Community Is Spatial Inequality

David J. Connell, PhD Candidate
Rural Studies, School of Environmental Design and Rural Development
University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada
dave@djconnell.ca
www.djconnell.ca

Abstract

This paper offers an alternative interpretation of 'false dichotomies,' which are often dismissed as empty distinctions based on tautologies and paradoxes. But such distinctions are not false, as much as they are predicated on a 'first order' logic. When one adopts a 'second order' logic or perspective, it is possible to observe distinctions as productive constructions of reality. This approach is particularly useful for lending insights and clarity to ubiquitous and enigmatic concepts like community, which is the topic of this paper. The aim is to discuss how a second-order perspective reveals community as a distinct form of spatial inequality. The discussion draws from the author's doctoral dissertation, *Observing Community: An Inquiry Into the Meaning of Community Based on Luhmann's General Theory of Society.*[1]

Distinctions are simple ways of dividing the world between here and there, between I and thou, between true and false, between right and wrong. Distinctions are also peculiar. The more one thinks about a distinction, the more problematic it becomes because they are self-referential: one side of the distinction refers to the other side which refers back to the first side. An example close the heart of rural sociologists is the distinction between rural and urban. Rural is what is not urban. Urban is what is not rural. The deconstruction of distinctions into tautologies and paradoxes are often denounced as 'false dichotomies.' As I will discuss in this paper, such distinctions are not false, as much as they are predicated on an unsatisfactory logic of a 'first order.' When we adopt a 'second order' logic, it is possible to observe distinctions as productive constructions of reality. 'False dichotomies' are 'true' because they are

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[1] At the time of preparing this paper in June, 2003, the author's dissertation had been completed and formally submitted for defense.

logical and acceptable. This approach, which I will refer to as a second-order perspective, is particularly useful for lending insights and clarity to ubiquitous and enigmatic concepts like community, as will be discussed in this paper.

I will begin by elaborating upon the concept of distinctions. I will explain how what starts out as a nice way to divide the world turns into indeterminate paradox of self-reference. The world I am entering is one based on the somewhat unconventional constructivist epistemology of Niklas Luhmann, a world that embraces the paradox of self-reference as a logical entity.[2] This epistemology can be distinguished as *operative* constructivism. The construction of the social world arises from *operations* of *observing* similarities and differences. The shift to an operative constructivist epistemology marks a difference between first-order observations that normatively and empirically describe social phenomena like community and second-order observations of social phenomena that recognise that a describer (i.e., the rural studies researcher) is implied in an observation. In other words, one no longer seeks to understand community as an observed object, but seeks to understand the possibility of community that includes observers (including myself) in the domain of observation. Questions need not be asked only about what community is and how it is studied, but also about what distinctions are being used to distinguish community.

A distinction can be understood specifically as "a boundary with separate sides so that a point on one side cannot reach the other side without crossing the boundary" (Spencer Brown 1969:1). In the operation of observing a distinction, one side of the distinction is indicated or marked; the other side is unmarked. The process continues by observing further distinctions; it continues as operations of constructing the world (Luhmann 1995). The ultimate form of this world is wholly contingent upon its starting point, upon the 'first distinction.' The world takes the form of distinctions (between A and not-A) in order to see itself. Which is to say that the world can only be observed partially and only from within the world we construct. "But *in order* to do so, evidently it [the world] must first cut itself up into at least one state which sees, and at least one other state which is seen" (Rasch 2002:7). In other words, the operation of constructing the world is for the world to "cut" itself, then to observe itself as a unity of difference. "Any reference to the world is self-reference, and any self-reference requires external reference, a not-self against which it can be distinguished" (Rasch 2002:10). The unity is always a self-referential whole. By (re-)constructing the whole as a unity of difference (the unity of the two sides of a distinction) we are no longer in the realm of a foundationalist philosophy, but rather in the realm of a 'second-order' philosophy of observations. In an arbitrary sense, "whoever wants to observe must observe *something* and distinguish it from other objects" (Luhmann 2000a:41).

