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Making a place of their own

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1 WITHDRAWING INTO INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES

Living in rural areas grabs the popular imagination, and in many West European countries, people move from cities to the countryside (Boyle *et al.* 1998). Such migration is often motivated by the dream among city dwellers to buy a picturesque cottage situated in a scenic landscape and a closely knit rural community. In this thesis, I focus on a specific type of such migrants, namely members of intentional communities. Intentional communities are deliberately founded to provide an alternative to life in mainstream society. Their members are often inspired by ideals of going 'back-to-the-land' (Coffin & Lipsey 1981; Hill 2003; Jacob 1996; Jacob 1997; Jacob & Brinkerhoff 1986), and 'simple living' (Elgin 1981; Rastogi 2002; Shi 1985). Both literally and figuratively, intentional communities are established on the margins of society. Margins or fringes are always outside the core, or central region, as defined by the dominant elite. In this case, the focus is on rural regions as fringes of a highly urbanised society. Therefore, I begin with discussing the urban-rural migration flows within which the development of intentional communities can be positioned.

1.1 To the fringes of society

Urbanisation was a prominent impetus for migration from the Industrial Revolution onwards. Employment opportunities, housing, education, health care and other facilities contributed to the perceived attractiveness of cities (Robinson 1990). From the 1950s, however, suburbanisation became a more prominent trend. This took the shape of an 'urban flight'. People attempted to escape the 'urban nightmare' of polluted, congested, crowded and dangerous industrial cities. The rise of suburbanisation was strongly associated with quality-of-life considerations and it became a mass phenomenon after the introduction of the car as a means of transportation. However, soon a 'suburban crisis' became apparent, with problems of political fragmentation, unrestricted growth, community quality and affordability (Boyle *et al.* 1998). People felt alienated in suburbia, and preferred to live in traditional rural communities. Consequently, movements to more peripheral areas became increasingly important. This deconcentration of people from 'urban' to 'rural' areas, with an inverse relationship between population size of an area and its growth rate, has been interpreted as counterurbanisation (Berry 1976; Champion 1989; Cloke 1985; Mitchell 2004; Spencer 1995; Woods 2005). Although counterurbanists are a diverse group, they are mostly associated with the middle classes (Woods 2005), and share backgrounds similar to those of suburbanists.

In periods dominated by a certain type of migration, other flows of people persist. For example, in the periods dominated by suburbanisation and counterurbanisation, migration flows towards the cities continued, for instance by farmers who could not raise a living off their land anymore. In general, since the 1970s, the share of the original (agricultural) population in rural areas has declined, and the countryside has become increasingly middle-class through processes such as counterurbanisation of the middle classes, and urbanisation of the rural population. This is not to say, however, that the original rural population has disappeared. In the Dutch context, Haartsen (2002) argued that the number and diversity of

actors who play a role in the countryside have increased from 1950 onwards. She identified 'new' groups such as former city dwellers, tourists, policy makers and conservationists. However, farmers maintain an important position. Other authors confirmed the increasingly positive perception of rural living, for example van Dam *et al*. (2002) who studied the perceptions of urban residents about rural life, and concluded that they are generally attracted to living in rural areas.

One interpretation of counterurbanisation is that it pertains to persons or households that move to rural areas, with the aim of taking up a traditionally oriented rural lifestyle. Within counterurbanisation, a specific group of anti-urbanists can be distinguished, who reject aspects of urban life, and want to live and work in a rural environment (Mitchell 2004). In the context of anti-urbanism, the group of 'classic' urban dropouts is particularly interesting. They seek a non-work life outside regular employment structures, by not working, working part-time, or in informal jobs, in relaxed surroundings (Walmsley *et al*. 1998), such as 'hippy communities' (Champion 1989). Bolton and Chalkley (1990, p.249) characterise urban dropouts as "refugees from the inner city, escaping its grime and crime", and "unconventional, anti-materialist commune members". Motives of urban dropouts for moving to the countryside are concerned with a rejection of urban culture and an 'escape' to a rural area, in which they hope to find space for their alternative lifestyles, and they are also attracted by relatively low property prices. Whereas suburbanists created attractive living spaces, counterurbanists forged a clean break with city life, through adopting an alternative lifestyle. Urban dropouts and intentional communities can be seen as extreme counterurbanists, or anti-urbanists.

