

Developmental Dilemmas

Intentional communities and the differing responses to change

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The biggest challenge facing intentional communities is not setting them up but keeping them going. In this sense the early days of an intentional community are perhaps the easiest although it might not always have appeared so to those early pioneers struggling to establish a new and utopian experiment on the margins of mainstream society.

Many of these pioneers were seeking to escape from religious persecution or economic and social dislocation. All of them had rejected the values of the dominant social, economic or religious systems and were trying to find a new way of living out their beliefs. In doing so they had to cope with all the innumerable challenges and problems of sharing their lives, establishing a collective economy, trying to work out how to turn an ideology into a social reality, building houses, setting up farms and business enterprises and of course arbitrating the inevitable grievances and disputes between the community members. In many ways they had to make it up as they went along since, for these early pioneers, there was no blueprint for setting up an alternative micro-society. Yet all the deprivation and hardships were more than compensated for by the extraordinarily high levels of energy and enthusiasm of those founding years. These communities had deliberately chosen a path that meant going against many of the conventional social orthodoxies. Inspired by a charismatic and visionary leader they re-invented and experimented with new forms of religious and spiritual belief, they tried out unconventional sexual relationships ranging from celibacy to polygamy, new family and marriage arrangements, new forms of childcare and education and new collective economic systems. The members of these communities felt as if they had been called to a new life in order to prepare for the impending millennium and summoned to the mighty task of building a better world. The levels of conviction and commitment would never be higher than in these pioneering years.

But the longer the community lasted the more things began to change. It became more difficult to keep alive the founding conviction and idealism. There was the struggle to deal with the daily disappointments as people failed to live up to their communal ideals and the gradual disappointment of realising that the vision might never be fully achieved. In addition as the community became larger it also became more diverse and more complex. The newcomers had not shared in the founding vision and came with their own ideas. Conflicting camps began to develop between the traditionalists who sought to hold on to the original ideals and practices and the reformers who wanted to change things. In general members became less willing to serve the community ideals unquestioningly and more outspoken in expressing their personal views, needs and wishes.

Most intentional communities failed early but those that survived had to grapple with the question of what to do about the increasing gap between their utopian aspirations and the reality of everyday life and to decide what compromises to make and what decisions to take in order to ensure a fair chance of continuation. Tough decisions had to be made and these invariably involved developing clearer and more rational organisational structures in the hope that they might bring about some sense of clarity, order, stability and sustainability. As part of this process an intentional community finds it necessary to re-define itself so that members, newcomers and 'outsiders' know what it is about and perhaps the community's aims and purpose are written down for the first time. There is the process of re-assessing the relationship of the individual to the community and of the community to the individual.

Another part of this process is that the expectations and obligations of the individual member to the whole are spelt out and issues to do with finances, work, and involvement are all made clear.

For the first time rules and guidelines are agreed upon and set down on paper. Membership criteria are drawn up and also elaborate diagrams of which individual and which groups are responsible for the various parts of community life and how they all relate to each other. A decision-making process is agreed upon. This might seem straightforward but in fact each aspect of this is often contested and gives rise to argument and division. More often than not those people who join intentional communities are nonconformists and they often have strong principles that they are not willing to compromise. They have rejected the values of mainstream society and have consciously elected to step out of a society based on authoritarian power and hierarchal control systems. One consequence of the introduction of organisational re-structuring is that some community members will resist the changes, some will withdraw from community processes in protest and others will simply leave their community in search of one that is more in keeping with their views. While the disillusioned and disheartened members leave those who stay must embrace the changes at work in their community. It is not all about loss as there are also gains. While something of the previous intensity and cohesion might have gone in its place are systems that are more open and inclusive and more responsive to individual needs. The autocratic control of the founder/leader is replaced by more democratic and consensual decision-making processes. There is a new acceptance of diversity and a tolerance of difference and deviance. The community becomes less inward-looking and more open to the wider world beyond its boundaries. Nonetheless the fall from idealism into reality and the concomitant compromises that have to be made are of enormous existential significance to the utopian aspirations of the members of intentional communities. From now on they will have to lower their expectations and come to terms with the step back from full communalism in the hope that this will ensure the viability of their community. Throughout their history intentional communities have had to make a choice between upholding their founding ideals and risking failure or compromising them in order to persevere.

The most obvious signs of these processes of change at work in intentional communities are the abandonment of collective economies in which all property, production and consumption are shared, the waning of communal practices in which all members participate and the drift away from radicalism and separatism back to something closer to the mainstream. Other signs are the rise in individualisation and private enterprise, a growth in diversity and an increase in organisational structures. It is as if social systems can only work so well for so long and after that something new is needed in order to move forward. At this point of transition from one phase to the next there is some uncertainty - a time in which the previous systems still operate and the new ones have not yet emerged. The introduction of these new systems can either be a gradual and unconscious process or something that is consciously worked out and implemented at a critical juncture in a community's development. Either way further progress is hardly possible unless major changes are made.

It seems that most intentional communities tend to move from a pioneering phase to a phase of organisation and individualisation. Organisation and individualisation go hand in hand – they are inseparable and complementary processes that inevitably arise from and lead to a major re-appraisal of how a community operates and how the individual relates to the community and the community relates to the individual. This change from a pioneering phase to a phase of organisation and individualisation is by no means a one-off process. The longer an intentional community lasts the more often will it have to go through similar processes of re-evaluation and re-organisation as it attempts to respond to changes both amongst its members and in the wider society.

All of this is very general and does not do justice to the variety of strategic decisions adopted by different intentional communities, some of which recognised the need to change and others that denied it. Nor does it differentiate between the developmental processes at work in religious and secular communities or historical and contemporary communities. In order to try and see these processes at work and in order to compare the different decisions that have led to different outcomes we need to turn to some examples.

The experience of some Scottish communities

Even a very cursory glance at some of the better-known intentional communities in Scotland serves to show how this process of organisational re-structuring was played out at critical moments in the development of each community.

Iona

The Iona Community was founded in Glasgow and Iona in 1938 by George McLeod as the result of his efforts to make the message of the church relevant in the context of the poverty and despair of the Depression in Glasgow. He found a common task for young men training for the priesthood in the Church of Scotland and for skilled craftsmen and builders from Glasgow who lived and worked alongside each other while re-building the monastic ruins of Iona Abbey. Over the years the Iona Community has developed into a dispersed ecumenical community. In her presentation to the inclusive New Lanark Conference of 2004 Kathy Galloway, then the Leader of Iona Community, described the moment when the community realised that what had started off as a small religious community had become an organisation with a turnover of nearly £2 million a year, fifty staff and hundreds of volunteers. She said that at that moment they had to sit down and take stock and then formulate numerous risk assessments and policies and procedures to cover just about everything. She pointed out the positive side of this process when she said *'But it is absolutely a fundamental of good practice because it's about creating conditions of safety, justice and opportunity in which everyone can be nurtured and flourish..... Nice people don't guarantee good practice, only appropriate structures do that'*. Her view was that good organisation and administration is about service to the community in that they allow an expanding community to be clear about what it is doing. As part of the same process of making clear its identity, aims and purpose, both to its members and to the world, the Iona Community set out its 'Working Principles' and 'The Rule'.