A distinction, which is a difference of pure self-reference, must start from a paradoxical beginning. At a fundamental level, paradox lacks connectivity; it revolves within itself. A search for the first distinction, for the starting point, necessarily leads to an infinite

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[2] Another session at the RSS 2003 conference examines Luhmann's general theory of society and community theory. This session includes papers by Lee, England, and Bakker. Connell provides an introduction to this session.

regress and therefore cannot be answered – one would have to start distinguishing in order to do so.

In everyday activities paradox appears as entertaining puzzles. For example: Does the barber who shaves all and only those who do not shave themselves shave himself? Another example is: I am from Crete. All Cretians are liars. Paradox, however, is not a trivial matter. It is a central concept in the theoretic discourse of biology (Maturana and Varela 1980), cognition (von Foerster 1984), and social systems (Luhmann 1995), among others. An example in mathematics is the problem of set theory. Is the set of all sets included within itself? Russell, who spent many years finding a way around the paradox of self-referential sets, declared in the end: self-reference is not allowed (Segal 2001:39-42). Otherwise paradox threatens the logic of mathematics.

The threat to logic centres upon the law of the excluded middle (Rasch 2002). The law can be phrased as follows: All propositions are either true or false. The law must exclude itself as a proposition that is either true or false, because, according to its own rules it can only be one or the other. Russell resorted to a higher law to resolve the paradox of self-referential sets (Segal 2001). Namely, to resolve the paradox of the theory of types, Russell resorts to a single, higher law: statements about totalities cannot be part of the totality they describe. Effectively, Russell blocks self-reference by excluding it as a logical entity, which is consistent with the familiar mathematics of Boolean logic based on the two conditions of true and false.

Under Boolean conditions, which are the normal conditions of science, the paradox of self-reference is resolved when the law exempts itself from its own operation. The distinction between true and false, for example, cannot be determined based on Boolean logic, but by other criteria. Consequently, another paradox arises: "A law determines what is and what is not legitimate, but it cannot justify its own legitimacy without implicitly resorting to a higher legitimacy, a higher law—a move that introduces, once again, the danger of infinite regress" (Rasch 2002:16). In other words, "the law of the excluded middle must effectively *be* the excluded middle; it must simply be, rather than be either true or false" (Rasch 2002:16).

To see how this second-order philosophy is about an operation of observing, we can follow Rasch's discussion about consciousness. His argument begins: "For pure consciousness to be conscious of itself, it must be conscious of itself as other; thus it must slit itself in two" (Rasch 2002:4). That is, consciousness posits itself as self and not-self. Yet, both self and not-self emerge from a common reference: the logically presupposed self (or absolute self). A problem of logic arises. Logically, the self refers not only to itself (A = A), but also to the not-self (A = not-A). The logical implications that unfold lead to a problem of paradox. Namely, the self both annuls and does not annul itself. Without getting into the details of Rasch's discussion, of present interest is that the paradox is 'resolved' by introducing the absolute self, the position from which we started – the position of the excluded third. When self is both self and not-self, "a middle that ought to be excluded is included" (Rasch 2002:5). The excluded third is the

"absolute self" that draws the distinction between the marked and the unmarked space. The excluded third is the observer.

Still always we are dealing with self-reference. As Kauffman (2002:52) claims, "the world is fundamentally circular." More precisely, we are dealing with the unity of self-reference, i.e., the unity of the marked and unmarked sides of a distinction. In this way, operative constructivism reaches beyond the normal science of a two-value logic of true and false. It works from an epistemological foundation of three primary entities that constitute all reality. An operation of observing a distinction can be considered the "most basic act of epistemology" (Keeney, cited in Segal 2001:52). I will next introduce the methodology underlying second-order observations.