Some authors argued that urban dropouts hardly exist anymore. For example, Perry *et al*. (1986) did not consider the urban dropout as relevant in their different case studies on counterurbanisation. Based on survey data in France, Wales and Scotland, they stated that this 'hippy' type of migrant has gradually disappeared after the 1960s, and that counterurbanist settlers are mostly middle-class, middle-aged, continue a cosmopolitan lifestyle, work hard, but enjoy a more leisurely lifestyle, rather than a hippy life of leisure. Hetherington (1998), however, revisited the phenomenon of urban dropouts and termed migration in the 1960s not as a time-restricted 'fashion' or trend, but as the emergence of alternative lifestyles and countercultures. Indeed, his study demonstrated that, even though hippy communes have largely disappeared since the 1970s, new communities of urban dropouts have begun to emerge, predominantly based on ecological beliefs and religious ideologies. This was confirmed by Bennett Berger (2004) in his book *The Survival of a Counterculture*, in which he discussed a viable countercultural commune in rural California, which aims at self-sufficiency.

Although intentional communities used to choose rural locations, also because of relatively low land prices, currently, a different trend can be discerned. As property prices in the countryside have risen dramatically in many areas, and rural areas are increasingly becoming a domain of the middle-class, fewer opportunities remain for alternative groups. Instead, the latter (re)turn to the cities, looking for affordable housing, and, for example, establish squatting communities in derelict properties (Chatterton 2002). The motivations to establish urban and rural communities diverge widely, and differentiating urban and rural communities can therefore be advocated (see, for example, Cock 1979; Fairfield 1972; Rigby 1974a). In this study, the focus is on rural communities.

1.2   Research questions

Studies on intentional communities have often focused either on religious communities that developed from the 16th century onwards, socialist communities of the 19th century, or hippy communes of the 1960s and 1970s (for example Hayden 1976; Miller 1999; Zablocki 1980). The aim of this research is to provide insight into the life courses of intentional communities located in rural areas in Northwest Europe. To achieve this, three research questions will be answered:

1   Which processes have influenced the development of the phenomenon of rural intentional communities in the Western world[1] from 1960 onwards?
2   Which categories of rural intentional communities can be distinguished in the Western world?
3   Which underlying mechanisms can help explain the life courses of different types of rural intentional communities in Northwest Europe?

The first question will be discussed in section 1.4, which provides an account of the history of intentional communities. The focus is on the Western world, as it transpired from the reviewed literature that intentional communities predominantly occur in the Western world[2]. It can perhaps be argued that the development of intentional communities requires a certain economic freedom. In other words, intentional communities can be seen as a luxury, a means through which people can realise their dreams (Infield 1955).

The second research question resulted from the fact that an empirically based categorisation, or typology, of intentional communities has been lacking. Therefore, one goal of the research was to construct such a typology. To be able to achieve this goal, a database of intentional communities was created, and the communities in the database were asked to fill out a survey form. The construction of the typology and the resulting types are discussed in chapters 2 and 3 respectively. In the first two questions, the research area is the Western world, as initial literature study suggested that the development path of intentional communities in this region is similar. I undertook to test the validity of this assumption, by comparing the prevalence of different types of communities on the different continents (see chapter 3).

