Basic Concepts to Understanding the Community System

Community
- Is known as an “umbrella” term because it encompasses a myriad of concepts. The broad definition states that community has a complex level of human behavior that is geographically based on groups of people who share common values, goals, and interests.

Community often entails…
- Civic habits/decision making
- Social norms that drive desirable behavior
- The ‘livability’ of the local area
- A form of recreation
- Roles of members
- A distinct sense of culture and identity

Communities also…
- Provide mutual support in times of celebration and crisis
- Provide cohesiveness for members to band together and accomplish things
- Serves as the heart, the soul, the nervous system, and the lifeblood of human society

Small vs. Large Communities
- Small= apartment buildings, apartment complex, apartment floor, and families
- Large= regional, national, and global communities

Community Admission
- A person or group of people are not limited to only being a part of one community; a person can be a member of a religious, ethnic, political, business, labor, and professional “community of interest.”

“A community is the common life of beings who are guided essentially from within, actively, spontaneously, and freely…relating themselves to one another, weaving for themselves a complex web of social unity.” ~ Robert Maclver~

Traditional Approach to Communities
- Often seen as being exclusive, inflexible, isolated, unchanging, monolithic, and homogeneous.
- Associated with geographical location; place that we carry out our daily activities
  - Sharing limited territorial space of residence such as a city, town, or village
- Associated with Function
  - Local participation, distribution, and consumption of goods and services
Socialization or the transmission of knowledge, values, and behavior patterns to members by individuals that are located in the group
Social control to influence members’ behaviors to conform to community norms through the accepted judicial process
Mutual support for community members in times of need
- Community is seen as a social system
  - It offers a more comprehensive/holistic view of community by allowing us to see the components or subsystems of a community
  - It allows us to recognize the influence on communities from other systems and subsystems in the larger environment
  - Community acknowledges that influences are reciprocal between system components and a community’s environment.

**Alternative Approaches to Communities**
- Includes: interpretive, intuitive, qualitative, subjective approaches, feminist perspectives, diversity focused visions, and personal and integrative perspectives that address oppression and discrimination in the community.
- Approach offers a more holistic approach to understand the many interrelated elements of community life than in the past.
  - Using the ideas such as: social work policy, research, practice, human diversity, social justice, values, ethics, and field practicum
- This new approach integrates the knowledge based on the theoretical approach to understanding community by using:
  - Community building
  - Community renewal
  - Community assets and strengths
  - Social capital
  - Civil ethnic and civil society

**People and Place Based Strategies**
- “A community-building approach looks at the whole picture, acknowledges, the interconnectedness of people-and place-based strategies, and recommends a course of action in which solutions are tied together in such a way that they reinforce one another.”

**8 Community-Building Principles**
- 1.) Integrate community development and human service strategies
- 2.) Forge partnerships through collaboration
- 3.) Build on community strengths
- 4.) Start from local conditions
- 5.) Foster broad community participation
- 6.) Require racial equity
- 7.) Value cultural strengths
- 8.) Support families and children
Identificational communities
- Groups such as ethnic/cultural/religious groups, patient groups, friendship groups, and workplace groups

Sustainable Community
- Defined uniquely by each community. Often on the basis of individual interests, needs, and culture.
- Also focuses on long-term integrated systems approaches, healthy communities, and quality of life issues by addressing economic, environmental, and social issues.
- The concept recognizes that economic, environmental, and social issues are interdependent and integrated.

Factors Found as to why Communities Decline
- Families moving often creates severed relationships
- Fear of others- people have become increasingly wary of each other, and don’t trust other people
- America’s infatuation with extreme individualism degrades the potential of community life in the future
- Our obsession with consumerism and materialism, thinking that it promotes happiness. Self-gratification is really just a way to cover up human suffering
- Severe over taxation=decline of civic/social service institutions that help to sustain communities
- Individuals become disconnected because people begin to move against others due to race, gender, cultural background, religion, or sexual orientation.

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