Semantics and social structures

A necessary assumption underpinning the possibility of observing distinctions is that semantics, of community in this case, is not arbitrary, but rather represents reactions to the respective society and the trends for change within it. Observing how the semantics of community emerge, persist, and change in relation to societal evolution (and vice versa) requires examining society's communicative capacity to deal with complexity. Theoretically, the guiding premise is that the dominant semantics of a given period becomes plausible only by virtue of its compatibility with its social structure (Luhmann 1986). In this regard, I follow Luhmann's studies of love (Luhmann 1986), art (Luhmann 2000a), and mass media (Luhmann 2000b). Pragmatically, observations of the semantics of community focus upon the effects of communication as a process of co-ordinating how people negotiate similarities and differences.

The function to be performed by any communicative act is to reduce complexity, to select from among a number of different possibilities. The more complex the world turns out to be, the ability to communicate becomes more improbable. What people need is a way to structure expectations to make it possible for selections made by one person to be relevant to another. In other words, the connectivity of communicative events requires structure to both guide and constrain human abilities to make sense of an experiential world.

Structures include, but are not limited to, norms, values, expectations, and roles to the extent that each holds ready forms of meaning. In communication "everything that takes place occurs as a selection and thereby operates to form structure when and insofar as *other selections admit this structure*" (Luhmann 1995:134). Structure, therefore, relates to the kind of uncertainty reduced in self-referential processing. An example is the self-made rules of accounting. Structure is not to be understood as relations between elements because when elements disappear so does the structure. Structure, by necessity, is conceived only as an emergent order that is dynamic and constantly changing. Structure arises within social systems out of anticipations of anticipations. Anticipating what ego might understand leads to other anticipations; and the same goes for alter. Anticipations of anticipations form expectations, which acquire structural value for connecting meaning through time and by excluding other

possibilities. Every expectation contributes to the process of making sense of complexity (the necessity of choosing). Structure, therefore, "is no productive factor, no underlying cause, but merely the constraint on the quality and connectability of the elements" (Luhmann 1995:283). As such, structure is presupposed in the constitution of self-referential observations.

Structure and semantics are closely related. Semantics, in a general sense of the term, is about the meanings of words people use; it is a supply of concepts and ideas for the purposes of communication (Luhmann 1995). A difference between semantics and social structure can be expressed in terms of first- and second-order observations. At a first order, we observe semantics as expectations of meanings of words people use. At a second order, we observe how the selection of semantics connects to other semantics. The latter describes social structure. In other words, structure is a second-order observation of semantics: semantics is expectations of meaning; structures are expectations of expectations of meaning.

Within the co-evolution of semantics and social structures, the connectivity of values appears to fulfill a particular role of stabilising expectations (i.e., meaning). What gives values stability is that they, in particular, have a capacity to persist under conditions of change (Luhmann 2000a). For example, people can value beauty, and this persists, but what people think of as beautiful can change. Values, like other semantic forms, are tested, and accepted or discarded. The more they are used, the more connective capacity they acquire. Thus, focussing upon values provides an entry point for observing the connective capacity of communications. And when we observe the semantics of community, we see that it is "bedevilled with value claims" (Eyles 1985:59).

Observations of community

As semantic forms become more connective (i.e., the more structural conditions of selectivity they develop), the more they simultaneously function as a factor motivating another person to accept what you are saying. This is evident in the semantics of community. Community has an inherent goodness about it; it is imbued with ideas of roots, belonging, and familiarity. As Bauman (2001:1) describes, community is a word that "feels good…it is good 'to have a community'; it is good 'to be in a community.'" The reason for this, according to Bauman, is that community promises pleasures that we would like to experience, like a warm, safe, cosy, comfortable place.

The stability of community rests on the recursivity of its goodness. "[V]alues are valid because they are presupposed to be valid" (Luhmann 2002:164). In effect, the person who wants to object to what is community assumes the complexity of establishing meaning. Likewise, when you speak against community, you are branded as someone who is against community, as an outsider. In other words, if a person does not agree they must announce this and assume the burden of argumentation of what is or is not community and why. Through this dialectic, the semantics of community is consolidated

through the communicative disadvantaging of contradiction. The negative value of community – of not having community – re-inforces stability.