Findhorn

In 2012 the Findhorn community celebrated its 50th birthday. It had all began with Peter and Eileen Caddy, their three young sons and Dorothy Maclean living in a caravan at the Findhorn Bay Caravan Park. At that time their main focus was to prepare for the landing of UFOs and building up a telepathic 'Centre of Light' to counter the negative forces of the Cold War and to prepare for the impending nuclear destruction of the world. The women were channelling guidance from God and Dorothy was able to communicate with the plant angels/devas to help Peter to grow the now-legendary vegetables in the sandy soil of the Moray coast. In 1970 they were joined by Peter Spangle and Myrtle Glines who set up the 'University of Light' programmes which then developed into the workshops, conferences and worldwide Outreach programme that have become the mainstay of Findhorn's development and expansion ever since. As the community grew and expanded over the years, it has had to re-define and re-organise itself numerous times in order to hold everything together. 1972 the Findhorn Foundation was registered as a Scottish charity. In 1979 the New Findhorn Directions was set up to coordinate and encourage the various business activities and initiatives. In the 1980s the previously collective enterprises were privatised. In 1983 New Findhorn Directions was set up as the trading subsidiary of the Foundation that also runs the businesses and services such as the Wind Park, the Living Machine sewage system and Park Energy and Water. By the end of the 1980s the eco-village project - that now includes 40 eco buildings - had started and in 1995 Findhorn became a founder member of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) that had been launched at a Findhorn Foundation conference. In 1997 the Findhorn Foundation became a NGO associated with the UN Department of Public Information and is active on global issues such as sustainability, environment, peace and shelter. In 1999 there was a major re-structuring of management and governance and the New Findhorn Association was set up as an umbrella council to bring together the 33 diverse businesses, charities and individuals all involved in Findhorn's expanding activities.

More recently the Foundation has built several co-housing developments and is reaching out to a yet wider audience, which includes schools, the socially excluded and people with learning disabilities.

Laurieston Hall

Laurieston Hall in Dumfries and Galloway started out in 1972 as a commune and a centre for alternative conferences and courses. In an interview in 2012 Patrick Upton, a long-standing member, described how after the first decade when people left and new people joined they recognised the need to develop new structures that would help them to live with each other and define their principles. They moved from a system of income sharing and all living together to a system by which each person had to find their own way of making a living and living in separate 'living groups'. Under the new system each person pays rent and does two and half days of unpaid work share for the community.

He says that in the process the commune became less radical and more formal. It also changed from being a commune to becoming a co-operative and adopted the legal forms of the Industrial Common Ownership Movement. In the late 1980s Laurieston changed to a housing co-operative – in which the members live individually, or in couples, families or in groups. As a result of this re-structuring, Patrick said that the community became more stable and more sustainable. The downside to this is that in the case of Laurieston Hall stability without expansion has created its own problem – an ageing community that is wondering how to attract younger members. He also pointed out that over the years Laurieston Hall has drifted to the mainstream; to the point that some observers have said it is very little different from the nearby village.

Camphill – some thoughts

Anybody at all familiar with the recent development of the Camphill communities will be only too aware of how much change they have had to come to terms with over the last 20 years or so. Not only have they had to adjust to the internal changes that affect all intentional communities - the archetypal changes on hand of the processes of individualisation and organisation - but in addition they have had to come to terms with the pressure to change from external sources that are particular to their own situation. There are two main aspects to this. Due to the nature of the core task and the state funding that comes with it there has increasingly been the need to be accountable to and to comply with a variety of regulatory authorities. In addition because of the shortage of new 'vocational co-workers' coming to join the communities there has been an increase in the number of employed workers and this brings with it the need to incorporate employment regulations into the management of the communities. As a result there are now new organisational and governance structures in place. The sheer scale and pace of the demands placed upon them and the implications of these demands to their unique culture have placed the communities under an enormous amount of pressure and have raised existential questions about the compatibility of providing a professional care service with maintaining the spiritual and social basis of the communities. This process has had a certain inevitability of its own since, despite the reservations and misgivings of the co-worker workforce, there has never been a realistic prospect of non-compliance if the communities are to continue to provide state-funded education and social care.

In all of these Scottish communities it is clear that the longer they continue the more they are challenged and that these challenges appear to be both archetypal and inescapable. The longer communities survive the more diverse and complex they become. The consequence of this is that they have no choice but to introduce systems that are both more formal and more structured and also that are more responsive to individual differences if they are to continue.

The Developmental Dilemma – the wider experience

In order to explore the implications of decisions that communities make in regard to the changes they are faced with we can look at some examples of communities that adapted and those that refused to compromise. We will be considering in brief the developmental story of six intentional communities – three of which went along with change and three that resisted change.

The three that saw adaptation as a necessary means of survival are Oneida, the kibbutzim and The Farm. The three that saw resistance as the necessary means of survival are the Old Order Anabaptists communities, the Shakers and George Rapp's Harmony.

Of these six communities four are religious – Oneida, The Anabaptists, the Shakers and Harmony - and one, the Farm, set out as a spiritual community but has not remained so. Three of them – Oneida, The Shakers and Harmony - no longer exist. Of the three that are still here the Anabaptist communities have not been unduly disturbed by change whereas the other two have been radically altered by the process of compromise and adaptation, as we shall see.

We will first be looking at those communities that compromised their founding principles in order to survive.

Responding to change - communities that adapted

Oneida

John Humphrey Noyes experienced a religious conversion in 1831 as part as what has become known in American history as 'The Great Awakening' - a populist movement of religious fervour that swept across parts of the country at that time. At his home in Vermont he set up the Putney Community to try out his radical religious ideas and in time other millennial communities were established that were inspired by Noyes' ideas. Noyes saw himself as a vessel that the Holy Spirit was going to inspire and he demanded that his followers completely accept his spiritual leadership. He abolished marriage in his communities as he held that it was an institution in which the man 'owned' the woman. Instead he introduced into his communities the practice of 'complex marriage' or 'group marriage' in which everybody was 'married' to everybody else. This was to be a preparation for the Second Coming at which time the spiritual union between the sexes that had been broken by Adam and Eve at The Fall would be restored. However, the sexual practices advocated by Noyes led to accusations of adultery and fornication. As a result the community had to leave their original settlement at Putney and Noyes and his followers amalgamated with the Perfectionist community of Oneida in New York. The Perfectionists believed that Christ had already returned to earth in 70 CE and that their task was to bring about the millennium kingdom of Jesus on earth. The Perfectionists asserted that they had attained a state of Perfection - of being without sin - and thus were assured of salvation.

