

**Using the seven characteristics of community life outlined by Beatson, describe and analyze a group you are familiar from reading or first hand experience.**

In discussing the above I have chosen a sporting group. The group is a Swimming Club however it could be typical of any established sporting or interest group that is working and surviving as a group.

The discussion from time to time will not only be limited to the Swimming Club but will also use examples of other Sporting Clubs and Groups in general. It will also demonstrate that if a "template" was laid over each club or group for comparison there would striking equivalencies.

It might be best to begin the discussion with how individuals came to form the Wanganui East Swimming Club and in later years how other individuals joined the club and become part of the group and swimming club community.

In the 1920's a School Swimming Pool was made available to the general public of Wanganui East, a suburb in the City of Wanganui. The pool was to be for public use when the school was not using it. Prior to the development of a unique swimming community the individuals in the suburb already had in common the fact that they all lived in the same suburb. Some may well have identified with that fact.

Once a number of the Wanganui East suburb residents started using the pool a smaller Swimming Community began to develop. The individuals that were using the pool at this point were an aggregate. They may have shared common traits but did not necessarily inter relate as a group. Tyson (1998 2<sup>nd</sup> edition pp4) gives an example of an example of a number of people in a doctor's waiting room as an aggregate, the general public using a public swimming pool is certainly another example of an aggregate from which the Wanganui East Swimming Club was to originate from

From the users of the pool, (the aggregate) some saw the need for a swimming club. A more passionate interest in swimming or the need for some better order in the pool or quality swimming time made have been the catalyst, however as at this point a Swimming Community was starting to develop. They were developing their "Primary Relationships" as described by Beatson (176.204, Book

of Readings, Peter Beatson, Defining Features of Community  
pp56)

An extract from the Wanganui East Swimming Club 75<sup>th</sup> Jubilee  
Card states:

*It was not long before the swimmers in Wanganui East  
could see the advantages of forming their own swimming  
club and on the 2 December 1922 a meeting was call for  
that purpose. A newspaper report of the day noted that  
"The meeting was an enthusiastic one, over 50 being  
present.*

This extract gives us an insight to the emotion and interest of the  
Primary Relationships that were forming between the inaugural  
members at the time. Individuals had a desire to form a club, they  
had a common interest or **swimming culture** and were keen to  
get the ball rolling. It also gives us a clear indication of the size  
of the early group.

Primary Relationships are easily identified in the sporting club  
arena due to individuals coming together on a voluntary basis  
looking for rewarding experience. This also can be seen quite  
clearly with Marist Rugby Clubs that are domiciled in most major  
cities throughout New Zealand. They all are members of the  
wider Marist Community (based on the Catholic Faith, another  
**culture**), and all have the sport of Rugby in common. Each Easter  
(another Christian Festival) the Marist Rugby Clubs get together  
and hold a Rugby competition. All participants will not know one  
another but all taking part **identify themselves** as "Marist" and  
during the social times of the competition relationships are  
developed between participants who more than likely have never  
met before. The affinities they have in common are Marist and  
Rugby. They are emotionally rewarded by being part of the  
Marist Rugby Community and by playing a game they enjoy.  
The relationships developed during the competition are informal  
and voluntary, mainly being developed during social times. They  
can also last for the duration of the competition or a lifetime.

Primary relationships developed within Swimming Club  
Community during its early years and it was not long before the  
others in the suburb identified those in the Swimming Club as  
"Swimmers". To an extent "**boundaries**" were beginning to be  
created but they were not a restrictive boundary but more of a

marking point, clear frontier, or line in the sand to define the fledgling Swimming Club Community.

The Swimming Club required a joining fee. The fee acted as the **boundary** between 'us' and 'them'. The frontier had been clearly marked. Once you paid the fee you had partial acceptance to the Swimming Club Community, however, this was not the only hurdle to overcome. Proof of some competent swimming ability or sustained effort to learn to swim or work for the Swimming Club Community also needed to be delivered before acceptance was achieved. Paying the fee was not enough in itself to be part of the group.

From the early days of the Swimming Club leadership was required. History of the Swimming Club Community recounts a list of past Presidents, Treasurer's and Secretaries. The people who are named on the honors board are the past **activists** of the Swimming Club Community. Most Swimming Club Community members today will not know what they [past Presidents, Treasurer's and Secretaries] looked like in the flesh, but Club Members of today may identify with a name of the previous office holders as if they were with us today.

Traceable **history** is important to the Swimming Club Community members as it provides them with a link to the past. In some cases three generations of family members names are etched into history both on the clubs trophies and records. These records and trophies provide both a tangible and tactile link to the past. It could be loosely paralleled to the carvings in a Maori Meeting House. They too tell of the Tribes **history** and can be touched by the hand of the living Tribe members today.

The feeling of **identity** these past leaders created serves a glue for the Swimming Club Community today. They steered the Club to past victories and those victories give rise to sense of **pride** for the present day Club members. At swimming meets most club members sit together collectively cheering and barracking on others from the club. The members attend swimming competitions wearing the same uniform to set themselves apart from other swimmers. In sitting together, barracking and taking part in the group activities **group awareness** is developed. It also clearly identifies, to outsiders, who the members of the Wanganui East Swimming Club Community are.

