

Definition of Community

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A **community** is a collection of living things that share an [environment](#). The individual living beings can be [plant](#) or [animal](#); any [species](#); any size. Communities are characterized by interaction in many ways.

This article focuses on [human](#) communities, in which intent, [belief](#), [resources](#), preferences, needs, [risks](#) and a multitude of other conditions may be present and common, affecting the degree of adhesion. The definitive aspect of community is that all individual subjects in the mix have something in common.



A [community of interest](#) gathers at [Stonehenge](#) for the summer solstice

Overview

The word *community* comes from the Latin *communis*, meaning "common, public, shared by all or many."^[1]

People have formed communities from the days of the earliest [hunter-gatherers](#). Communities are distinguished by having enough

participants in a group caring for the [common good](#) and developing a [sense of community](#), in which they give of themselves. A crucial factor is the balance between self-interest and shared interests.

Whatever drives people to cooperate in the first place is not as important in the context of community as what makes them *continue* to associate. Lasting ties between and among people are important in the formation of viable communities. Successful efforts by a mix of participants tend to attract the attention of other less-connected individuals, who may seek to join a group that is succeeding. This tendency, akin to [herd behavior](#) in animals, is called [self-organization](#) in humans.

Over time, some [cultures](#) have progressed steadily toward more complex forms of [organization](#) and control. Hunter-gatherer tribes settled around seasonal foodstocks to become [agrarian villages](#). Villages grew to become towns and cities. Cities turned into [city-states](#) and [nation-states](#). The fact that commerce, industry, government and human [institutions](#) become ever larger and more complex suggests that humans, particularly those who are conversant with the [rules](#) that drive these complexes are themselves driven toward aggregation and consolidation. When this increase in [social capital](#) reaches critical mass, innovations in [social networks](#) can begin to work toward a higher context through an inescapable cultural awareness of others. This is often referred to as the emergence of [collective consciousness](#).

The idea of community is important in many academic disciplines, especially within the [social sciences](#). These include [sociology](#), [psychology](#), [anthropology](#), and many overlapping areas of thought. Community theories are important also in subjects such as [economics](#), [urban planning](#), [social work](#) and [architecture](#). The body of knowledge about human [organization](#) within the context of community has grown to include [community psychology](#), [organizational studies](#), [organizational development](#) (sociology), [social geography](#) and even recently [computational sociology](#).

Individual and community



A [group](#) of youth interacting

During human growth and maturation, people encounter sets of other individuals and experiences. Infants encounter first, their immediate family, then extended family, and then local community (such as school and work). They thus develop individual and group [identity](#) through associations that connect them to life-long community experiences.

As people grow, they learn facts and perhaps insights to form perceptions of [social structures](#). During this progression, they form [personal and cultural values](#), a [world view](#) and [attitudes](#) toward the larger society.

Gaining an understanding of how [group dynamics](#) work and how to fit in is part of [socialization](#). Individuals develop [interpersonal relationships](#) and begin to make choices about with whom to [associate](#) and under what circumstances.

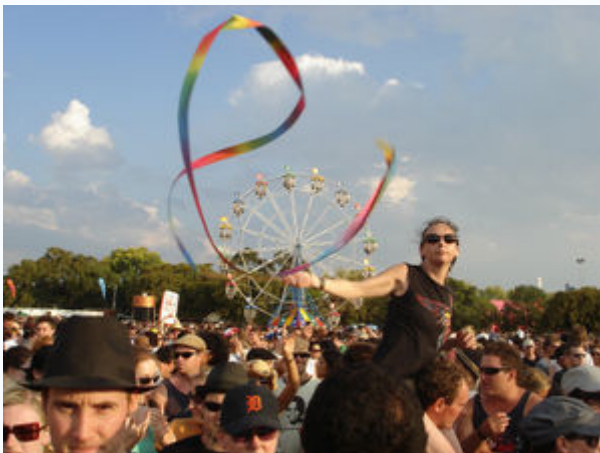
During [adolescence](#) and adulthood, people often develop a more sophisticated identity, often becoming capable of a [role](#) as a [leader](#) or follower. If associated individuals develop the intent to give of themselves to each other, and commit to the collective well-being of the group, they begin to acquire a sense of community.

