of these two terms. Looked at more closely, however, these poles are interdependent: without commitment,

freedom consists only of random action, and without freedom, commitment is a hollow performance of one's "duty". Through the synthesis of freedom and commitment a vital macro-organism comes into being.

An enriched community is a living organism. It defines itself first and foremost through its culture; therefore the development of a culture has high priority. Like all other organisms, a vital community must have a protective membrane between itself and the external world. This separating "skin" provides protection but not isolation. Every organism exists through constant exchange and communication with its environment. The task must therefore be to create an intelligent membrane.

This must be a membrane through which individual human beings can enter and leave the community. Rituals will be needed for that process.

It must also be a membrane that regulates the flow of goods, information, and money between inside and outside. The challenge in this will be to make intelligent use of the differences between conditions within the community and those of the outside world:

- certain services and products, usually related to the "information society", are highly valued in the global market: software, training programs, consultation, culture, etc., and to provide them will be profitable
- certain psychosocial services can be provided easily in a healthy community. (e.g. the integration of a few difficult adolescents into the community)
- other services and products that have a higher value for the community than for the global market are better produced within the community, for its own needs: arts and crafts, organically grown fruit and vegetables, etc.

In these ways the best possible balance of trade between the community and the outside world can be developed. The resulting financial surplus can be used to:

- pay off possible debts from initial loans
- establish a separation fund, so that individuals who leave the community can have enough money to start a new life outside the community
- support similar community projects as well as enterprises that share their profits fairly

- support research and cultural activity

### **And now what?**

Perhaps you like this inspiration. If so, I would like you to think about concrete steps for making this idea a reality. Probably only experience will show exactly how enriched communities will come into being. My first step is to share the thoughts expressed in this paper with a few friends and wait for feedback. Of course, I myself have some concrete ideas of how to make the enriched community concept a reality, and I look forward to sharing them with you. If you want to be kept posted about the further development of the project or if you want to participate in it, please contact me, and preferably mention your e-mail address.

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