**Pride** and identity go hand in hand. One can be proud of being a member of a community and proud of their community. **Pride** within a community, especially a sporting one, is often displayed by way of a dress or formal uniform. Examples of this could be a travelling All Back Team wearing the Silver Fern or an expatriate New Zealander identifying with a Kiwi symbol. The symbols are often **boundary** identifiers also.

External contact with other swimming groups also creates pride within the group or **communal pride**. The success of its members in competition, the setting of a personal best time, or the winning of a points competition for the club all adds to the level of pride the group has. Older or more senior members who are involved in administration or who hold office take pride in activities that are not so public to the whole group. These may include a successful fund raising campaign, a well organised swimming meeting or the presentation and condition of the groups clubhouse or headquarters.

Personal and communal pride grew over time within the rank and file of the Swimming Club. This was not an overnight development however one of the byproducts of the group pride in the Club appears to be **loyalty** to the Group. In the late 1970's another swimming club in Wanganui attempted to join with the Wanganui East Group. This move was totally rejected by the Wanganui East Swimming Club and the today club still enjoys having third generation family members.

Over the years as the Club developed there was a need to establish a more unique meeting place for the Club Members. The pool they used was a public pool and only at certain times was it restricted to members of the Swimming Club Group. For the majority of the time it was also open to and possibly being used by the public. The general public were viewed as individuals who used the pool but were not part of the Swimming Club Community. They did however perform a very important function, albeit by default. They were still an aggregate that was able to supply new members to the Swimming Club.

The leaders of the Swimming Club came up with a very predicable solution to the need. That was to build a Clubhouse for the exclusive use of the Swimming Club Community. By doing this they created their own **unique meeting place** or turangawaewae and a place where a formal record of their **history** could be stored and viewed by members of the group.

The Clubhouse or Headquarters whether it be a Sporting Club or Interest group appears to be a basic necessity for any group or community of this nature. It provides a focal point for the group and an opportunity for the group to be identified by outsiders. It is also, in a unique way, a communication vehicle. Messages, notices and results can be displayed in a central place. These are described by Tyson (1998 2n edition pp79) as one way communication by being placed on a notice board for all members to read but not requiring feedback. Trophies can be displayed recounting or communicating the groups **history** to all members. In modern times the Clubhouse can also be a base for a Telephone, Computer or Fax to ensure that the wider or far off members of the group can successfully be included in the groups activities.

As the club progressed through the years it found that it was necessary not only to have a President as their leader but a full committee as a governing group. The requirement for **activists** to co-ordinate the **activities** became greater. This was further reinforced when other swimming related interests started to emerge from within the group.

A Diving group was set up as was a Waterpolo Team, and Learn to Swim Classes. All are part of the wider Swimming club group but it gave rise to groups within a community. In a sense the Swimming Club was starting to form a "community of communities" (176.204, Book of Readings, Richard Thompson, Group Loyalties and National Unity pp116). The Governing Committee became a group itself within the Swimming Club and for the swimming club to survive it had to work effectively as a group in it own right. Despite the myriad of different groups within the Swimming Club Group all were still part of the mother group and have a collective past. They all identify with their sub-groups but with the mother group overall. In other words all members were **aware** of their Mother Club as the Wanganui East Swimming Club and the sub groups they may belong to.

The identification with a mother group, and sub groups, is also found outside Sporting and Interest groups. It can be also seen in the gang forum. It is demonstrated succinctly during the interview conducted by Bill Payne (Gangs - Old Dogs And Chinamen pp92 & 93) when the interviewee is speaking of his gang patch.

*Mongrel Mob [name] is on top and that's where it belongs,  
where we are from is secondary. Okay, were from  
Wellington and we're proud of that.*

Here the Mongrel Mob are speaking of their Chapters spread around New Zealand but are clearly stating their first and foremost allegiance is to the Mongrel Mob. Swimming Club Members may be on the Diving or Waterpolo teams but they are first and foremost members of the Swimming Club.

In conclusion the swimming club selected is a group that typifies any functional group looked at whether it be a swimming club, rugby club, interest group or even a gang. The duration or history of the group in this case stretches over decades but this is not unique to the Wanganui East Swimming Club. Long established successful groups can be seen world over. The Swimming Clubs history has built up over the years but history starts accumulating the moment a group forms. The culture of the group is Swimming but it can be anything that members have in common and identify with, as is the case with Rugby Clubs or Ethnic Gangs. All groups have leaders or activists to co-ordinate things, The Swimming Club is no different. Boundaries may be set formally by way of a fee or non formally and are recognised by both insiders and outsiders of the group. The Club or groups success engenders both communal and individual pride within the group. Pride in the group also gives rise to loyalty.

Although membership of communities are never static and the Wanganui East swimming Club is no exception. They will gather new members, new activists. Some members will become inactive or drift off, but it is not uncommon for individuals who have become inactive to years later still identify themselves as Swimmers with the Club, Rugby Players or Mongrel Mob Members. The above mentioned characteristics are ever present when looking at all successful groups and could be identified in all groups if a "snap shot" was taken at any time during the groups life.

**REFERENCES**

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