Socialization

The process of learning to adopt the [behavior](#) patterns of the community is called [socialization](#). The most fertile time of socialization is usually the early stages of life, during which [individuals](#) develop the skills and knowledge necessary to function within their [culture](#) and [social environment](#). For some psychologists, especially those in the [psychodynamic](#) tradition, the most important period of socialization is between the ages of 1 and 10. But socialization also includes adults moving into a significantly different environment, where they must learn a new set of behaviors.

Socialization is influenced primarily by the family, through which children first learn community [norms](#). Factors also include school, [peer](#) groups, mass media, the workplace and government. The degree to which the norms of a particular society or community are adopted determines one's willingness to engage with others. The norms of [tolerance](#), [reciprocity](#) and [trust](#) are important "habits of the heart," as [de Tocqueville](#) put it, in an individual's involvement in community.^[2]

Sense of community



The [sense of community](#)

Main article: [Sense of community](#)

Continuity of the connections between leaders, between leaders and followers, and among followers is vital to the strength of a

community. Members individually hold the collective personality of the whole. With sustained [connections](#) and continued [conversations](#), participants in communities develop emotional bonds, intellectual pathways, enhanced linguistic abilities, and even a higher capacity for critical thinking and problem-solving. It could be argued that successive and sustained contact with other people might help to remove some of the tension of isolation, due to [alienation](#), thus opening creative avenues that would have otherwise remained impassable.

Conversely, sustained involvement in tight communities might tend to increase tension in some people. However, in many cases, it is easy enough to distance oneself from the "[hive](#)" temporarily to ease this stress. In fact, psychological maturity and effective communication skills may well be a function of this ability. In nearly every context, individual and collective behaviours are required to find a balance between inclusion and exclusion; for the individual — a matter of choice; for the group — a matter of charter. The sum of the creative energy and the strength of the mechanisms that maintain this balance is manifest as an observable and resilient [sense of community](#).

Community and Society

An important concept is defining what "community" actually is. German sociologist [Ferdinand Tönnies](#) presented a concise differentiation between the terms "community" (*gemeinschaft*) and "[society](#)" (*gesellschaft*). In his 1887 work, [Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft](#), Tönnies argued that "community" is perceived to be a "tighter" and more cohesive social structure within the context of the larger society, due to the presence of a "unity of will" (Tönnies, 22). He added that family and kinship were the most perfect expressions of community but that other shared characteristics, such as place or belief, could also result in *gemeinschaft*.

Communitarianism



[Lewes Bonfire Night](#) procession commemorating 17 protestant martyrs burnt at the stake from 1555-57

Main article: [Communitarianism](#)

Communitarianism as a group of related but distinct philosophies (or [ideologies](#)) began in the late [20th century](#), opposing [classical liberalism](#), [capitalism](#) and [socialism](#) while advocating phenomena such as [civil society](#). Not necessarily hostile to [social liberalism](#), communitarianism rather has a different emphasis, shifting the focus of interest toward communities and societies and away from the individual. The question of priority, whether on the individual or community often has the largest impact in the most pressing ethical questions, such as [health care](#), [abortion](#), [multiculturalism](#), and [hate speech](#).

Organizational communication

Main article: [Organizational communication](#)

Effective [communication](#) practices in group and organizational settings are important to the formation and maintenance of communities. How ideas and values are communicated within communities are important to the induction of new members, the formulation of agendas, the selection of leaders and many other aspects. Organizational communication is the study of how people communicate within an organizational context and the influences and interactions within [organizational structures](#). Interrelated members

depend on the flow of communication to establish their own identity within these structures and learn to function in the group setting. Although organizational communication, as a field of study, is usually geared toward companies and business groups, which are also communities, the principles can also be applied to other types of communities.

