The Community Compass

An aid to orientation for community projects.

(Beta-Version, 07-06-2018, Feedback welcome)

Abstract

The Community Compass gives a simple and easy-to-apply answer to the question: What makes communitarian projects successful? To which aspects shall they pay attention during their development?

With the seven aspects of the Community Compass: Individuals, Community, Intention, Structure, Practice, Harvest and World, all relevant fields for the development of communitarian projects are identified.

Individuals and Community are the conscious core of the Community Compass, they are the key for project development for communitarian projects.

With this easy scheme, the community compass opens up a multitude of possible appliances, to analyse and work on processes in groups, to enhance consciousness and constructive development in groups and community projects.

Its focus is any group that is collectively and voluntarily approaching any issue – so its main focus are community groups, political and social initiatives and associations. It can as well be applied for businesses with a strong idealistic and collective background.

Background Motivation

„When we are dreaming alone it is only a dream. When we are dreaming with others, it is the beginning of reality.“ (Don Helder Camara)

The „Community Compass“ has been developped out of the experience of two of the founders of Sieben Linden Eccovillage, one of Europes best-known ecovillages. Eva Stützel and Martin Stengel have not only shaped this project but as well worked as community consultants for many other projects. This is why we know out of our own experience: If many people dream together, this can be an important contribution for the development of our society and the beginning of a new reality.

But it‘s not only ecovillages that contribute to a change of consciousness in society. Any successful project of civil engagement, most of the pioneers of change, are projects on which people participate in their free time. We can look at citizens‘ energy cooperatives, neighbourhood initiatives, transition initiatives or cohousing project, and many other social and civil initiatives – they are all communitarian projects. And often we have to experience that projects that got started with the enthusiasm of many people and develop beautiful ideas, without ever reaching to a focus and a stage of realisation – or they blossom shortly and then they vanish again, without any sustainable influence on society. Nevertheless, some of them are long-lasting and have consequences as Margret Mead is framing it:

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„Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.“

What makes the difference? When do communitarian projects succeed? When do they really contribute to the „great transformation“ of our society? How can the development of these projects be a contribution for anyone personally and for the global change?

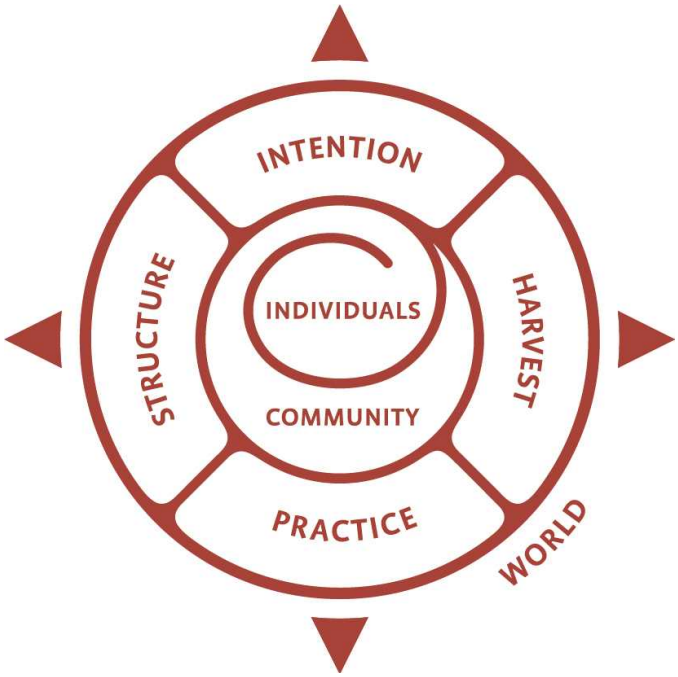
The Model

The Community Compass is an aid for orientation for community projects. It shows the essence of the experience of many projects. It points out, which aspects are important for realising community projects in a sustainable and successful way. The Community Compass identifies seven aspects that are crucial for this. These seven aspects serve as a memory-aid and framework for analysing the project and for identifying and better understanding pro-
blems in the community development.

Seven Aspects

The seven crucial aspects for community development are:

Individuals, Community, Intention, Structure, Practice,
Harvest and World.



The main assumption is that successful community projects
need attention, competence and conscious focussing on all
hese seven aspects. The duality of the Individuals in

Community has a central position in the model.

All aspects are important and influence each other, but weak-
nesses in the other aspects than Individuals and Community
can be irrelevant for some projects or can be compensated by
the other aspects, whereas weaknesses in the fields of individuals and community will almost always weaken the project as a whole.

The key for the success of communitarian projects is to see Individuals and Community not as opposites that are in competition with each other, but as two sides of the same coin that mutually complete and strengthen each other.

How does community as an assembly of many individuals function? What is Community in the 21st century. How can we develop the strengths of the individuals for the sake of community? And how can community support the growth of the Individuals? How can separation and conflict, individual

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and collective crises be perceived constructively and be solved?

These are central questions if the duality of Individuals in Community shall unfold itself. Through a successful synergetic solution of this core-questions, the activists of a project gain motivation and connectedness. The project starts to blossom and has a stronger impact than before. But this duality is not always unfolding positively. It needs conscious attention and fostering, in all stages of the project and always when looking at the other aspects.

Some more words about the seven aspects:

Individuals

The core concept of the aspect of Individuals is the fact that thriving Communities need conscious individuals. They need individuals that are working on their personal growth, individuals that are able to see difficulties and conflict not (only) as annoying obstacles on their personal path, but as well as chances to learn through the feedback of the environment.

