

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE COMMUNITY LEADERS

M. PASCARU

*“1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia and Școala Superioara de Afaceri (Superior School of Business)
Alba Iulia, 2500 Alba Iulia, Romania*

Abstract

The study presents, at the beginning, some old modalities of identification of the community leaders: the establishing of the communication and prestige lines (Charles P. Loomis) and the application of a sociometric test (C. H. Proctor and R. Mucchielli). It is said that a leader with a community behaviour insufficiently acknowledged is identified using these methods. The author proposes the identification of the community leaders based on the score obtained at the level of community matrix (knowledge, communication and common action in the community). Using this new method, the leaders specialized in knowledge, communication, and common action or in all these put together could be identified. To identify these leaders and to see which are the laggards in a community, the author realized a series of investigations in some Romanian localities. The study also presents some of the results of this investigation.

Key words: community leaders, community matrix.

1. The Objectives of this Paper and its Motivation

The main objective of this study is the presentation of a new methodology of identification of the local communities leaders (local leaders or community leaders). Many studies demonstrated that in the action of community expansion or development we cannot disregard these leaders. They could influence and mobilize the community in the direction wanted by us or the direction required by a certain development project. Therefore, they are also called *leaders of influence*. Only these leaders could be identified by the methodology used until now. They are leaders *generally speaking* and we can not know anything about their certain behaviours specific to the community life: how much and what they know about the other members of the community, how frequently they communicate with the others, how frequently they participate to common actions along with the other members of the community. In reality, even the simple observation of the life of a community demonstrates us that more leaders specialized of the community could exist. A person that knows almost everything about the others, although he/she does not communicate directly with many persons and doesn't participate to common actions might exist. Likewise, a person very communicative but less interested in what others do, promoting communication only for personal purposes might exist. Finally, a person that participates along with many peoples to common actions although he/ she is not “omniscient” or “talkative” could exist. Of course, a person with all these qualities might exist: knows almost everything about the others through frequently communications and participations to the common actions. Such a member of the community, we observed, could be or not the leader of influence, the one discovered using the old methodology of identification of the local leaders. Therefore, in this paper we will present firstly the main conquests of the old methodology (Loomis, 1961, Mucchielli –1976). Then we will present our propositions based on a new methodology- the methodology of the construction of the community matrix.

In Romania we have a saying: “Everybody knows football and agriculture”. We will try to simplify the originality of our method using an example taken from the football game. If a manager wants to organize a team taking into account also the relations between the players, using the old methods of sociometry only the captain could be chosen, without knowing which is the most appreciated full back, halfback or attacker. Our methodology allows scarcely the emphasising of the place occupied by every type of player. On the “community terrain”, the players will be specialised in knowledge, communication or common action. There is another fundamental difference between the old methodology and the methodology proposed by us: the old methodology “measures” the intensity of certain relations more or less conscious (sympathy or antipathy) while we propose a direct “measurement” of the behaviours that lead to sympathy or antipathy: the knowledge of the others and its level, the frequency of communication or the frequency of common action.

A new approach is necessary because, based on our observations, in the community life we can meet problematic situations as: □ the leaders of influence, identified by the old methodology, are not always also the most informed peoples in the community; □ the leaders of influence are not always the most communicative persons in the community; the leaders of influence are not always also the individuals most disposed to common actions along with the other members of the community. Even the simplest fact that he/she is a leader could isolate him/ her somehow.

2. Old Techniques of Identification of the Community Leaders

Since the 60's, the American sociologist Ch. P. Loomis (1961) took into consideration *the prestige or the social status* of a person in a community and *its position in the communication system* among the factors that influence the success of “the action groups”. Further, the American sociologist focuses on communication, which is defined as the *process by which the information circulates within a group and the opinions and the attitudes of the group about the information are formed and modified*. It is said that familial groups and the groups of friends are of particular importance because for the most people the communication network is incomplete without these ones, each individual being a member of a group of friends or a group of relatives. There is an extremely interesting observation of the American sociologist: *probable less than half of the people in a community, especially where there are people with low incomes, can be directly informed through the communications issued by the official organisations*. On the other hand it is said that few people are in relationships based on face-to-face communication with more than two or three dozens of persons. This way the individuals that are key members of the informal groups and are contacted constantly by the other members, they are in powerful positions. They can influence the others by giving information or formulating, distorting or retaining the information. Sometimes these key persons have also a high prestige but not always. In fact, their power is based on relationships of proximity and influence, which they have with low status groups whom prestige persons cannot become without their help. Based on these considerations, Ch. P. Loomis infers that in order to work efficiently, the “action groups” in a community (for example, promoters of a project or an innovation) must know both *the prestige system* and *the communication one*.