Under Noyes' leadership communal life at Oneida was based on a shared religious life, Bible Communism, mutual criticism, male continence and complex marriage. Mutual criticism was the public occasion for the members to acknowledge their faults and to point out the faults of others. This ensured that no behaviour or thoughts were to be private or personal – every concern of the individual was a concern for the whole community. Through male continence – the practice in which the man was not to ejaculate during sexual intercourse – the women were to be freed from continual child-bearing.

Noyes went further in exerting complete control over his followers in introducing the practice of stirpiculture and 'Ascending Fellowship'. Stirpiculture was a form of eugenics or controlled breeding.

In the quest to breed perfect children only those parents who had been selected for their spiritual and moral qualities were allowed to have consummated sexual intercourse as these offspring, who were reared communally, were destined to regenerate the world. 'Ascending Fellowship' was the practice whereby young community members, who had no choice as to their partners, were sexually initiated by older members.

Despite, or because of these radical ideas, Oneida was a flourishing community for thirty years with so many people wanting to be part of the religious and social experiment that several offshoot communities were started up. The members were extraordinarily loyal to their leader; they enjoyed a wide range of social and cultural activities and worked productively in the many successful business enterprises. However, tensions had begun to appear. The fact that Noyes had fathered nine of the fifty eight children born through stirpiculture undermined his leadership. The sexual practices at Oneida came to the attention of the authorities and led to accusations yet again of fornication and adultery, as a result of which the community faced prosecution. As before, Noyes had to flee in order to escape this danger and in 1879 he left Oneida and crossed the border into Canada. Perhaps finally realising that his ideas were too controversial for society to accept and therefore jeopardised the continuation of his communities, Noyes wrote to his followers to suggest that they abandon complex marriage. In 1870 70 members entered into traditional marriage. Things began to change after Noyes' departure. As in so many other intentional communities, the younger members showed less commitment to the founding principles and practices. They were increasingly drawn to conventional marriage, private property and the world outside the community. Oneida then went through a major re-organisation. In 1881 the move away from a collective economy to a joint stock organisation – Oneida Community Ltd - was formally set out in 'The Agreement to Divide and Reorganize'. In 1893, after a good deal of factionalism and internal divisions, Pierrepont Burt Noyes, a son of John Humphrey Noyes through stirpiculture and a group of the younger generation took over control. They re-instated some of the previous community atmosphere and combined this with the running of a modern well-run and profitable business. As Oneida retreated from full community it came to resemble a pleasant company town, many others of which were being set up at that time by enlightened business leaders. In 1935 Oneida Community Ltd broke completely from its communal past and became simply Oneida Ltd, indistinguishable from any other small and successful businesses. Today Oneida Ltd continues to design and market its own-brand cutlery but the cutlery itself is manufactured in other countries.

Looking back it could be said that the new group of leaders in Oneida who took over from Noyes had made a conscious decision both to re-organise the community and to put it a new footing in which manufacturing took precedence over community. From one point of view this could be seen as a failure of the communal life in its purest expression at Oneida. Yet from another point of view it could be said to have successfully ensured the survival of the community - albeit in a reduced form – for a further 50 years.

The Kibbutz

The Israeli kibbutzim are perhaps the most well-known, longest-lasting and most numerous of the contemporary intentional communities. The first kibbutzim were set up in the 1900s by young Zionist Jews in Palestine on land occupied by the Arabs; Jews whose aspiration was to create their own Biblical homeland in the Holy Land of their origin. Living together and sharing resources was both a pragmatic response to the harsh and unproductive environment and the hostility of their Arab neighbours and also an expression of their socialist ideals. The pioneer settlers worked hard in their endeavour to reclaim the desert while protecting their settlements through force of arms.

They renounced everything personal and raised their children communally. Not only did this free up the mothers for the common work but was also a tangible symbol that their children belonged to the community and the higher cause – that of forging the new Jewish nation.

They were subsequently joined by waves of Jewish refugees escaping wars and persecution who were drawn to take part in the expanding Zionist movement whose aim was to renew secular Jewish culture and establish a state of Israel. Following the Holocaust of the Second World War Jews were allowed to return to their historical but disputed homeland and these new arrivals led to the rapid expansion of the kibbutz movement. When the state of Israel was formed in 1948 it owed a great deal to the kibbutzim and kibbutz values were central to the society and culture of the new state. This was a unique phenomenon.

The kibbutz movement, far from attempting to create an alternative social reality to the mainstream as did all other communal movements, became the embodiment of the Zionist aspirations of the Israeli people. The kibbutzim were supported by the state in a way that no other movement of intentional communities ever experienced or indeed ever sought to experience. Yet ironically, despite their crucial role in the creation of the state of Israel, the kibbutz movement did not continue to expand as much as previously. It seems that the new immigrants were less interested in the collective lifestyle than their predecessors had been and it was the moshavim – the collective farm settlements – and the private farm settlements that attracted most new members. In addition those who did choose to join the kibbutzim had less experience of and commitment to the Zionist Youth Movement that had been central in the creation of the first kibbutzim. Over the following years, as the Israeli state and society began to move away from the socialist ideals embodied in the kibbutz movement and instead embraced western capitalist economic and social models, the kibbutzim became increasingly marginalised. Nonetheless, the kibbutzim attracted a great deal of attention from around the world. Visitors came who were interested in the kibbutz as a new social model and were especially interested in the collective agriculture enterprises and communal child-raising. Over the years many young people from Europe came as volunteers to work on the kibbutzim, keen to take part in this new social experiment.