To answer the third research question, the use of the life course concept needs some clarification, as it is usually applied to individuals. "Life course research focuses on how social processes such as the family, education, employment, health, and migration domains are structured over the individual life span" (Mills 2000, p.47). The concept of transition is central in the life course approach (Boyle *et al.* 1998). Typically, the creation of an ideal life-path is avoided, and an infinite number of different life courses allowed. In this study, the life courses of intentional communities are the subject of study. By means of life course analysis, transitions such as origin, periods of growth, decline, transformation, disappearance, and continuity can be analysed. The perceptions and experiences of the members of the community to which they belong contribute to the dynamics in the life course of that community. Essential elements are the sense of place, and norms and values that individual members derive from their community. Recording accounts of the

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[1] The Western world comprises Europe, North America, and Oceania, where Oceania is defined as encompassing Australia and New Zealand.
[2] This is not to say that there are no intentional communities outside the Western world. Examples of non-Western communities are *kibbutzim* in Israel, and temple communities in countries such as India and China.

experiences of individual members in various types of intentional communities provided insight in the life course of intentional communities. Conceptually, the focus is on communities, identities, ruralities, and social exclusion (see also sections 1.6 and 1.7). Through the insights gained, mutual understanding and tolerance between intentional communities and mainstream society can be enhanced (Shenker 1986), which may contribute to creating a society in which diversity is valued.

Northwest Europe was chosen as the study area for case study because of the relatively large concentration of communities found there, especially when compared with North America. The aim of the case study was to explain the occurrence of the phenomenon of intentional communities in itself. Consequently, the third research question involves a return to the first, thus integrating the different chapters and validating the results of the study.

1.3   Outline of the thesis

The remainder of this chapter provides a conceptual discussion on intentional communities which serves as the basis for the thesis. In section 1.4, the history of intentional communities is sketched. From this history, certain conceptual issues arise, as the aims of intentional communities differ. Therefore, the discussion of the historical background is followed by a conceptualisation of intentional communities in section 1.5. Sections 1.6 and 1.7 deal with the concepts that transpired from the case study as the most relevant, i.e. ruralities, identities and social exclusion. In chapter 2, the methodology of the study is described. Subsequently, chapter 3 discusses the typology of intentional communities that was created, based on survey data of communities in the Western world. Chapters 4 to 6 contain the results of the case study that was undertaken after establishing the typology. Nine communities in Northwest Europe were selected for in-depth case study research. In the chapters about the cases, everyday life in the communities is related to the concepts of ruralities, identities, and social exclusion. The cases are treated in three chapters. In chapter 4, two religious communities are discussed. Chapter 5 examines three ecological and two communal groups. Communal and ecological communities are discussed in the same chapter, because of the similar relations that were found between everyday practices and theory. The subjects of chapter 6 are two practical communities. Each of the chapters on the case study contains sections on the communities' ideologies and identities, organisational structure, and their position in mainstream society. Finally, chapter 7 consists of conclusions and discussion. However, to gain insight into the current situation, attention is first directed at the historical background within which intentional communities have developed over the years.

1.4   A short history of intentional communities

The existence of intentional communities strongly varies over time and place. In the Western world, various characteristic periods in the formation of intentional communities can be distinguished, as shown in Table 1.1. First, ancient communal traditions existed in the Roman Empire, such as the Essenes, a group of Judaic sectarians in Palestine in the first century BC. They attempted to escape forced assimilation into the Roman culture by withdrawing into communities. In the first century AD, early Christians also unified against ongoing Romanisation, and established small communities. These communities often had a

'common purse', and made decisions through consensus. Catholic monastic communities are a second type of community. They developed in Europe from the first century onwards, and have continued until now. The 13th century was the 'golden age' of the monastic communities. Orders such as the Franciscans, Dominicans and Carmelites were founded, and the already established Benedictines flourished. The third phase consists of heretical communities in the Middle Ages, the most important example of which is the Brotherhood of the Free Spirit in Western Europe. With the colonisation of North America, the development of intentional communities started to develop on that continent as well. In the fourth phase, spanning the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, various Protestant communities developed, such as Shakers, Hutterites and Mennonites. These religious groups were persecuted in Europe, and sought refuge mainly in North America. There, they established intentional communities, which was facilitated in the context of the North American frontier mentality of freedom and unlimited possibilities (Zablocki 1980). These religious communities are based on traditional values such as patriarchy, authority, austerity and celibacy, in response to their rejection of modernisation.