In the locality studied, Southtown, like most of the rural regions where the chance to go-up or down on the social scale is reduced, the most groups are formed of family friends` groups, in Ch. P. Loomis opinion. The American researchers, who participated in the experiment described by Loomis, relate that, when they started their investigations in Southtown the people were suspicious and unwilling to give information. Later, they understood that the most important member of the family, the man with the higher prestige, left to meet the local officials. Fortunately, the researchers explained their mission to the officials and the leader

came back in the community with a changed opinion that their mission was organized for the well being of the village. In a few hours, the leader communicated his own conclusions and answer through the network of communication, without leaving his farm. The attitude of the community about the investigators was changed from suspicion to active co-operation, in just a few hours. The people who “were not at home” first, became friendly and they often sent their children to invite the researchers to visit them. Using the data on the map, the Extensive Agricultural Service, a service specialized in promoting the innovations in United States of America, invited a group selected from the community to participate to a demonstration of improving the farm practices. The leaders of the groups of family’s friends were the ones selected to see the demonstration.

Next day, the promoters visited some of the families just to talk to them and find out how many of them knew about the demonstration to which only the leaders participated. All the investigated families had knowledge about this, with no exception.

Ch. P. Loomis remarks that in order to understand the process of transformation, one must know the prestige and communication information systems of the community. In the stable communities, there are information structures, more or less powerful, which must be taken into consideration before any major change be done. When the change includes programmes like reorganisation of the local school or building a hospital, all that leaders of prestige could do nothing else but to approve or disapprove or to organize a campaign pro or contra that change. Sometimes, the leaders say that the change is good or bad based on different reasons. Usually, in moments like these, they create their own motives so as to match with the people’s reasons. But, irrespective of method, active or passive, used by the prestige leaders, they will use the communication system drawn on the map to extend their standpoints. Ch. P. Loomis concludes that, usually, in rural regions, action groups must have direct contacts both with the leaders of prestige and with those of the family friends’ groups.

In his paper about the investigation in the rural regions (1976), R. Mucchielli, in the chapter “Psychological File”, mentioned among its assignments the determination of the informal networks of communication. The French sociologist thinks that this might be realized by using the *method of observation* (□ Who meets who? □ Who visits who? □ Who gives the news or the rumours to someone else? □ To whom does he says the news that he found out?) or using an adjusted sociometric questionnaire which may locate the leaders or the less appreciated ones.

R. Mucchielli adds to this work a sociometric questionnaire proposed by C. H. Proctor in *Sociometry Reader*, volume edited by J. L. Moreno (1960): □ *If you are ill, who are the first persons that come to see you?* □ *what families visit you more often?* □ *whom do you trust and who are the persons that you share your personal worries (difficulties)?* □ *from whom do you borrow money, if necessary?* □ *who is invited at your receptions, excepting your family members?* □ *if someone in your family dies, who is the first person that finds out, excepting the members of your family?* □ *among all the persons you know, who is the most capable to deal with the village problems?* □ *who has your notice for the mayor, general counsellor and official authorities function, representing the average of the villagers in a committee, in case of catastrophe?* Three names are asked for each question. The totality of answers enables us to establish the *sociogram*.

The leaders have an important social role: on the one hand they are the agents of a double information process (from the village to the society and from the society to the village) and, on the other hand, they are the opinion leaders and this makes them promoters of the innovations.

Probable, the sociogram technique, or a similar one, stayed at the basis of the hierarchies of Ch. P. Loomis. The American sociologist was reserved about the presentation of his methodology.

3. A New Methodology of Identification of the Local Leaders: the Position in the Community Matrix

3.1. *The community matrix and its construction. Theoretical basis*

Among the theoretical bases of our investigations in Apuseni Mountains area, the definition of the human information as a product of the *knowledge* objectified by *communication* and destined to underlie the *human action* exists: the knowledge (acquaintance), communication and common action (Pascaru, 1987). When the human activity is reported to community, we consider we could talk about community matrix. The community matrix can show us to what distance a human community is on the axis between a society of inter-knowledge and a mass society.

The French sociologist Henri Mendras assumed the distinction between the society of inter-knowledge and the mass society: Moving on two plans of analyses of reality, we can define globally a society of inter-knowledge and define the types of social rapports, opposing the human-to-human rapports, or personal, and distance or functional rapports. In a small village in the 19th century, everybody knows everybody. The number of persons is relatively limited and all these persons are born to live together till death. That is why such a society is defined as a society of inter-knowledge. Each member of the community knows all the aspects of the personality of all other members. But in the mass society, an individual knows some individuals in the mass and knows just a part of the aspects connected to these individuals. These sentences are homologues: in a traditional society everybody is known and all the aspects of each individual are known, in mass society only a small number of peoples is known and only certain aspects of personality and social life of known peoples are known (Mendras, 1989 [1967]).