Despite the great success of the kibbutz movement things began to change over the years. The kibbutzim began to turn away from agriculture and horticulture as their mainstay and focused instead on more profitable enterprises. The prosperity and higher standard of living that came with this turned out to be a mixed blessing since financial success has a way of undermining communal principles. The kibbutz members began to drift away from communal living, communal dining, communal child-raising and communal social and cultural activities. Because of the move away from shared living, the kibbutzim had to build new houses for families and individuals to live separately. In addition car ownership increased and therefore more roads were built and in general there was an investment in new infrastructure. Kibbutz members began to work outside the kibbutz and contributed their salaries to the kibbutz rather than their labour. At the same time more workers were hired from outside the kibbutz – to the point in the 1970s when half of the workforce was employed. There was a rise in consumerism and, as living standards rose, members tended to go out of the kibbutz for their leisure and entertainment. The defining identity and the boundaries that had traditionally separated the kibbutzim from mainstream Israeli society became less clear. The disenchantment felt by the younger generation with the kibbutz way of life and the loss of the personal conviction of their parents meant that as many of half of those born in the kibbutzim left to live a more conventional lifestyle in mainstream Israeli society. This in turn led to a demographic crisis of an ageing population. This has brought with it both the challenge of caring for the elderly members and also recruiting more employed workers to provide the workforce for the commercial enterprises.

In addition to all of this the kibbutz movement was hit by a financial crisis in the 1980s. The kibbutzim had incurred substantial debts in order to finance their development. They then had to negotiate for financial bailouts from a government that had become increasingly indifferent to their cause. Previously the state had identified with Zionism, with nation-building, settlement, defence and the culture that had played such a major role in bringing about the creation of the new state of Israel. The state had supported the growth of the kibbutzim through the allocation of land and the cancellation of debts which helped them to survive critical periods - but this has now changed.

As a result of these financial difficulties and the need to cope with the hard reality of a free market capitalist society, some kibbutzim have collapsed, some pay wages, some have become co-operatives, some have become capitalist enterprises and some have remained traditional. Some are now less of a village settlement and more of a dormitory suburb with new neighbourhoods built to rent out to non-kibbutz members. Only sixty of the two hundred and seventy five kibbutzim still operate on collective principles. But there are signs that the kibbutzim movement is going through a renewal. There is a new generation of urban intentional communities which have adapted the kibbutz model to the new social, political and economic environment. There are now one hundred urban kibbutzim – individually known as a kvutzot - with an active commitment to peace, justice and equality – especially between Jews and Arabs and Israelis and Palestinians. Further there is now also a new group that call themselves the Green Kibbutz Movement who are focusing on developing ecologically sustainable kibbutzim and are affiliated to the Global Ecovillage Network. In addition, following on from the economic and social re-organisation that entailed a move away from collective principles and towards more individualisation and liberalisation, there has been significant influx of new members to the point that membership is now at the highest in the history of the kibbutz movement as people are attracted by the environment, the security, the excellent education and facilities and a sense of community. But now the selection criteria have become more stringent and prospective members must be able to buy their own home. In a report in the Guardian in July 2012 the leader of kibbutz Afikim, Amikam Osem, describes his kibbutz as being like an excellent country club, but with a safety net.

The Farm

Before he and his followers set up The Farm community, Stephen Gaskin had taken on the role of spiritual teacher to young hippies – teaching on all manner of subjects with a focus on increased self-awareness, self-responsibility and personal growth. He had begun with the Monday Night Class at the Experimental College in San Francisco but as the classes grew they moved off campus where over a thousand young people came to hear him every week. Stephens's ability to communicate with the young students attracted the interest of some liberal churches and he was invited to go on a teaching tour across the USA. Stephen had a school bus and invited his students to buy and convert their own buses and join him on the journey. In the end 300 people in 100 converted buses and other vehicles joined what became known as the Caravan, which travelled 7,000 miles in 4 months. When they got home again Stephen and his followers wanted to re-create the sense of community that they had found on the road and in 1971 they bought some poor and rocky land in the Tennessee Bible Belt. Here, at The Farm Stephen, known as the 'acid guru' gave up LSD but stayed with marijuana as a source of spiritual insight and ceremonial ritual. His Sunday morning outdoor sermons were the focal point of the Farm's spiritual life. The city-bred west coast students learnt survival skills as they set up tents, built shelters and put in water, sewage and electricity – all very basic and rudimentary. The Farm set up numerous innovative projects both within and outside their community that included, construction, farming, book publishing, a soy dairy, a mechanic workshop, their own radio station and a health care clinic. Stephen's wife, Ina Mae Gaskin, became the community midwife and the Farm Midwives offered free homebirths and adoptions for young women and provided medical assistance and other support in deprived inner city areas. The Farm Midwives eventually gained international respect for their success with natural home births. In 1974 The Farm formed Plenty, a charity to provide relief and developmental organisation for people in need. Plenty volunteers went to build cheap houses for homeless victims of the 1976 Guatemala earthquake. The Farm also set up a free ambulance service in the South Bronx. In recognition of the many enterprises that the Farm had brought about, in 1980 Stephen received the 'Right Livelihood Award' – known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize' and Ina Mae and the Farm Midwives received the same award in 2011.

With 1,700 members at its peak the Farm had become one of the biggest and most complex of America's intentional communities. In the 1970s and on into the 1980s each person who joined the community signed a Vow of Poverty and members lived a voluntary subsistence lifestyle as a precondition of life in a spiritual monastery that was out to save the world. But there were signs of problems. Alfred Bates, who had been there almost from the beginning, tells the story. Living conditions remained primitive. There were streams of people wanting to visit and to join; there had been mistakes in their organisation, resource management and finances and the founding agreements had become diluted and contested through attempting to be open, diverse and heavily involved in social projects outside of the community. Bates said that things began to unravel in the early 1980s.

Members had become disillusioned with the communal system and it had become increasingly difficult to integrate spirituality and morality into business and family life. It was becoming difficult to cope with the scale of its national and international operations. There was a lack of agreement as to overall purpose of the community, the ownership of property, drug use, working and earning money, voting, residency, and a host of other questions – all of which served to undermine social cohesion. In addition there were problems with The Farm's agriculture, construction and other enterprises. There had been a crash in agriculture nationally and an economic recession and as a result The Farm found itself with a debt of half a million dollars, interest rates of over twenty per cent and facing bankruptcy. In addition, the focus had shifted from young, single hippies to families trying to raise children while feeling ground down by continual poverty. They wanted more family space and more resources. Stephen, who was often away on speaking tours, seemed unaware of the difficulties and people were losing confidence in his leadership. Eventually he was asked to step down. In 1983 the Farm Board organised what became known as 'The Great Changeover' which was effectively a vote to de-collectivise. The Farm moved from a communal society to a co-operative land trust – from income sharing to an independent income economy in which each business had to be self-financing and to pay wages to its employees. Each family had to find their own source of income and pay their own housing, food and monthly expenses and also make monthly payments to help pay off the debt. Hundreds of people left, disillusioned and demoralised.

