WORKING APART TOGETHER

Towards a typology for communities addressing wicked problems.

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Abstract

In current society, we observe the emergence of new collaborative forms of organising on a regional scale in which civilians, organisations, and institutions engage in processes of collective action (Ostrom, 2009, 2010a). We refer to these novel forms of organising as communities. We set out to understand how constituents in these communities collaboratively determine their strategic objectives and subsequently plan and engage in multiple value creating activities that address wicked problems (Faber & Jonker, 2015; Weber & Khademian, 2008). The aim of this contribution is to develop a typology of regional communities trying to address wicked problems through collective action.

We adopt Ostroms (2009; 2010a; 2011a) view on collective action undertaken by communities aiming to ensure access to and management of Commons (Bauwens, 2010; Conaty & Bollier, 2014; Ostrom, 2011a). Bollier (2014) addresses these emerging communities as the 'rise of the contemporary Commons', indicating a wide variety of community-based initiatives uniting constituents of different realms of society that engage in 'commoning' (Bollier & Helfrich, 2015): they develop collective actions to manage and preserve shared resources and interests. Faber and Jonker (2015), and Weber and Khademian (2008) classify issues targeted by these communities, such as climate change, energy transition, dematerialisation and societal changes (Dentoni, Hospes, & Ross, 2012), as wicked problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Churchman, 1967). Here the viewpoint is adopted that communities addressing wicked problems in a regional context are value-creating organisational entities. To understand how they address these problems a strategic perspective comes into play. Here processes of strategy formation are addressed as action situations (Ostrom, 2005; 2010a, 2010b), referring to these processes as strategic action situations. The research explores how strategic action situations evolve over time in regional communities and their contextual settings. The active participation of civilians differentiates the communities we address from other collaborative forms of organising that operate on a regional level, such as for instance public-private partnerships, cross-sector collaborations, or workers co-operatives.

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Preliminary observations (Kamm, Faber & Jonker, 2016) suggest that regional communities emerge and develop in different and place-bound contexts, resulting in various forms of communities. Ostrom (2005, 2010b) denotes that action situations are influenced by external variables: (i) the actors involved, (ii) constituents' positions, (iii) allowable actions how they are linked to outcomes, (iv) potential outcomes linked to individual sequences of actions, (v) the extent to which participants have control over choice, (vi) information available to participants about the structure of the action situation, and (vii) costs and benefits related to actions and outcomes. We suspect that strategic action situations are likely to be affected by these variables. Furthermore, we suspect strategic action situations to vary in different communities. However, knowledge concerning a framework that enables us to recognize and differentiate between strategic action situations in various communities is missing. This offers ample ground to develop a typology of communities addressed in a two-step approach.

The first step towards understanding strategic action situations in communities is to empirically recognize communities. Building on Faber and Jonker's (2015) work on regional hubs we propose five universal properties for regional communities:

i). Place-based: context-bound and local-situated. Constituents demonstrate a sense of regional belonging and activities have a regional orientation.

ii). Wicked problems oriented: Approaching wicked problems from a regional perspective appears to be beneficial for realizing objectives that profit from both meso-scale activities, and proximity of constituents that engage in those activities.

iii). Pluriform: broad, civilian-centred, configuration of constituents that live and/or operate in the same region. The active involvement of civilians brings a new dimension to collaborative constructs that engage in transformative actions.

iv.) Multiple-value focused: realising multiple value creation through a mix of long-term strategic goals and short-term activities.

v). Organisational pioneering: experimenting with horizontal organisational structures while engaging into action.

The above-mentioned five properties enable the identification of communities as collaborative forms of organising. However, based on preliminary observations (Kamm, Faber, Jonker, 2015) we contend that communities meeting the five above-mentioned properties differ in shape and structure. To enable an appropriate and balanced choice of communities for further research we need to be able to recognize the most notable variations characterising communities. We aim to do so by developing a tentative conceptual typology that enables the recognition and classification of distinct manifestations of communities. In the light of this ambition we propose the development of a "polythetic" (Fiss, 2011) typology; allowing the grouping of communities that may appear similar, but are not identical. We adopt Fiss' (2011) notion of core elements that indicate a strong causal relationship with strategic action situations, since we consider these as essential for determining archetypical communities. Additionally we distinguish a number of peripheral elements that have a weaker relationship to the core elements but are helpful in refining the archetypes.