We considered that every rural community (more or less delimited administratively) is on a certain step of modernity (MS), of assimilation of the elements specific to the industrial society or, after H. Mendras, specific to the mass society, and a particularly community step (CS) corresponds to it, i.e. of inter-knowledge, communication and common action.

Based on the above mentioned, numerous observational elements lead us in time to the hypothesis that the modernization process of the rural communities is associated to – *a general decrease of the level of the community (interknowledge - intercommunication – common action)* and – *a continuous weakening of the structure of this matrix, in the sense that the interknowledge is realized mostly by communication than common action*. The two aspects seem very connected, i.e. the more we climb the steps of the community matrix the more the distance between the realization of interknowledge and the realization of common action increases.

3.2. *The community matrix and its construction. Methodological tools*

In order to realize our investigations we proposed a short questionnaire that looks at: □ to what extent do the people questioned know some aspects of other members' life and activity in that community; □ to what extent they establish communication relationships; □ to what extent do they participate together at the achievement of some actions (Pascaru, 1990). We referred to all the three elements of the *community matrix* (knowledge, communication and common action). In order to test the **inter-acquaintance** we took into consideration: □ the modality of identifying the members of community by the subject questioned (five members of community for each subject questioned, three of them having the same sex as the subject and two of them having opposite sex), granting a certain score for each modality of identification as follows: A: 1) identification by name: 9 points (p); 2) identification by name and nickname (sobriquet): 7 p; 3) identification by name, nickname and first name of the husband or wife: 5 p; 4) identification by name, nickname and husband's or wife's first

name and children's first name: 3 p; 5) identification using the above mentioned data and another biographical details: 1 p; 6) non-realization of the identification: 0 p. B: The knowledge of some aspects of members' life and activity which the subjects were questioned about, granting a point to each correct answer to the following situations: age, studies occupation and work place if the persons has been sick recently; if the person sold or bought anything special recently. In order to evaluate the communication we stopped upon the data when the latest discussion between the subject questioned and each of other five members of community took place; granting the following score: the discussion took place in the last week: 144 p; the discussion took place in the last month: 36 p; the discussion took place in the last three months: 12 p; the discussion took place in the last year: 3 p; the discussion took place in the last three years: 1 p; they never discussed: 0 p. In order to evaluate *the common action*, we have requested the subjects to specify the date when they were last involved in an action together with each of those five members of the community. For each variant of answer, we gave a score, as follows: the action took place in the last week: 144 p; the action took place in the last month: 36 p; the action took place in the last three months: 12 p; the action took place in the last year: 3 p; the action took place the last three years: 1 p; they have never operated together: 0 p. The maximum score that may be obtained, on categories of issues, is as follows:

- *inter-knowledge – identification*: 45 p;
- *the knowledge of some aspects*: 30 p;
- *total knowledge*: 45 p
- *communication*: 720 p
- *common action*: 720 p.

For blurring the difference between the maximum score at the inter-knowledge level and the maximum score of communication and common action, we propose the use of an index given by the *relation between the real score obtained by the questioned subjects and the possible maximum score*. This index may have theoretically values between 0 and 1 or between 0% and 100%.

3.3. *The community matrix and its construction. Investigations and results*

In 1986, in Musca (Alba county, Romania), locality inhabited by 571 peoples in over 150 households, we questioned 24 persons, active members of the **community**. In this investigation, the following indexes were obtained in Musca:

- *knowledge*: 0.67, or 67%
- *communication*: 0.42 or 42%,
- *common action*: 0.20 or 20%.

The index of community matrix calculated as the average of knowledge, communication and action indexes: 0.43 or 43%. If we establish a decimal scale of ten steps (degrees), the appropriate step for the community matrix would be the fifth step, between 40 and 50%. Which fact is this situation due to? Why the community matrix is not situated on, let`s say, the maximum step – the tenth step? We think that a series of new factors intervene here: job, commutation, state owned trade etc. They define a certain modernity step of the community we have studied. In our research we have used only an indicator – the *jobs* of those questioned – establishing that the weight of the modern occupations (workers, trade agents, intellectuals) is between 40 and 50 %. If in the case of modernity we also establish a ten steps (degrees) scale, the community studied would be placed on the fifth step [*modernity step* (MS) = 5]. This finding leads us to the hypothesis that the *community step* on which a rural community is placed (CS) is given by the difference between the total number of steps (S) and *modernity step* (MS), on which that community is placed; it means:

$$CS = S - MS$$

In our case CS (the level of the community matrix) is 10 (total number of steps) minus 5 (modernity step), i.e. five –5.