There were other changes. Decision making was now done by small, elected councils instead of through group processes. The Farm experimented with several economic systems and now there are different systems that people can choose from according to their principles and their needs. Bates says that by the 1990s nuclear families came to replace the large group households. Virtually everybody had a car, a telephone, a flush toilet, electricity and a television. Many had a computer and/or a satellite dish. The main road had been paved, buildings were clad, insulated, remodelled and landscaped and business revenues settled. People no longer talked of a spiritual journey of discovery; there were no more utopian fantasies and life had become more pragmatic. Bates' conclusion was that The Farm is now increasingly difficult to distinguish physically from a planned community enclave for fixed-income retirees. Today the Farm has reinvented itself as an eco-village training centre with 150 residents running courses on midwifery, permaculture, carbon farming and ecovillage design. Stephen Gaskin died on July 1st 2014.

Reflections and comparisons

Each of these communities has had a different developmental story. This has depended on a variety of factors including the historical and social context, the internal leadership dynamics, the nature and commitment of its members and especially on for how many years that each community's story has played itself out.

In terms of leadership, for example, Oneida and The Farm had more in common with each other than each had with the kibbutzim. In Oneida the leadership was vested in one individual, Noyes, who sought to uphold his religious and social ideas and practices. These practices, however, had deviated too radically from the moral standards of the wider society at that time and had thus jeopardised the community.

The changes that had to be made in order to ensure the future stability of Oneida could only be made when Noyes was no longer on the scene. In a similar way the inspired and charismatic spiritual leader of The Farm, Stephen Gaskin, had to step down from leadership before the fundamental changes of the Great Changeover could be implemented and the community saved from financial ruin.

It was different in the kibbutzim. There was no one leader. Each kibbutz has appointed managers who oversee the work of the different departments and who together co-ordinate activities. This meant that the response to the need for change on hand of the members' wish for a better standard of living and on hand of the major economic crisis faced by the movement as a whole differed from one kibbutz to another. In addition each kibbutz, unlike Oneida and The Farm, is part of a much wider movement of similar communities.

In a different context the development of the kibbutzim and The Farm had more in common with each other than with Oneida. As we have seen, the imperative for change in the case of Oneida was the persecution from the church and other authorities on hand of their extreme religious and sexual practices and the wish of their children for a more conventional lifestyle. The members of Oneida enjoyed a standard of living that was much higher than the surrounding areas and a richer social and cultural life. In the kibbutzim and The Farm, on the other hand, the members had become dissatisfied with the poor standard of living and wanted better for themselves and especially for their children. Both the kibbutzim and The Farm were forced to abandon their collective economies in order to come through severe financial crises.

Yet there are as many similarities as there are differences and it is these similarities that can tell us a great deal about the archetypal developmental trajectories of intentional communities.

To begin with there are striking similarities in the way in which community members describe how their communities have ended up. Patrick Upton concurred with the suggestion that his community, Laurieston Hall, has become little different from the nearby village and Amikam Osem, and Alfred Bates both expressed the view that their respective communities have ended up resembling retirement enclaves for the financially privileged.

It seems that there are common processes at work in these communities and perhaps also within many other intentional communities, namely that over time the original inspiration that brought the community into existence becomes dissipated and something else takes its place – something more pragmatic, more rational and more organised that is better able to deal with the everyday concerns of the long haul. It seems that communitarians can only put up with the poverty and sacrifices of the pioneering phase for so long. After so many years of this they expect a better standard of living and more space and time for themselves and their families. They begin to seek a more 'normal' lifestyle; a lifestyle that is less radical and less demanding. They seek for more control over their lives and more distance from their fellow community members. This move from the collective to the individual plays itself out on all levels of the community - economic and financial, social and cultural and also manifests itself in new communal living and working arrangements.

The community's children, seen as the hope of the future, often turn out to be less inspired and less committed than their parents and less prepared to make the sacrifices that their parents made. Instead they seek for a closer connection to the world beyond their community. Thus as community members become older more people have to be employed to keep the community going; people who often have less interest in and commitment to the values of the community.

In all of this it also seems that in most communities there is a shift away from the predominance of work in the farms and garden and instead the emphasis goes on commercial enterprises and educational courses as the main source of income.

To some people this seemingly inevitable trend from the intensity of the pioneering years to the next phase which is more stable and organised might appear to be a loss, or even a sign of failure. Yet it is also a gain of sorts in that it allows the community to evolve social forms and organisational structures that members feel more comfortable with. It allows the community to become more sustainable through being more 'liveable' – through being better suited to the needs and wishes of its members. It also allows the community to renew itself and thus avoid the fate of so many intentional communities that imploded on the death of their founder.

Oneida found new life as a model company town. Some kibbutzim have found a new sense of purpose in an urban context, in working for peace and equality and in ecological sustainability. The Farm re-invented itself as an eco-village training centre. The three Scottish communities that we looked at earlier - Iona, Findhorn and Laurieston Hall – have each found a new identity in a contemporary context through a process of both re-organisation and renewal.

Responding to change - communities that held fast

We will now consider three very different communities that have chosen a different path. Rather than adapting, compromising and re-inventing themselves these three have steadfastly turned their back on change and have chosen instead to uphold tradition and conformity. In two of the three cases this led to their eventual demise but in the third case the communities continue to flourish and expand. The three communities are the Old Order Anabaptists, the Shakers and George Rapp's Harmony.

The Old Order Anabaptists

The Radical Reformers emerged during the religious and civil wars between Catholics and Protestants that followed the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. They went further than the mainstream Reformers in that they rebelled against the entire order of European society and attempted to establish communities of Christian communism in which they could preserve the original and pure apostolic faith that had become corrupted by the established Church. Their struggles to set up a new religious dispensation in the face of fierce resistance from the church authorities took place at the same time as the European peasantry were rising up against the feudal system that was sponsored by both the church and the state.

The Radical Reformers rejected worldly power, especially as represented in the Pope and the Emperor. They rejected the Reformation belief that only a chosen elect would be saved at the Day of Judgement. They believed that the individual should turn away from worldly concerns and begin a spiritual pilgrimage as they await the Second Coming of Christ to earth at the millennium. They held that only an adult is able to make their own confession of faith and hence be baptised and that therefore child baptism was null and void. They re-baptised adults who had previously been baptised into the Catholic Church and hence they were called Anabaptists – the 're-baptisers'.