Social capital

If the sense of community exists, both freedom and security exist as well. The community then takes on a life of its own, as people become free enough to share and secure enough to get along. The sense of connectedness and social networks that form comprise what has become known as [social capital](#).^[3]



[Azadi Tower](#) is a [Town square](#) in [modern Iran](#)

[Western cultures](#) are losing this spirit of community that once were found in [institutions](#) such as [churches](#), [community centers](#) and rural/urban centres. [Sociologist Ray Oldenburg](#) states in [The Great Good Place](#) that we need three places: 1) The [home](#), 2) the [workplace](#), and, 3) the community hangout or [gathering place](#).^[4]

With this philosophy in mind, many [grassroots](#) initiatives such as The [Project for Public Spaces](#) and others are being started to create this "[Third Place](#)" in our communities. They are taking form in our

[independent bookstores](#), [Coffeehouses](#), local [pubs](#) and via many innovative means to create the social capital necessary to foster the sense and spirit of community.^[5]

[Social capital](#) is defined by [Robert D. Putnam](#) as "the collective value of all [social networks](#) (who people know) and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (norms of reciprocity)." Social capital in action can be seen in groups of varying formality, including neighbors keeping an eye on each others' homes. However, as Putnam notes in *[Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community](#)* (2000), social capital has been falling in the United States. Putnam found that over the past 25 years, attendance at club meetings has fallen 58 percent, family dinners are down 33 percent, and having friends visit has fallen 45 percent.^[6]

Community development and improvement

Main article: [Community development](#)

[Community development](#) is often formally conducted by universities or government agencies to improve the social well-being of local, regional and sometimes even national communities. Less formal efforts, called [community building](#) or [community organizing](#), seek to empower individuals and groups of people by providing these groups with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities. These skills are often concentrated around building political power through the formation of large social groups working for a common agenda. Community developers, sometimes called community development practitioners, must understand both how to work with individuals and how to affect communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions.

Formal studies conducted by universities are often used to build a knowledge base to drive curricula in sociology or community development practice. The [General Social Survey](#) from the [National Opinion Research Center](#) at the [University of Chicago](#) and the [Saguaro Seminar](#) at the [John F. Kennedy School of Government](#) at

[Harvard University](#) are examples of national community development in the [United States](#). In The [United Kingdom](#), [Oxford University](#) has taken a lead role as a provider of extensive research in the field through its *Community Development Journal*,^[7] used world wide as an academic resource for sociologists and community development practitioners.

At the intersection between community *development* and community *building*, there are a number of initiatives and organizations providing tools for communities to develop. One example of this is the program of the Asset Based Community Development Institute of [Northwestern University](#). The institute makes available downloadable tools^[8] to assess community assets and make connections between [non-profits](#) and other organizations that can assist in community building. The focus of the Institute is on helping communities to develop by "mobilizing neighborhood assets" — building from the inside-out rather than the outside-in.^[9]

Community building and organizing



The [Ithaca Hour](#) is an example of [community-based currency](#)

Community building, can use a wide variety of practices, ranging from simple events like [potlucks](#) and small [book clubs](#), to larger-scale efforts such as mass [festivals](#) and building [construction](#) projects that involve local participants rather than outside contractors. Some communities have developed their own [local currencies](#) to encourage economic growth and an enhanced sense of community.

Community building that is geared toward [activism](#) is usually termed "community organizing". In these cases, organized community

groups seek accountability from elected officials and increased direct representation within decision-making bodies. Where good-faith negotiations fail, these constituency-led organizations seek to pressure the decision-makers through a variety of means, including picketing, [boycotting](#), sit-ins, petitioning, and electoral politics. The [ARISE Detroit!](#) coalition and the [Toronto Public Space Committee](#) are examples of [activist networks](#) committed to shielding local communities from government and corporate domination and inordinate amounts of influence.

Community organizing is sometimes focused on more than just resolving specific issues. Organizing is the business of building a widely accessible power structure, often with the end goal of distributing power equally throughout the community. Community organizers generally seek to build groups that are democratic in governance and open. Such groups facilitate and encourage the use of [consensus decision-making](#) with an intentional focus on the general health of the community rather than a specific interest group.

There are three basic types of community organizing, [grassroots](#) organizing, [faith-based community organizing](#) (also called institution based community organizing, broad-based community organizing or congregation based community organizing), and [coalition](#) building.