Table 1.1: Intentional communities in various eras

Phase	Community	Time period	Place
1	Sectarian & Christian	Until second century	Roman Empire
2	Monastic communities	From first century onwards	Europe, gradually spreading to the rest of the world
3	Heretical communities	12th and 13th centuries	Europe
4	Protestant communities	16th–18th centuries	Europe, North America
5	Socialist communities	Early 19th century	Europe, North America
6	Anarchistic communities	Late 19th century	
7	(Hippy) communes	1960s and 1970s	Europe, North America and Oceania
8	Cohousing communities & eco-villages	From 1990s onwards	Europe, North America and Oceania

Source: Based on Zablocki (1980)

Fifth, in the early 19th century, secular communities developed. They were based on socialism as a protest against industrial society, and inspired by the ideas of Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Étienne Cabet in particular. Owen, for example, created *New Harmony*, a community emphasising education, science, and communal living. His goal was to empower the working class, which would ultimately result in an egalitarian society. Many communities were inspired by this example. Almost all of these communities proved to be short-lived, and disintegrated after internal conflicts (Pitzer 1997a). By the end of the 19th century, a new 'wave' of communities based on politically leftist ideals developed, inspired by anarchists such as Peter Kropotkin and Leo Tolstoy (see chapter 6). Their members were very idealistic, and unwilling to compromise their ideals, which resulted in conflicts about the contents and practical performance of the founding ideology. Similar to their socialist counterparts, most of these communities only existed for a brief period of time. In view of the preceding, it seems that communities based on religious values such as monasteries and protestant communities enjoy longevity more than secular communities

such as socialist and anarchistic communities. This was confirmed by studies carried out by Kanter (1972) and Sosis (2000). The current study joins this debate, because it intends to explain why some communities are able to survive, where others have failed in that respect. Through focusing on the life course of different communities, factors that enhance or limit their continuity can be identified.

After a period of little communal development, an expansive phase in the development of intentional communities was evident in the (hippy) communes that were founded from 1960 onwards (Schehr 1997). Schehr (1997) estimated that only in the United States, more than two thousand communities were established. Their members were young, educated people who felt alienated in society, rejected its cultural norms and values such as consumerism, and wanted to live more 'free' lives (Miller 1999). This resulted in a wide range of communities, for example focusing on spirituality, a 'meaningful' existence, self-sufficiency, reconnecting with nature, sustainability, or socialism. An often-shared characteristic was the use of drugs in these communities (Miller 1999). Furthermore, the members were often politically active, and part of a countercultural movement. They demonstrated for example against poverty, social and economic inequality and the Vietnamese War (Melville 1972). A well-known example of a hippy community is the Findhorn Foundation, which was established in 1962. A central element is a life in touch with nature, inspired by spiritual values (Hawken 1975). This is expressed by growing organic vegetables and fruit, communal meditation, and giving courses and workshops in meditation and other spiritual activities (Findhorn Foundation 2006).

The most recent phase in the development of intentional communities can be discerned from the early 1990s, and is characterised by two different types of communal living: cohousing and eco-villages. The emergence of these communities can be related to the increasing distinction of postmodern characteristics in society. Harvey (1989) identified ephemerality, discontinuity, fragmentation, and chaos as distinguishing attributes of postmodernism. A common denominator is the lack of a universal 'truth'. Similarly, according to Dear (2000, p.25), postmodernism is characterised by a "*fragmentation* of traditions, fashions and trends" (original emphasis). Different identities, together with a reality consisting of various life-worlds, become increasingly accepted. The development of communities that withdraw from mainstream society is acknowledged by a postmodern society, because these communities are seen as representing postmodern attributes such as fragmentation and differentiation. People with the same ideas or features can contact each other, form groups and withdraw from mainstream society to various extents. Although this also took place in the past, as shown in the preceding discussion, postmodern society has been more tolerant and accommodation toward developments such as intentional communities. An illustrative example of the 'mainstream' interest in intentional communities is the Danish community Friland (Freeland), which is a 'reality' television show and an established intentional community at the same time. In Friland, people attempt to live in a community with a minimal impact on the environment. The progress of the community members is recorded and broadcast on television, radio and internet by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (Danish Broadcasting Corporation 2006). This may reflect an interest in the 'exotic', as well as a certain acceptance towards intentional communities in society.