The Anabaptists hold that the Bible is the only basis of faith and practice and that central to this is the Sermon on the Mount. The tenets of Anabaptist doctrine are the separation of Church and state – of spiritual and worldly power - and separation from the world. Members are not to participate in the worldly instruments of the state, not to hold civil office, not to swear oaths, not to bear arms or to resist against force and not to use the courts. Sinners are to be excluded from the sacraments and to be excommunicated from the congregation of believers.

The Anabaptists were tortured and killed throughout Europe by both Catholics and Protestants. In the face of persecution and, like so many other non-conformist groups, they left Europe and set up new homes in America in the 1880s. For all such groups America represented a second opportunity to create the perfect society in a New World free from the prejudices and divisions of the Old World.

Even before they left Europe the Anabaptists had been breaking up into numerous groups over doctrinal differences and this process continued in their new homeland. There are now Old Order, conservative groups and New Order groups that are more liberal and progressive. There are five main Old Order Anabaptist groups, the Hutterites, the Mennonites, the Amish, the German Baptist Brethren and the Bruderhof, all of whom have their distinct identity and all of whom have adopted different practices in relation to the sharing of property, the use of technology and to mainstream society. In general the Old Order groups are conservative, patriarchal, hierarchical and authoritarian, fundamentalist, dogmatic and insular. These might appear to be negative traits but it is just these qualities that have ensured the cohesion and stability of the Old Order communities over many generations. In each case, as the leader of a new sect passed away, the leadership passed to a group of elders whose moral example have upheld community tradition and values. The Old Order communities exert a high degree of control over their members and community practices are in place that promote conformity and cohesion and discourage and punish deviancy. The communities have a strong internal identity, which is reinforced by a uniform appearance and the wearing of uniform clothes.

The children born into the communities are raised and educated in the community and there have been very few new members from outside. Their large families and the fact that most children choose to stay in their communities mean that there are no concerns over succession and ensures that their numbers only increase. There is a strong work ethic with the emphasis on farming and small manufacturing. They do not allow higher education and the teaching of science. Different Old Order communities have taken different stances in relation to modern technology and the various groupings are defined by the varying stance that they have taken. These communities have high boundaries in order to exclude as far as possible any influences that might disturb their stability or challenge their orthodoxy. There is a shared historical and ethnic background; the Amish, for example, continue to speak their own dialect - Pennsylvania Dutch - and refer to outsiders either as 'English' or 'worldlings'. Finally, many of these communities have had a defining story of persecution and resilience in the face of adversity and this continues to define their relationship to the world, which is seen as a hostile and decadent.

There is a shadow side to this model of community life, which becomes apparent from reading the stories and the websites of people who have left them. These mostly revolve around questions of community control, resistance to change, the misuse of power and the tendency to stifle individuality, self-expression and choice. The communities demand complete submission to the authority of the elders and church teachings and deviancy is punished by public shaming and exclusion from community activities. In the past, expulsion from the communities caused a great deal of anguish as it destroyed lives and broke up families.

The Old Order Anabaptists have turned their back on the world and on modernity. They view the possibility of change as a threat to their long-established traditions, to their religious convictions and to church unity and therefore strive to limit the influence of anything from the world that might disrupt their ordered way of life. Because of their large families they do not need to employ extra labour or seek new recruits. They keep the world at bay by refusing to use telephones, radios, TVs or the internet. Historically they have managed to negotiate important compromises with the state over things of critical importance to them such as military service, taxes and higher education.

Yet it is not so clear cut as it may have been in the past. Some changes have been made and some degree of deviance has been tolerated. The Hutterites, for example, have introduced computers and other technological innovations. Some Hutterite men work outside of their communities in order to earn money for 'forbidden' goods. The Bruderhof have adopted the name 'Church Communities International' as they seek closer connection to the wider society of Christians and some of their younger members are now working in deprived inner city areas.

Over recent years the Amish have recently featured in two series of reality TV programmes that allowed a look inside their communities; something that would have been unthinkable previously. The levels of resistance or compromise with the forces of modernity also differ from one Amish group to another. Some groups choose to use kerosene lamps over electric lights, for example whereas other groups advertise on the web and carry mobile phones. All groups however, continue to use horses and buggies.

The Old Order Anabaptist way of life, centred on a rigid doctrine, strict social control and closely-guarded boundaries, is not one that most people today would choose to follow yet it is obvious that it is one that continues, after hundreds of years, to provide a deep sense of belonging, fulfilment and satisfaction to members of these communities. The extraordinary longevity and the increasing expansion of the Old Order Anabaptist communities serves to prove that their particular response to change – to resist it as far as possible - has served them well and continues to do so, unlike the Shakers and Harmony who resisted change and came to an end.

The Shakers

The Shakers, who had first come together in England, were another religious non-conformist sect that fled to America to escape persecution. They had started as a breakaway group from the Quakers and were originally called 'The Shaking Quakers'. The Quakers were so called because it was said that people should quake in the presence of the Lord. While the Quakers gradually moved from quaking to Quietism in their meetings, for their part the Shakers, who had come together in north-west England in 1747 under the leadership of John and Jane Wardley, took quaking even further. They had ecstatic ritual practices of shaking, dancing, whirling, singing and speaking in tongues during their worship.

In 1758 they were joined by Ann Lee who they recognised as the female messiah. The Shakers were persecuted for their beliefs and practices and 'Mother Ann' was both stoned and jailed. Eventually in 1774 she and eight of her followers sailed to America to make a new start. The Shakers had never numbered more than sixty and, following the departure of Mother Ann, the movement faded away in England.

In some ways the American Shakers came to resemble the Anabaptists. Their settlements were founded on hard work and religion and they refused to acknowledge the authority of the secular authorities. But whereas the Anabaptists held the family and family values as central to their communities, the Shakers practiced complete separation of the sexes and celibacy. They held that a life of purity and celibacy was the necessary preparation for the coming millennial kingdom of Christ on Earth. In the Shaker communities the members lived together communally as brothers and sisters but men, women and children lived in separate orders. There were separate staircases and doors within the house and men and women sat at opposite sides of the room during meals and worship. The Shakers' chosen name was 'United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing' or 'The Millennial Church'. Although they were based on their property in Niskeyuna, Ann Lee and her fellow Believers spent a lot of time on the road, moving between a network of houses belonging to Believers, gathering to worship and making and supporting converts. They were accused of being heretics, of disturbing the peace and breaking up families and thus had to keep moving in order to avoid trouble. Despite all of this Ann and her believers attracted more and more new converts. Because of her conviction in the impending millennium, Ann Lee was not interested in settling down in communities. For her the imperative was to save as many souls as possible. From her point of view there was no point in marriage or education as everybody would soon be in the afterlife. Ann Lee believed in continuous revelation from the 'Spirit World' and so did not develop either a doctrine or a particular social structure. Nonetheless there were four core tenets of faith - celibacy, communalism, confession of sin and separation from the world.