For our typology we have determined two dimensions: Approach (single or multiple wicked problems) versus Orientation (project execution oriented or process facilitation oriented). Juxtapositioning these dimensions results in an initial, tentative typology of four archetypes: (a) entrepreneurial communities, (b) civilian coops, (c) stakeholder platforms, and (d) regional networks. This initial tentative typology is depicted in figure 1 and elaborated in table 1. We expect to gather further information about peripheral elements and how they affect communities during our (upcoming) field research.
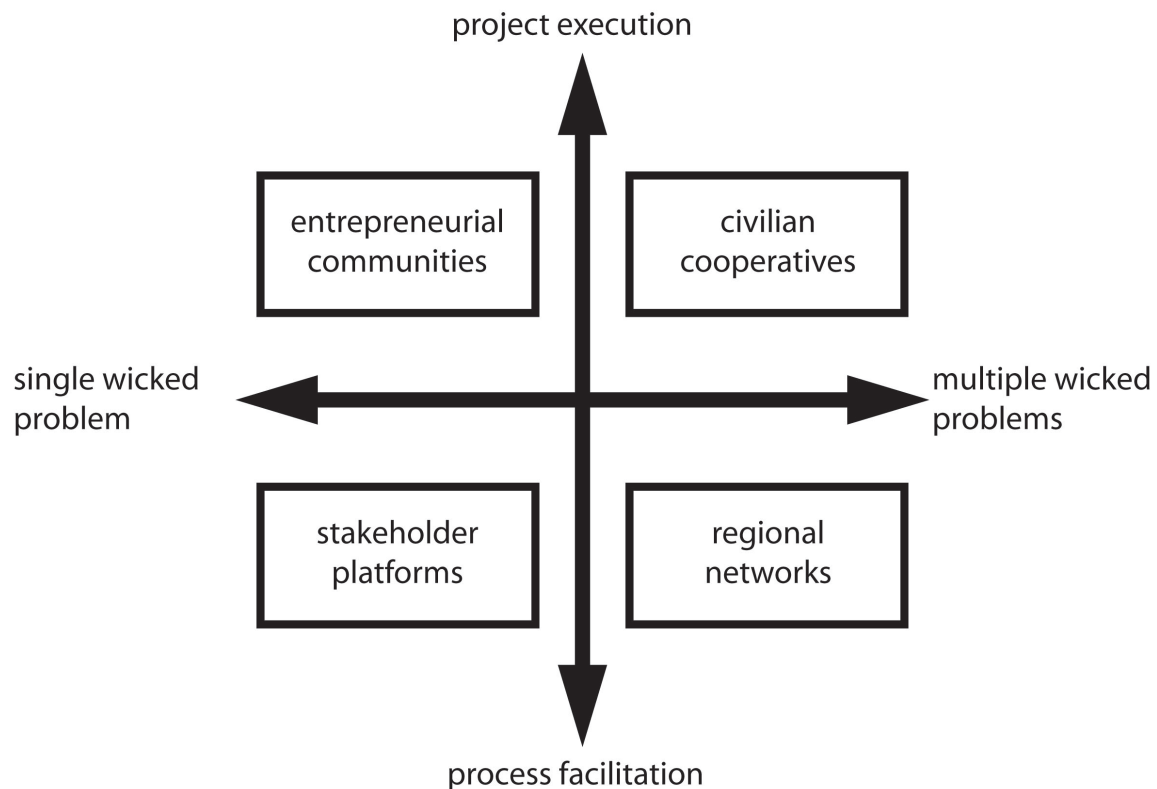
Figure 1: four archetypes of communities related to two main dimensions

How communities develop and how they relate to the four archetypes is partly determined by the variables mentioned by Ostrom (2005, 2010b). In particular the attitude of the constituents towards the role the community can play in relation to the wicked problem they address is leading to an elementary distinction. This attitude emerges on a dimension between project execution and process facilitation. It reveals the extent to which the constituents of the community are directly involved in organising the issues at hand or take a more facilitating position. Key to this distinction is the role of the community in the undertaking at hand.

	Entrepreneurial communities	**Stakeholder platforms**	**Civilian cooperatives**	**Regional networks**
Approach	Single Wicked problem	Single Wicked problem	Multiple wicked problems	Multiple wicked problems
Orientation	Project execution	Process facilitation	Project execution	Process facilitation
In brief	Shows to some extent parallels with worker co-operatives. Constituents invest various transactional means including money to realize physical projects.	Based on a core group of organisers around a single issue. Public participation in activities also advocates the importance of the issue.	Initiating, accommodating multiple, regionally embedded, collaborative projects. Constituents invest time, knowledge, and/or network	Establishing networks that facilitate a range of projects by a broad configuration of constituents.
Example	http://www.windparknijmegenbetuwe.nl/	http://www.foodcouncilmra.nl/	http://www.bommelerwaar.nl/	http://gloeipeelenmaas.nl/

Table 1: four archetypes of communities

This contribution finally discusses the benefits of this conceptual typology for recognizing and classifying communities in our research project. In the end we postulate that there is a strong relation between archetypes and aforementioned strategic action situations. We intend to use our typology to select cases for our upcoming comparative case study research into strategic action situations in communities.

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