Community

Concerning the aspect of Community, the most important message of the Community Compass is that the **spirit of Community needs active fostering.** It's important to work on creating a community culture of trust and respect. Places for deep sharing of personal experiences are a very important tool for creating this community culture. To learn methods and approaches that serve it, like non violent communication, process work, the circle way, is an important step to do in community development. A conscious dealing with conflicts and with the questions of rank and power are important.

Intention

Any project that wants to have an impact, needs to be **clear about its intention**. People that get together for realising a project should be aware of the fact if they really share the same intention. Therefore, a concise and clear formulation of the goals that wants to be reached. A short and catchy sentence, that every community member will remember it, is an important contribution for the success of the project. But for motivating the right people to join the project it needs more than this concise formulation of the goal – it needs a description of details of the pursued goal and of the cornerstones of the project. By cornerstones I mean a formulation of what contributions or behavior are expected by all members.

Structure

A community project needs to give itself a structure that suits to its intention. It is important to be clear about how decisions are made, who has the right to decide what on which basis. Transparency of the power structure itself and of the meetings and decisions is important. A very crucial aspect for communities that share houses and or land together is the question of property and legal organisation. In the long run, it is impossible to establish a community of members with equal rights on the property of one member of the community (or a subgroup of members). This is a very important experience from many communities that is often neglected – and it has lead to many very difficult situations in community projects, so the most important single advice that can be given to projects

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that want to start a community is: Community housing projects need communal legal organisations that own the land. For the sake of a community, it is easier to live in the house or on the property of someone external to the community than to live on the property that belongs to one member of the community.

Practice

The field of Practice is a vast one and therefore, I will not say much about it at this stage. It contains all the work that is needed to get the project „on the ground" - this includes the physical work as well as finding the place and organising the finances.

Harvest

Some readers might be puzzled by the aspect of „Harvest". This aspects contains everything that has to do with reflecting and enjoying the results of what has been done. It is an important aspect that is often neglected by activists projects. It encompasses the evaluation of ongoing and finished projects, the appreciating of the contributions of everyone and as well the moments of celebration when an important step has been reached. The aspect of Harvest is important as it prevents burnout and is an important contribution to the well-being of the group. Especially in any voluntary groups, the members take the work of the others for granted, as they themselves work voluntary as well. But voluntary works needs recognition! And it is important that the group members give this recognition to each other consciously and honestly and that they appreciate everyones contribution.

World

All projects happen in this world and usually want to have an impact on it. Therefore, it is important to position the project within society and to look for partners and networks. This will prevent from „stewing in one's own juice" and will strengthen the project.

To work as much as possible in cooperation with all potential stakeholders and to gain them as partners rather than to see them as opponents is one of the crucial messages of the Community Compass concerning the topic of „World".

Applications of the Community Compass

Starting a project

The Community Compass proposes a logical pathway how to proceed when starting a project. This pathway leads through the four „project-aspects" Intention, Structure, Practice and Harvest, and bears in mind that through all the stages of the project, the active caring for Individuals and Community and the positioning in Society is important. To read more about this pathway, check the article „Starting a Community with the Community Compass" (so far only available in German, sorry!)

Increasing awareness about strengths and weaknesses of the group

The Community Compass serves to increase the awareness of the groups of what they strengths and weaknesses are. It can help to identify the weaknesses and take action to change this. There is

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a self-evaluation-tool for groups that can be used for this purpose. But even more important than the quantitative results of any tools are the conversations within the group about its strengths and weaknesses. This is the most important step for improvement.

Understanding group dynamics

The Community Compass can help to understand and better deal with group dynamics. The simple truth of Community Compass is that for realising the project it needs competences in all these fields. And as no one is a specialist in all these fields, groups need these people with different focusses. Knowing that may help a group to better deal with diversity in the group. Many conflicts arise out of the fact that people who are good in one aspect of the Compass don't understand why the other aspects get so much attention. All projects can tell stories about conflits between the practitioners and the community builders or the visioneers, the structure-people and the people that are caring for celebration, and so on. When the Compass opens the eyes for the fact that exactly these different competences is what the group needs, it explains and relieves some of the conflicts and changes the group dynamic.

Assigning Roles as „Custodian of the Aspects"

One possible application of the Compass is it to assign roles as custodians of the different aspects. This assures that the aspects are not forgotten and might give important roles to people that so far were rather ignored with their competences.

Background for any project development, coaching and facilitation

The way we use the Community Compass most is not an explicit application of the Compass as a tool. But knowing about the importance of the seven aspects is a good background for any project development and facilitation of group processes in Community projects. It can serve as a guide for orientation for the supervisor of community projects as well as for the activists themselves.

In our seminars, we use it as a background for collegial coaching. One person with a problem formulates her problem and describes the background and the peers work on finding solutions with the Community Compass as an inspiration for analysis and intervention.

Invitation for Feedback

The Community Compass is not a static piece of wisdom. It is a systematic visualisation of the essence of my and my colleague's experience as consultants for communities. As is pointed out in the compass, openness for learning and integration of new experiences is an important part of any project, so it is as well an important part of our future path with the compass. That's why I am curious to learn about your experiences with it and to read your feedback about it.

Feel free to share these experiences with me: eva.stuetzel@gemeinschaftskompass.de.
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