According to Poldervaart (2001), the 1990s communities demonstrate various features of postmodernity. A first trait is uncertainty with respect to the future rather than hopeful idealism, for instance with regard to the environment. Furthermore, a rejection of fixed

group identities and standard ideas, and an increasing focus on the diversity between people are postmodern characteristics. Within these general trends, two kinds of intentional communities developed in particular: cohousing and eco-villages. Cohousing is a way of communal living that originated in Denmark and the Netherlands in the 1970s, and gradually spread to other countries in the Western world. By living in cohousing communities, people attempt to unite the home as a private place with the home as a place rooted in a community (Lindemann 2000). Many cohousing communities explicitly aim to be socially diverse communities, and for example attempt to include ethnic minorities (Paiss 1995). There are also cohousing communities for specific groups, such as elderly people or single parents. Cohousing communities attempt to practise more practical and social lifestyles, which is realised for example through communal dinners in a common house. The process of setting up a cohousing community is characterised by a high degree of participation of all potential members. The underlying idea is that people who have been involved in the creation of a community will feel more at home in it, and they will be more committed to it (McCamant *et al.* 1994). Summarising, cohousing communities serve to provide their members with practical and social homes. An eco-village can be described as a communal development in which people attempt to live in harmony with both nature and humans (Bunker *et al.* 2001). For example, they strive to grow their own - organic - food, build their own houses, and use renewable energy. With their focus on limiting their impact on the natural environment, eco-villages resemble some of the hippy communes of the 1960s. In the next section, more general similarities and differences between intentional communities are presented by conceptualising intentional communities.

1.5 Conceptualising intentional communities

In this section, intentional communities are conceptually contextualised. To begin with, the concept of community is defined, followed by an elaborate definition of intentional community. Subsequently, liminality and heterotopia are introduced, as they provide relevant alternative approaches of viewing intentional communities. The final part of the section briefly discusses the concept of utopian community, as this is closely related to intentional communities.

1.5.1 Intentional communities

Members of intentional communities are united in their quest for 'community'. As the meaning of 'community' is not unambiguous, the various meanings of the concept are discussed in the current section. When conceptualising community, the classic distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* by Tönnies (1887) should be recognised, because it has been used extensively to differentiate between community and society respectively. In a *Gemeinschaft*, people are profoundly linked, whereas in a *Gesellschaft* they are not. The most intimate relationships among people can be found in a *Gemeinschaft*. Tönnies cited the bonds between mother and child, spouses, and siblings. He further compared these relationships with a village community, where people are bound together through their relation with the land, resulting in an economically and socially unified community. Building on Tönnies' ideas, the concept of community has been further elaborated.

On a more abstract level than the traditional village society, community can be conceptualised as a social and spatial framework within which individuals interact. Social behaviour and spatial settings are therefore vital themes in research on community