Starting out from community as a seemingly incontestable fact of human life (Minar and Greer 1969) creates a situation where connectivity within the semantics of community leads to acceptance, thus stability. Furthermore, centring upon the value of community, on the positive and negative sides, offers the advantage of using familiar distinctions, such as belonging, attachment, familiarity, as well as empowerment, participation, and sustainability.

It is possible to observe connective capacities within the semantics of community that are greater than the connective capacities of values. Generalised symbolic media of communication increase connectivity by combining selection and motivation (Luhmann 1986). Motives, it is important to note, do not arise independently of semantics. Semantics describes how motives can exist and how they are to be communicated. "Motives are themselves a product of the evolution of generalised symbolic communicative media, i.e., an artifact of socio-cultural evolution" (Luhmann 1986:39). The combination of motives and selection means that the use of such generalised symbolic media increases the probability that one's selection will be accepted by others because each symbolic medium has the particular quality of setting out the rules for the use of the medium (Beyer 1984). If one follows the rules of the code then communication should be successful.

The possibility of observing generalised symbolic media infers that the semantics of community possesses particular capacities for connectivity. As a value, community is good because it is good. As a more connective medium of communication, the 'goodness' of community is symbolically generalised in the semantics of inclusion. This can be observed in the semantics of community development (e.g., CDS 2003; Bhattacharyya 1995; Ryan 1994), community economic development (e.g., Douglas 1994; Daly and Cobb 1989; Ross and Usher 1986), and healthy communities (e.g., OHCC 2003), which represent semantic forms that have been tested and accepted. These examples not only uphold community as a social value but, beyond this, also convey rules for 'successful' communication. This means that the use of the semantics of community as a generalised symbolic medium increases the probability that one's selection will be accepted by others because community has the particular quality of setting out the rules for the use of the medium: community is valued because it is inclusive. If one accepts the goodness of inclusion, communication should be successful – so long as the underlying distinction is not questioned.

As a symbolically generalised media of communication, the semantics of community is used increasingly and become more socially significant in the late-twentieth century as a communicative medium of inclusion. And the more the semantics of community is used as a symbol of inclusion, the more connective capacity it acquires. At the same time, the meaning of community is becoming more general and abstract. Community refers to inclusiveness regardless of scale, reflecting the residual meaning of having in common, without being bound to either land or property. It is only as a general and

abstract description of human relations that it is possible to use community across an increasing range of contexts. Hence, the Brundtland Commission (1987) can refer to and speak for the "world community"; Wellman et al (1988) can refer to personal communities as networks; and, people can belong to the virtual communities of the Internet (Driskell and Lyon 2002).

Perhaps the reason that community moves towards the more general and abstract is that the semantics of 'society' is losing relevance in a global context. Paradoxically, the increasing use of community to describe almost any group of people at any scale, from 'virtual communities' to a 'world community,' undermines the significance of the term as a meaningful self-description.

Trying to exhaust the list of different uses of community runs the risk of becoming a meaningless, first-order exercise of describing the semantics of community. Drawing upon the concept of distinction helps to understand what is happening from a second-order perspective. As Schecter (2002) explains, in an increasingly complex society, community has the advantage of simplification. Community is a semantic description of something that people have difficulty naming, yet provides a distinction that enables people to communicate about and act on issues which we could otherwise not do. Community is also a term of choice for its normative sense of connectedness. It is "a contemporary self-description which different people use to indicate their reference point for belonging" (Schecter 2002:2). Given unbounded possibilities of using community, Schecter argues that a discussion about its explicit meaning is not helpful. "If, however, we understand community as a distinction, we then ourselves have to distinguish the context in which it serves as a distinction" (Schecter 2002:2). To figure out what community refers to we can also explore what community does not refer to. That is, we can gain insights by observing community as a two-sided form.

The semantics of community can be seen as structurally conditioned by the early stages of modern development and the corresponding semantics of individual and society (Williams 1985). The semantics of community developed to accommodate new demands for expressing social relations influenced by individuality, new forms of public, private, and intimate relations and, more generally, of expressing the relationship between individuals and society. As the semantics of individual and an abstract society displaced previously privileged concepts of order, describing what society is not became increasingly important. Correspondingly, the semantics of community refers not necessarily to what relations exist, as it refers what relations are missing.