When Ann Lee died in 1784 the millennium had still not arrived. In order to ensure the continuation of their movement the new leaders had to take the Shakers into a new stage of development – they had to plan how to consolidate their gains and create the forms and structures necessary to keep the faith alive and the keep the faithful together. The first leader after Ann Lee was James Whittaker, who reinforced the necessity of communalism. He was followed by Joseph Meachem who had previously brought his congregation of New Light Baptists to join the Shakers. ‘Father Joseph’, as he became known, organised the Shakers into settled communities, which were divided into ‘Families’ of between thirty and one hundred members.

The members were grouped into ordered ranks of commitment – the Novitiates, the Juniors and the Seniors. He instigated separate leadership for spiritual matters and economic concerns and shared the spiritual leadership with ‘Mother’ Lucy Wright – mirroring the spiritual equality of the sexes. The Shaker ideology was formalised in a long series of theological treatises and he brought changes to the services of worship. The ecstatic whirling frenzy was replaced by a more orderly and structured form of dancing that became known as ‘the square order shuffle’ or ‘laboring’. The charisma, spontaneity and exuberance of the early days were replaced by formal spiritual discipline.

In fact all that we now think of as Shaker culture was introduced by Joseph Meachem as he attempted to rationalise and organise the believers following the death of Mother Ann. After the passing of Meachem, Lucy Wright led the Shakers through a time of prosperous stability for twenty five years, a time in which their numbers continued to grow as some of the previous missionary zeal came to fore again. Following the death of Lucy Wright, in recognition of the need to achieve greater cohesion and conformity as the movement expanded, the Shaker beliefs and rules were codified and each Family received a copy of the ‘Millennial Laws’.

There were signs of decline but for ten years between 1837 and 1847 the movement went through a small revival during a time when members saw visions and there was a return of the bizarre and ecstatic behaviour of earlier days – in fact it was termed ‘Mother Ann’s Work’. But this could not reverse the overall decline as difficulties increased. The younger members were no long as committed as previously and some left in order to marry and to experience the freedom of living in the world. Levels of dissension also increased and came to a head during the 1860s with the schism between the socialist ideas of the progressive camp led by Elder Frederick W. Evans and the conservative camp led by Elder Hervey Eads that resisted any dilution of the Shaker’s evangelical Christian core. As a result many people left, some of the communities closed, assets were sold off and the remaining members consolidated into fewer communities. By the time the Ministry closed the doors to new members in 1965 only two communities remained. From their peak at the turn of the century with between four and six thousand members in sixteen communities throughout America, they are now down to just a handful of elderly members in one community and all the other communities have been turned into museums.

There are several general factors that serve to jeopardise the sustainability of intentional communities. In addition to these the Shakers suffered from another, which were the schisms caused by leadership struggles. The most significant and less common, factors, however, that undermined their long-term survival were two things that were fundamental tenets of their faith – the belief in the millennium and the practice of celibacy. Obviously, neither of these promotes longevity in intentional communities and it was the Shakers refusal to compromise on these that was to lead to their eventual demise. The millennium failed to arrive and hence the very reason to lead such a radical lifestyle was gone. As a result disillusioned members left and no new ones joined. Celibacy had been seen as the path to perfection and to the preparation for the millennium kingdom on earth. While being central to the Shaker belief system and thus working to promote individual commitment and community cohesion it could only lead to one end. The problem was solved for a while by the practice of adopting orphans from outside the communities.

Very few of these orphans chose to stay with the Shakers on reaching adulthood and when laws were passed to prohibit religious groups from adopting orphans the survival of the Shakers was no longer viable. In contrast the Hutterites and Amish have a natural population increase which doubles every 20 years and only a tiny proportion of their children choose to leave their communities.

It could be said that the Shakers failed because they had chosen to put the importance of their ideological beliefs before pragmatic considerations of community perseverance. On the other hand it could be said that this choice served them well for a considerable number of years and that as a result, they succeeded in surviving far longer than most other intentional communities.

Harmony

Just as the Radical Reformers of 16th century Europe had broken away from both Catholicism and Protestantism a century earlier, three non-conformist religious groups broke away from the Evangelical Lutheran Church following the Thirty Years War of the 17th century in which Catholics and Protestants continued their religious and political wars. Like the Anabaptists before them these three groups, calling themselves 'Separatists', all set up communities in the New World in order to escape both religious and secular persecution.

Joseph Bimeler founded the community of Zoar, Christian Metz the Amana communities and George Rapp, whose followers became known as 'Rappites' founded Harmony in Pennsylvania. The Rappites later sold Harmony to Robert Owen - who re-named it New Harmony. They then set up another Harmony in Indiana and then ended up moving back to Pennsylvania to found a new community, Economy.

The Rappites had much in common with Oneida, the Anabaptists and the Shakers. Like John Humphrey Noyes, George Rapp declared himself a divinely appointed prophet although he stopped short of declaring himself the Messiah as Ann Lee had done. Like Ann Lee, however, he had been imprisoned for his nonconformist theology and heretical preaching. In common with the Anabaptists, Rapp's Separatists modelled their life on the early apostolic church, rejected infant baptism and refused to swear oaths of loyalty and obedience to the government and to take part in military service. The Rappites held to the same millennial theology as both Oneida and the Shakers. The major difference was that Noyes and the Perfectionists believed in the manifest millennium whereas for Ann Lee and George Rapp it remained imminent. Yet for all three the preparation for the millennium was to be through a communal life and through returning to the pure state of Eden through overcoming the gender differences that have divided humankind since The Fall. For Noyes this was to be through group marriage or free love, for Ann Lee and George Rapp this was to be through celibacy. Whereas with the Shakers the men and women lived separated lives, the Harmonist men and women lived celibate lives within a family unit. Both the Shakers and the Harmonists raised their children communally as a way forward to a more perfect social order but later this was seen as being unnatural and unnecessarily distressing and, as with the kibbutzim over a century later, it was duly abandoned.

The Harmonists shared the same two flaws with the Shakers. Community enthusiasm waned when Rapp's prophesied dates for the Second Coming - 15th September 1829 - passed uneventfully and membership numbers decreased as a consequence of celibacy. Both flaws led to the eventual decline of the communities. In setting up his communities Rapp had built into them several fundamental beliefs and practices that were to jeopardise their future. In addition he refused to compromise on these.

He steadfastly upheld celibacy and refused to allow any dilution of his collective principles. The second generation of Harmonists wanted to abandon celibacy and to marry; raise their own children, they wanted to be able to claim some of the community wealth on leaving or at least get some of their own property back.