In the winter of 2000 we came back with our investigations in Musca and we obtained the following index: □ inter-knowledge: 0.77 or 77%; □ communication: 0,79 or 79%; □ interaction: 0.16 or 16%. Community matrix index: □ 0.57 or 57%. We can proceed in a reverse way. Having S=10 and CS = 6; for an index of the community matrix, between 50% and 60%, we obtain the modernity step: MS = 4, *inferior to the modernity step of 1986*. From this moment on we could suppose important alterations at least on the level of occupational structure in the researched locality, in the sense of increasing the weight of population that has traditional occupations, or in other words, of the population that don't have modern occupations anymore. The increase of the number of those without modern occupations is due mainly to unemployment and the returning to traditional agricultural activities, in the circumstances of a mountain region without many technical facilities. Not even pensioners can afford to live together with their children in the city, far away from agriculture.

We could talk also about the utilization of the telephone. If in 1986 there was just one telephone in the locality (in a school), now over 75% households have a phone. In our investigation in 2000, we also took into consideration the preference for telephone conversations compared to direct conversations. The answers are displayed in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Telephone Conversations and direct Conversations (Musca, 2000)

Answer	%
I use only the phone, I don't leave home too often	7,1
I use the phone but I never avoid face to face meetings	42,8
I use the phone but I prefer face to face meetings	3,5
I have no phone	10,3
Another answer	23,7
Total	100

Those who offer „another answer” are those who have a phone, but they never use it to communicate with other inhabitants of the village, the phone being used only for communicating with relatives (kinships) in another locality. Most often those who left the locality call their parents or relatives, paying even the phone bill. However, we can say that the telephone encourages the communication within the community, and hence, people know each other through communication. The phone can also facilitate the organisation and development of a common action.

More detailed investigations we realized in Horea commune (Romania) in the summer of 1999. We took into consideration 5 localities: Horea, the centre of the commune with the same name: 234 inhabitants (94 households), Petreasa, a scattered village situated approximately 7 km of the Commune Centre: 69 inhabitants (23 households), Preluca, a scattered village, situated approximately 4 km of Commune Centre: 95 inhabitants (32 households), Teiu, situated approximately 4 km of Commune Centre: 78 inhabitants (26 households), and Trifești, a scattered village, too, situated approximately 5 km of Horea: 108 inhabitants (36 households). *Table 2* comprises the indexes of the community matrix for each locality. These results confirm one of the observations made by the Romanian sociologist George Em. Marica: „A small social unit with a low number of persons involves a

certain type of social relationships. All people know each other; they are involved in personal and close relationships. The increase number of the people of a community, irrespective of the disposition towards sociability of his members, implies the predominance of the relationships without intimacy, because the individuals cannot be any longer in touch with each other and they cannot know each other personally” (Marica, 1997[1942]: 150).

Table 2: Index of Community Matrix in Horea Commune (1999)

Locality	Matrix elements				Community step (CS)
	Knowledge	Communication	Common action	Community matrix	
Horea	0,60	0,48	0,32	0,47	5
Teiu	0,76	0,86	0,49	0,70	7
Trifesti	0,85	0,75	0,41	0,67	7
Preluca	0,87	0,71	0,46	0,68	7
Petreaşa	0,81	0,82	0,60	0,74	8

3.4. Applications of the Community Matrix for the Identification of Community Leaders

The acquaintance level, communication frequency and common action frequency will first lead to the obtaining of a score by each person investigated. Each subject of the investigation can be classified according to points obtained (between 0 and 1 or between 0% and 100% of maximum score that can be obtained), that means he or she will take a certain place in the hierarchy of persons investigated. Therefore we shall distinguish **leaders of acquaintance**, **leaders of communication** and **leaders of common action**, and also **leaders of community matrix** (that means acquaintance, communication and common action got together). For the last category we have proposed as an index the average of indexes obtained for acquaintance, communication and common action. Identically we can set the *laggards* of acquaintance, communication and common action or community matrix on the whole.