As the companionship associated with face-to-face relationships is increasingly displaced, the distinction of community as more immediate than society became especially important. The semantics of community provides a link to the past as a reference to nostalgia, feeding off the traditional notion that simplicity was a legitimate property of society. As a link to the future, community functions as a reference to utopia.

In second-order terms, the semantics of community is anchored in the internal side of the distinction but refers to the *external* side, i.e., the 'inside' is elaborated as a counter-concept to the 'outside.' Rather than describe what modern society is, community more often refers to what modern is not. In other words, community is a self-description of *negativity* – of what society is missing.

In contrast to the general and abstract uses of community described above, more specific uses of community do not refer to what is missing in society. As noted above, the semantics of community development, community economic development, and healthy communities illustrates a shift from negativity (of what is missing in society) to *positivity.* This semantics symbolises inclusion as a positive description of what community is. In this shift the semantics of community acquires a motive to describe itself.

Although a positive view of community likely existed previously in various forms, positivity assumes an emerging dominant form in the context of globalisation and ecological concerns. Community embodies the desire for a more *inclusive* world: "the concept of community has become even more central to a wide-spread atmosphere and movement in western society – a revolt against progress and modernisation, a rejection of individualism and of economic growth as alienating, a longing for the warmth, comfort, and humanity of a *real* community" (Kamenka 1983:vii). Barbesino (1997:689) stated that community is "increasingly seen as the remedy against the impersonal features of modern society." As a resistance to capitalist forces, the semantics of community emerges as a positive counter to the perceived alienation of global-scale development and growth (Barbesino 1997). Community also emerges as a source of social values in the pursuit of sustainability. Rees (2001) states that reducing ecological footprints is one step toward sustainability and, to achieve sustainability, people must turn to "community" to restore values. Similarly, Bunce (2001) states that rural sustainability must focus on community.

Yet, as long as the semantics of community refers to both what is missing in society and to what community (and society) should be, to both sides of a distinction, the relationship between community and not-community becomes increasingly paradoxical. Which is to say that it becomes increasingly difficult to know to what community refers. And, for the most part, this is the dominant condition of 'community' within rural sociology.

In the process of establishing a difference between community and not-community, many distinctions are tested to either accept or reject them. There are ecological, sustainable, green, and other descriptions of communities (Roseland 1997). As well, there are Just (Newbrough 1995), just and equitable (Beatley and Manning 1997:35), true (McLaughlin and Davidson 1985; Cock 1979), real (Kamenka 1983), genuine and counterfeit (Freie 1998), ethical (Bauman 2001), and pseudo- (Ehrenfeld 1996) communities. Each of these distinctions relate to different attempts to distinguish between community and not-community.

Emerging semantics of sustainable rural communities

A new form of stability, which emerge from the same process of establishing a difference between community and not-community, can be observed within the semantics of sustainable rural communities. This stability comes by focussing inward, by the semantics of community acquiring a motive to describe itself in terms of what it is, and, through this evolutionary process, by building upon community as a positive form of self-description and as a generalised symbol of inclusion. Examining the semantics of sustainable rural communities lends further insight to the meaning of community generally and, more specifically, to the meaning of community as it relates to rural sociology.

As opposed to the general and abstract semantics of world communities and virtual communities, the semantics of sustainable rural communities is more specific. The combination of political, spiritual, and ecological arguments within this semantics exceeds a dominant understanding of community, while the semantics of sustainable agriculture adds a particularly local and rural dimension to these observations. For example, Beatley and Manning's vision for sustainability, for making a difference in the world, rests upon the idea of sustainable communities. Vitek states that the shift to an ecological ethos is premised upon "the rediscovery of community" (Vitek 1996b:177). "The restoration of local communities, especially rural communities of human scale, is essential to national renewal" (Cobb 1996:194). "The challenge now is to retrieve that commitment to community from the past, from scattered pockets of rural life, and to find a modern expression for it in this new age of industrial agriculture" (Worster 1984:40). There is also a poltical dimension to this discussion. Berry describes a two-party system that divides over the fundamental issue of community: "One of these parties holds that community has no value; the other holds that it does" (Berry 1996:80).

