

Workshop (2 December 2005) on *Communities and Networks in the Book Trade*

INTRODUCTION by John Hinks – outline notes plus [text from slides](#)

The aims of my research [\[details here\]](#).

What is meant by the confusing terminology of communities and networks? (In the 1950s a piece of research discovered 94 different meanings of ‘community’!)

Let’s begin with ‘**community**’. I have (from way back) some background knowledge of sociology, which may (or not) help.

1.

‘Community’ is one of those words – like ‘culture’, ‘myth’, ritual’, ‘symbol’ – bandied about in ordinary everyday speech, apparently readily intelligible to speaker and listener, which, when imported into the discourse of social science, however, causes immense difficulty.

Anthony P Cohen, *The symbolic construction of community*, 1985, p.11.

(I should add that, unlike some historians, I am happy to include history in the social sciences!)

2.

By community I mean something that goes far beyond mere local community. The word, as we find it expressed in much nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought, encompasses all forms of relationships which are characterized by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time.

[Community] achieves its fulfilment in a submergence of individual will that is not possible in unions of mere convenience or rational assent.

Robert Nisbet, *The sociological tradition*, 1967, p. 48

I began to explore the differences in potential meanings between ‘community’ and ‘network’. There is much variation in the use of this terminology but, for my purposes, it seems sensible to regard the **community** as coming first and being longer-term. **Networks**, which are (arguably) created by a community (e.g. a scholarly community), are shorter-term entities. A network may be temporary and quite short-lived; it may be replicated a number of times; it may be a one-off. A network may be visualised as a series of lines on a map. Networks are about **communication**.

3.

The idea of a ‘communication community’ [as in the work of J. Habermas] means that social relations in modern society are organized around communication rather than by other media such as authority, status or ritual.

Gerard Delanty, *Community*, 2003, p. 115.

In search of further enlightenment, I turned from sociology to anthropology. I found similar vagueness here, with multiple and confusing meanings of **community** in use. However, anthropologists do seem to be rather clearer about the use of **network** and **network analysis**. I need to explore this more fully.

4.

In anthropology, one might usefully isolate three broad variants of traditional approach. 'Community' is to be characterized in terms of: (i) common interests between people; or (ii) a common ecology and locality; or (iii) a common social system or structure.

N. Rapport & J. Overing, *Social and cultural anthropology: the key concepts*, 2000, p. 61.

My current view is that **community** – although seemingly unfashionable with some sociologists – is nevertheless a useful term, so long as its meaning is clearly defined. Also useful, but quite different, is **network** (a term used even more frequently than community in a vague, metaphorical sense). However, I have gained some clarification of this tangled web (another metaphor!) from my delving into social and cultural anthropology and historical sociology. I hear that (just last weekend) Asa Briggs spoke of some terms he believed to be particularly useful in book history.

5.

Key words in relation to book trade history:

- Culture
- Longevity
- Networks
- Relationships

Asa Briggs, 'British book trade history: a continuing adventure' -
keynote lecture at a conference on modern book history, November 2005.

[I concluded this brief introductory talk with an outline of my research plans.]