Community service

[Community service](#) is usually performed in connection with a [nonprofit organization](#), but may also be undertaken under the auspices of government, one or more businesses, or alone.

It is typically unpaid and [voluntary](#). But it can include alternative [sentencing](#) technique in a [justice system](#) and it can be required by educational institutions.

Types of community

Location

The most common usage of the word "*community*" indicates a large group living in close proximity. Examples of [local community](#) include:

- A [municipality](#) is an administrative local area generally composed of a clearly defined territory and commonly referring to [town](#), or [village](#). While they are also municipalities, large [cities](#), due to their diversity, are often thought of as a collection of communities.
- A [neighborhood](#) is a geographically localized community, often within a larger [city](#) or [suburb](#).
- A [planned community](#) is one that was [designed](#) from scratch and grew up more or less following the plan. Several of the world's [capital cities](#) are planned cities, notably [Washington, D.C.](#), in the [United States](#), [Canberra](#) in [Australia](#), and [Brasília](#) in [Brazil](#). It was also common during the [European colonization of the Americas](#) to build according to a plan either on fresh ground or on the ruins of earlier [Amerindian](#) cities.

For more details on this topic, see [Community of place](#).

Identity

In some contexts, "*community*" indicates a group of people with a common identity other than location. Members often interact regularly. Common examples in everyday usage include:

- A "professional community" is a group of people with the same or related occupations. Some of those members

- may join a [professional society](#), making a more defined and formalized group.
- A [virtual community](#) is a [group](#) of people primarily or initially communicating or interacting with each other by means of information technologies, typically over the [Internet](#), rather than in person. These may be either communities of interest or communion. (See below.) Research interest is evolving in the [motivations for contributing to online communities](#).

For more details on this topic, see [Community of interest](#).

Overlaps

Some communities share both location and other attributes. Members choose to live near each other because of one or more common interests.

- A [retirement community](#) is designated and at least usually designed for retirees and seniors – often restricted to those over a certain age, such as 55. It differs from a [retirement home](#), which is a single building or small complex, by having a number of autonomous households.
- An "intentional community" is a deliberate residential community with a much higher degree of social interaction than other communities. The members of an intentional community typically hold a common social, political or spiritual vision and share responsibilities and resources. Intentional communities

include [Amish](#) villages, [ashrams](#), [cohousing](#), [communes](#), [ecovillages](#), [housing cooperatives](#), [kibbutzim](#), and [land trusts](#).

For more details on this topic, see [Intentional community](#).

Other classifications

Social scientists have classified communities in various ways. Another way to look at community is to categorize them as communities of *place*, *interest* or *communion*. It should be noted that with any classification schema for communities there is likely to be overlap between categories. ^[2]

- A [community of place](#) is one in which the shared element is geography.
- In [communities of interest](#) (or "elective" communities) members share attributes other than place:
 - A [community of practice](#) is a group of people who choose to [collaborate](#) over an extended period to share ideas, find solutions, and build innovations:
 - A [community of action](#) is a group of people organized to support a [cause](#) or bring about [social change](#).
- In its strongest sense, "communion" connotes a profound meeting or encounter:
 - A [faith community](#) is based on a spiritual union between members and their god or among practitioners of a particular faith. Examples include [monasteries](#), [convents](#), [Amish](#) and [Mennonite](#)

- [communities](#), [Ashrams](#) and others.
- In other instances, "communion" can mean a feeling of attachment to a group or idea (i.e., where there is a [spirit of community](#))

The challenge of community

Definitions of community as "organisms inhabiting a common environment and interacting with one another,"^[10] while scientifically accurate, do not convey the richness, diversity and complexity of communities, whether human, animal, or plant-based. Their classification, likewise is almost never precise. Untidy as it may be, community is vital for living organisms and especially for humans. [M. Scott Peck](#) expresses this in the following way: "There can be no vulnerability without risk; there can be no community without vulnerability; there can be no peace, and ultimately no life, without community."^[11] This is the challenge, and the potential, of community.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community>

Collaboration in Minnesota: Supporting Families & Youth in the Jordan Neighborhood

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