The notion of place-in-the-world, as a form of interconnectedness, rootedness, and intimate relations, is an important aspect of the emerging semantics of sustainable rural communities. As Kalinowski states, inclusion "comes when persons become emotionally rooted to a place they can call their own" (Kalinowski 1996:141). Several other examples from the literature illustrate this theme of place-in-the-world. "A sense of community is most simply put as an awareness of simultaneous belonging to both a society and a place" (Livingston 1996:132). "If we speak of a *healthy* community, we cannot be speaking of a community that is merely human. We are talking about a neighbourhood of humans in a place, plus the place itself" (Berry 1992:14-5). Lamb (1993), in his book, *Sense of Place: Listening to Americans*, recounts stories he collected while wandering the back roads of the country listening to people who were talking about community. "From them I learned the meaning of place – where you belong and not necessarily where you are" (Lamb 1993:8). Haas and Nachtigal (1998:21) describes community as collectively creating a story about place: "It is the narrative of who we are, how we get along together, how we make a living, and how we are connected." The book, *Rooted in the Land*, is dedicated to the search for a community life rooted in a place. "Slowing down, staying put, opening our senses, practicing humility and restraint, knowing and caring for those around us, and finding

our natural place in the natural world are simple yet significant steps in the rediscovery of place and the sense of community it holds" (Vitek 1996a:1).

It is this notion of place-in-the-world that leads to understanding community as a distinction of spatial inequality. Two related areas of thought enrich this observation. First, the need to describe a world that is close and comprehensible is central to intimate relations. Second, the idea of a close and comprehensible world is also found in a phenomenological understanding of place as a point from which one experiences a world. I will briefly discuss each of these points.

The emergence of modern society is characterised by a fundamental shift in the quality and distribution of social relations, from personal to more impersonal relations (Luhmann 1995). Impersonal relations are increasingly mediated by money and formalised roles predicated upon functional relationships. Such impersonal relations displaced, for the most part, personal, communal relations of simpler societies. In other words, functional differentiation socially displaces people. "At the same time, society and the possible worlds it can constitute become much more complex and impenetrable" (Luhmann 1986:16). People can no longer be bound to a single system of society and, therefore, they relate to the world in terms of a difference between themselves and their environment. The differentiation of intimate relations is an evolutionary response to these societal conditions.

What one looks for in an intimate relationship "is first and foremost *the validation of self-portrayal*" (Luhmann 1986:165). Making one's own experience of a close world available to others – and having it affirmed by others – is the basis of intimate relations. They include the inner experiences of other people and thus for the possibility of a shared sense of a close world to become differentiated. In the semantics of love (intimate relations between two people), validation is a matter of passion (Luhmann 1986). In the semantics of community, the validation of self-portrayal is a matter of inclusion.

A unity of inclusion/exclusion is paradoxical, however. As each person's view of his or her world is increasingly individualised yet still held to be anonymously constituted, the probability of successful communication becomes less probable. To increase the probability of communication, the semantics of community includes self-descriptions of intimate relations. People construct a world that is understandable, intimate, and close. "The individual person needs the *difference* between a close world and a distant, impersonal one, i.e., the *difference* between only personally valid experiences, assessments and reactions and the anonymous, universally accepted world—in order to be shielded from the immense complexity and contingency of all the things which could be deemed possible" (Luhmann 1986:16). That is, people speak of a psychological sense of belonging, sense of community, sense of attachment, sense of rootedness, and sense of place.

