

The Imaginary

There's an association that still lingers between a "community" and a physical location .

However, McMillan and Chavis in their journal "Sense of Community" have cited an important distinction between two types of community that have long coexisted. One is geographical and the other is "relational," concerned with the interconnections among people. ⁴⁴

In the collective publication "Telecommunications Reclaimed" a community is built around at least one common interest, goal, attribute. ⁴⁵ Similarly, in the book **Imagined Communities**, first published in 1983, Benedict Anderson argued that members of a **community** experience a "deep, horizontal camaraderie." Despite being strangers, members feel connected in a web of imagined experiences. ⁴⁶

Following the reasoning of Anderson, the idea of imaginary was already included in Durkheim's work, where he emphasised that mechanisms of projection hold key significance in the process of community-building ⁴⁷. In the cultural-theoretical-oriented psychoanalytic deliberations as encountered, for example, in Slavoj Žižek ⁴⁸ or Cornelius Castoriadis, the imaginary is the prerequisite and basic component of sociality per se.

Bound to the work of all above mentioned, all communities are imaginarily constituted. The design of community is necessarily dependent on this anchor point. They not only have to be experienceable as communities and have an external boundary at their disposal, they also require an idea (by no means always a conscious and reflected one) of

themselves, an idea of their unity or common feature(s), quasi pictorially constituted and also embodied in practices. Within this context, the imaginary element is a constituent component of community. What is more, it is not just situated in the imagination of the individuals, but in the practices and utterances of community that continually generate and continue the idea of community-and are responsible for making the community seem attractive to the subjects in the first place. The fact that communities are imaginarily constituted also means that they appear complete and unified only in the imaginary mode. ⁴⁹ Here the imaginary is understood as the prerequisite and foundation for the community construction, while the illusion is the reflection on it in retrospect.

Complete identification of the kind promised by the imaginary cannot be achieved, and the unity/identity of the community must thus remain fiction and is not applicable to reality.

Instead, a moment of alienation and "non-correspondence with one's own reality" ⁵⁰ arises. The imaginary thus has a paradoxical structure: "On the one hand it is the production site of alienation / mis-recognition, on the other hand it is also the instance which negates such alienation in favour of a fictional unity, providing the driver and motive for its denial – such as the desire to become one or to merge as posited against alienation." ⁵¹

This paradox though, between the imaginary and reality is constitutive. While the imaginary promises to fill the gap , the desire for identification and unity can "ultimately lead

⁴⁴ McMillan, D. and Chavis, D., 1986. Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal Of Community Psychology*, (Volume 14).

⁴⁵ Dulong de Rosnay, M. and Tréguer, F., 2019. *Telecommunications Reclaimed: A Hands-On Guide To Networking Communities*. Internet Society. p.59

⁴⁶ An **imagined community** is a concept developed by Benedict Anderson in his 1983 book *Imagined Communities*, to analyze nationalism. Anderson depicts a nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group.

⁴⁷ Durkheim, E., 1895. *The Rules Of Sociological Method.*, The Free Press, New York

⁴⁸ Žižek's deliberations have never been published in a monograph but are scattered among various texts. The motifs of his argumentation are most clearly conveyed in two essays: see Žižek 1997 and 1998.

⁴⁹ If we assume with Lacan that identity is constituted as imaginary, the emphasis will fall first and foremost on the fact that the notion of identity as unified homogeneity is part of the imaginary and will thus necessarily remain there.

⁵⁰ Lacan, J, 1975. *Schriften I*, Ullstein Berlin, p.64

⁵¹ Gertenbach, L., 2011. The Imaginary and the Absence of Community. Reflections on an elusive category. *OnCurating #7*, p.13

to the excesses of community (exclusion, violence) as much as to its jubilatory moments (inebriation, ecstasy, celebration).”⁵² Thus the community cannot be understood without such concepts, as the imaginary is fundamental in regard to the mechanisms of exclusion and violence emerging within the community.

⁵² Ibid.