Rapp saw himself as a divinely appointed leader and thus his leadership style was both autocratic and despotic. He refused to accommodate the changing values of the new generation of Harmonists and thus was personally responsible for the eventual failure of his communal enterprises.

Following the death of George Rapp in 1847, many disillusioned members left the Harmony Society. The nine elders who took over leadership retained celibacy and communal childcare, but agreed to new, more democratic, leadership forms and the right of the individual member to have money on leaving the Society. The new leadership guided the transition from agriculture to investment capitalism; from communal utopianism to corporate financial success and to the eventual dissolution of the Harmony Society in 1906.

Like other community leaders before him, when faced with the dilemma of either holding onto principles or adapting them, Rapp had decided that holding on to his principles took precedence over the long-term survival of the community that he had founded. Rapp and the leaders of other religious communities saw their divinely-inspired beliefs to be more important than the well-being of their followers and their communities. The absolute conviction of belief and the charismatic and authoritarian leadership style that held them in good stead in enduring persecution and in pioneering their communities were perhaps not what were needed to ensure the long-term survival of these communities. Having said that, the Shakers had kept their communities going and continued to meet the needs of their members for 200 years and the Harmonists for 100 years.

Thus the development of these religious intentional community movements cannot be considered to be a failure and in fact, compared to the longevity of most other intentional communities, represents a considerable success.

Final thoughts and insights

This has just been a brief look at a handful of intentional communities and we can ask if there is anything that we can learn from what we have seen?

It seems clear that as some point in their development communities have to decide whether or not they are going to dilute their founding principles and compromise their practices in order to accommodate the changing needs and wishes of their members and changes in the world beyond their boundaries. In doing so they are faced with a fundamental dilemma. If they choose to resist change and to uphold the traditional way of doing things they must then exert considerable pressure on their members to conform to these expectations. This pressure can easily turn into authoritarian control and then there is the risk of disillusioned and disgruntled members abandoning the community and no newcomers coming to take their place. On the other hand if they choose to move with the times, tolerate deviance and introduce changes that make life easier for their members they risk losing any sense of community cohesion and identity and end up becoming little different from those around them.

The longer a community lasts the more difficult it becomes to continue. The greatest challenges are not in the pioneering phase but in the years that follow. As the years go by community members find it more difficult to negotiate the gap between their aspirations of what community could be and the reality of every-day communal life. Ultimately it comes down to a fundamental developmental dilemma - whether to resist or to adapt in the face of change – whether to hold fast to principles and practices that are of such critical importance that to continue without them takes away the purpose and meaning of the community or whether to compromise because the important thing is to continue and to continue in the hope that there will still be enough defining features remaining that give the community a sense of cohesion and identity, that mark it out from the mainstream society.

Another thing that we can discern from our brief consideration of a selection of communities and the study of the literature in general is that it has been the religious communities of the past that have taken the most determined stand against compromise and change.

No doubt a calling to live a communal life of obedience to the will of God manifest through his word in the Bible and through his appointed prophets is not conducive to any form of dilution or compromise in community practices since this would question both the will of God and the obedience of the believer. These communities, with a dogmatic religious ideology that pervaded all aspects of the life of the community and of the individual member, with authoritarian, divinely-sanctioned power structures and with rigid boundaries that excluded the influence of the world, exerted a degree of control over their members that, with few exceptions, would not be tolerated in contemporary times. It seems to have become a self-evident truth that the more a community demands of its members the more committed are the members. This strategy has stood the religious communities in good stead; the Shakers resisted change and survived for generations and the Anabaptist communities continue to expand even today.

But we live in different times and the religious and spiritual communities that have been founded more recently – for example, Camphill, Iona, Findhorn and the Farm – whether through choice or necessity, have been less extreme in their beliefs and practices and have sought less control over the lives of their members. As with the communities that preceded them, they owe their success to the charismatic leadership of their founders and to the continuing willingness of their members to uphold the common principles and to conform to communal expectations. They have many things in common with the communities of the past - a defined identity, clear boundaries, communal practices, core ideological beliefs and some level of social control - but they have tended to be more open, more inclusive, more tolerant and more egalitarian than the communities of the past.

Today's communities are less demanding and expect less from their members. The contemporary eco-communities, ecovillages and co-housing projects are less ambitious than their predecessors and tend to steer clear of some of those characteristics that defined the success and longevity of the communities of the past. They do not seek to exert such a high level of control over the lives of their members and they are less ideologically dogmatic. They are more inclusive, tolerant and diverse and are more likely to encourage individual initiative and enterprise. They tend not to stray too far from mainstream norms and they demand less of their members in the way of sacrifice, renunciation and conformity. They have tended to move away from a collective economy and from collective values and practices in general and instead moved towards a more individualised lifestyle that emphasises self-fulfilment as much as community service. They no longer turn their backs on society so resolutely as in the past and instead are more likely to promote engagement across their boundaries. The intentional communities of today tend to be driven by visions that are somewhat less grand and less all-encompassing. They are perhaps less pre-occupied with high aims of bringing about a complete transformation of the individual and of society and more focused on ethical lifestyles and environmental sustainability. They are perhaps less radical and less marginal but as a consequence they are perhaps more stable. In comparison with the communities of the past they tend to be tighter in terms of structural organisation but looser in terms of conformity, cohesion and identity.

We have seen that there is a common developmental trajectory to be seen in most intentional communities. They tend to move from a pioneering phase characterised by charisma and conformity to a phase of individualisation and organisation. Faced with this seemingly inevitable developmental process the question is not about how to resist organisation because at a certain stage of community development organisation is both necessary and inevitable. It is not about demanding conformity and sacrifice when community members seek for more autonomy.

The question is more about how to keep alive the flame of community – the spontaneity, the celebration, the community-building practices, the mutual interest and support, the trust and the intimacy that are both the prerequisites and benefits of a communal lifestyle. It becomes a question of re-imagining, re-inventing and re-creating community in changed circumstances.

All too often organisation and individualisation are seen as forces that undermine a true experience of community. The sustainability of today's intentional communities, however, lies in creating new community forms, structures and processes that integrate organisation and individualisation into community. As far as a community goes along the route of organisation and individualisation it also needs to go as far along the path of rekindling the enthusiasm and idealism of community. As we have seen, those communities that manage this can break through to a new level of community development in which they can find a renewed sense of meaning and purpose in more complex times.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the influence of the work of Donald Pitzer, most especially as set out in his introduction to 'America's Communal Utopias' (The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

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