From a phenomenological perspective, places are basic elements in the ordering of experiences of the world (Relph 1976, 1985). It is, among other things, about

rootedness. "To have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one's own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular" (Relph 1976:38). Place is about "reflecting and revealing human nature and seeking order and meaning in the experiences that we have of the world" (Relph 1976:4). In other words, we can conceive of rootedness as a form of being included in place.

In second-order terms, the identity of place is a distinction that marks a unity of difference of here/there, inside/outside. Distinctions enable others to determine what is meaningful and what is not. The self-referential creation of an inside distinguished from the outside is also an important aspect of the phenomenology of place. Paradoxically, "What is involved is not merely the recognition of differences and of sameness between places – but also the much more fundamental act of identifying sameness in difference" (Relph 1976:45). Relph continues:

> "The essence of place lies…in the experience of an 'inside' that is distinct from an 'outside'; more than anything else this is what sets places apart in space and defines a particular system of features, activities, and meanings. To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is the identity with the place" (Relph 1976:49).

According to Norberg-Schulz (1971:25), "to be inside is the primary intention behind the place concept; that is to be somewhere, away from what is outside." Lyndon et al (1962:34-5) states: "Being inside is knowing where you are." And, finally, according to Bachelard: "Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us…. Outside and inside are both intimate – they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility" (Bachelard 1969:211 and 217-18, cited in Relph 1976:49).

Bachelard's notion of the blinding dialectic between inside and outside can be understood in systems-theoretical terms as the blind spot of the excluded third: the paradox of the observer from which the horizon of spatial possibilities emanates. In other words, place is the meaningful centre of one's world that one sees, but also the foundation and context for that seeing (Seamon and Mugerauer 1985:8). People need "a *here* from which to discover the world, a *there* to which we can return" (Relph 1985:27).   Thereby, the distinction of place is a medium that facilitates the processing of a unity of difference of inside and outside. The unity of the difference of inside and outside, of system and environment is *the world* (Luhmann 1989:138).

The semantics of community describes one place as distinct from other places. Inescapably, community is reduced to either a tautology or paradox: it is what it is or it is what it is not. People conceal this self-reference by observing it as a distinction between inside and outside, between community and world. The idea is that the semantics of community refers to an interconnectedness, to a sense of inclusion and intimate relations embodied in such uses as evident in the sustainable rural communities literature. Lamb (1993:6) describes community as the "comfort zone of life." Vitek (1996a:1) refers to community as one's "natural place in the natural world."

'One's place in the world' refers to an intimate and familiar relation of people and place. It is part of a self-observing, self-organising semantic evolution that establishes a difference between community and not-community. In other words, community is a distinction of spatial inequality. Place-in-the-world conditions people's experience of difference so that the intended difference between here and there is understood as a meaningful expression not only of identity, but also of inclusion.

Discussion and Conclusion

What has been described in this paper as a second-order philosophy is based on the constructivist epistemology of Niklas Luhmann. A second-order perspective provides new insights to possible meanings of community. At the outset, a focus upon the selective contingency of distinctions increases awareness of and heightens sensitivity to semantics of community. This perspective, at a minimum, provokes the question: What do you mean by community? Moreover, at a second-order level of observation, one can follow this question with a question about what is not community.

This approach is not only for asking difficult questions; it also helps to interpret complicated answers. The possibility of community, as has been discussed in different contexts, must always be understood as a co-evolution of semantics and social structures. By this means, we not only gain a descriptive account of the residual, dominant, and emerging semantics of community, but also gain important insights as to why people are increasingly using community as an increasingly significant societal value. In the end, whereas normal approaches willingly accept ambiguity as an inescapable condition of the meaning of community, a second-order philosophy accounts for this condition and advances beyond undecidables toward new possibilities.

Semantics develops structural qualities by stabilising possibility, which, as a medium of communication, makes it possible to share meaning with different people in different situations. This in turn allows people to come to the same or similar conclusions. In an increasingly complex society, the semantics of community both facilitates communication about health, well-being, and sustainability, and acts as a catalyst for communication about inclusion – and as a distinction of spatial inequality. In relation to the theme of this conference, we can ask: What is not spatial inequality?

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