In a scientific and didactic project started in 2000 with the participation of the students of the Superior School of Business Alba Iulia, we realized investigations and analyses in a series of villages in Alba County, in Transylvania and also outside this historical area. Research was accomplished in Noslac, Rimetea, Lunca Mures, Rachita, Valtori, Oarda, Horea, Musca, Petresti and Teius – Alba county, Pintic - Cluj county, Iancu Jianu - Olt county, Aurel Vlaicu – Hunedoara county. A lot of aspects may be pointed out following our investigation. But which interests us in the context of the present research is who are the leaders identified, more definitely what is the most frequent „portrait” of leaders and laggards in the acquaintance, communication and common action in a rural community. In order to draw some lines of that portrait we take into consideration: sex, age, studies, occupation, skills and job (if in the locality of residence or outside). We shall refer to the index of participation in the community matrix (the average of acquaintance, communication and common action index). In the **Table 3** we show the distribution of leaders and laggards of acquaintance, communication and common action. We can notice: □ the leaders of acquaintance are mostly men and but the laggards of this unit are mostly men too; the difference is that leaders are elderly as a rule, many of them are pensioners, while laggards are young, high school leavers, having jobs in industry; □ this situation is the same as concerns the communication; □ in the domain of the common action, leaders are mostly women between 31-60 years old, with 10-12 grades, who work in trade and services, in the locality area; and laggards are more women of the same category of age and education (studies) but having another jobs than those of services` sector;

□ at community matrix level (acquaintance, communication, common action) as leaders there are more women aged between 30-60 years old, employees of services` sector; as laggards there are men, many young men and pensioners too.

Table 3: Distributions of Leaders and Laggards at Community Matrix Level (Total=13)

		Knowledge		Communication		Common action		Community matrix	
		Leaders	Laggards	Leaders	Laggards	Leaders	Laggards	Leaders	Laggards
Sex	Men	10	7	8	7	5	6	6	8
	Women	3	6	5	6	8	7	7	5
Age	18-30	1	6	1	4	1	2	1	5
	31-60	6	5	6	4	9	8	10	4
	>60	6	2	6	5	3	3	2	4
Grades	0 grades	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
	4-8 grades	4	3	5	4	4	6	3	4
	10-12 grades and vocational school	8	7	7	6	7	7	9	5
	>12 grades and faculty	1	2	1	2	2	0	1	2
Occupation	No job	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
	Agriculture	1	3	1	5	1	3	1	3
	Industry	2	4	1	0	1	3	0	3
	Services	2	5	4	2	6	2	7	2
	Pensioners	7	1	6	4	4	3	3	4
	Un-employed	1	0	0	2	0	2	1	1
The place of work	In locality	10	9	12	13	12	11	11	9
	Out of locality	3	4	1	0	1	2	2	4

4. Conclusions. About some Results of Application of the New Methodology of Identification of the Community Leaders and the Practical Importance of these Results

Firstly, a general observation: our investigations are not finished yet. We intend to perfect the proposed methodology and to look for new means of validation. Consequently, we do not pretend that the above-mentioned are definitive and paradigmatic. We continue by saying that a team of extension or promoting of a development project deals with more types of rural communities. First we distinguish less united communities and very united communities taking into account the relations between their members. The more united communities could be the communities with a high index of community matrix (CS). For example: Teiu, Trifesti, Preluca, Petreasa in Horea commune, in *Table 2*. These communities could be more easily to mobilize because they are also small communities, but at the same time strong traditions

could oppose the new, the innovation and the extension activity. We had the opportunity to observe that in less united communities (with a smaller index of community matrix (CS), as Musca or Horea) the traditions and conservatory traditional mentality are less present or less powerful. The activity of the teams of extension or promotion of a community development project must take into account the community they are working in. Then, every community needs its peoples. When entering a community of which unit I know on the base of the community matrix, I am interested in finding out who bought certain agricultural installation and what kind of installation. In this case we could organize an investigation. But it is more expensive than a discussion with the leader of knowledge, the one that knows almost everything about the others. This could be, following the results of our investigations, an elderly person, pensioner, with the domicile in the locality. It is more difficult to obtain such a piece of information from a young man that works in the industry, outside the locality. We will also look for a pensioner when we want a certain piece of information, for example the one about our presence in the community at a certain date, to get to as many members of the community researched as possible. But, in order to mobilize the members of the community for a meeting with us, it will be much easier to contact a middle aged woman that works in the services' area, especially commerce. Within certain limits, the same woman could help us to do all these: the discovery of data about the community members, informing the people, their mobilization within a common action. In all this time, the leader of influence, identified by old methodologies, which can be the best householder in the community, stays as reserve for the action of influencing the community members. The recognition of the plurality of leaders specialized at the level of rural community could be one of the key of the success of our actions. The perfecting of this methodology, by more ample investigations in different communities, could lead us to the a priori establishment of the leaders specialized in the human communities, without conducting expensive research every time.

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