development (Harper 1987; Hillery 1972; Relph 1976). A community is bound by a shared sense of belonging, shared customs and modes of thought or expression, and a distinctive identity defined by and for its members (Hale 1990; Halseth 1993). With the cultural turn in geography (see, for example, Philo 2000), the conceptualisation of communities changed from that of a stable place with people to a continuously changing, fluid, and complex social construct. Illustrative in this respect is the work by Liepins (2000a), who viewed a community as a process rather than an entity. To introduce dynamism and to reflect the non-static nature of a community, she identified four essential dimensions of community: people, practices, meanings, and spaces and structures (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Conceptualisation of community
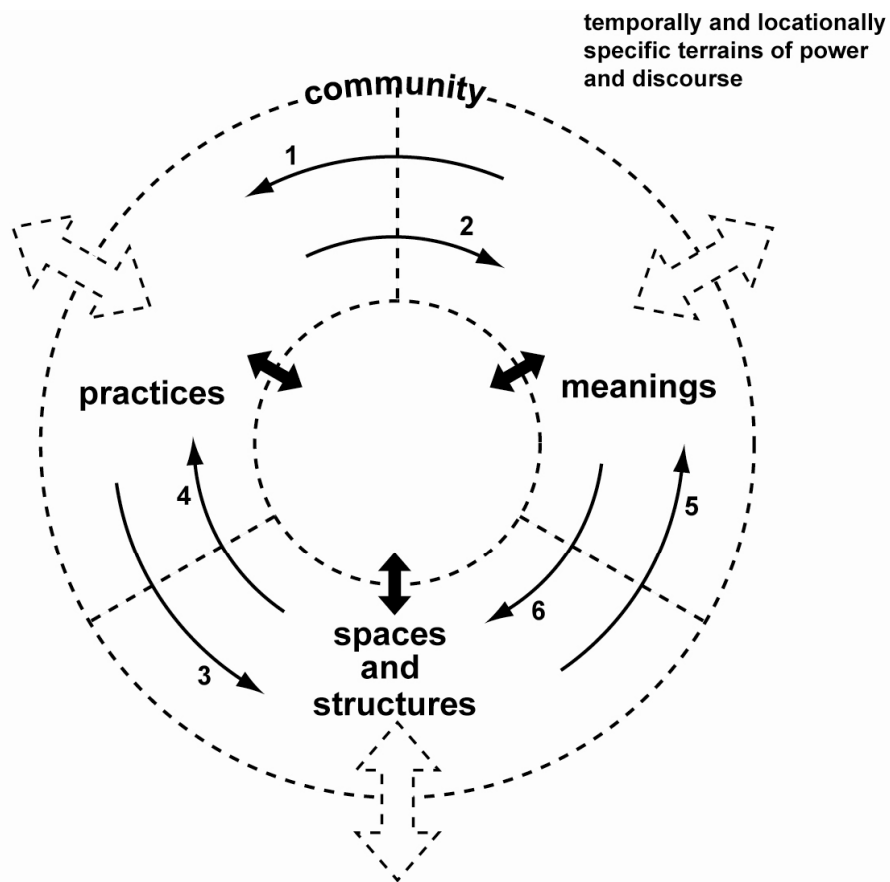
1 MEANINGS: legitimate practices
2 PRACTICES: enable the circulation and challenging of meanings
3 PRACTICES: occur in spaces and through structures, and shape those
   spaces and structures
4 SPACES AND STRUCTURES: affect how practices can occur
5 SPACES AND STRUCTURES: enable the materialisation of meanings
6 MEANINGS: are embodied in spaces and structures
Source: Liepins (2000a)

People are central to communities; the former influence and are influenced by the other three dimensions. They are connected through the shared meanings they attribute to a community. These meanings of communities are dynamic and continuously (re)constructed through changes in people, practices, spaces and structures. As such, meanings can be seen as the shared identities of the community members. Practices are the activities people undertake to construct their community lives in a meaningful way. Spaces and structures are the physical and psychological boundaries of the community. They provide the framework within which meanings and practices are displayed and contextualised. Other authors use similar terms in describing communities: they are symbolic constructions of reality, continuously changing, and have different meanings (Cohen 1985; Delanty 2003). In this thesis, the way in which Liepins conceptualised community is adopted. In so doing, the focus is on the development of intentional communities through a life course approach (see section 1.2), which implies a perspective on communities as processes, rather than stable entities.

Intentional communities can be identified by a deliberate attempt to realise a common, alternative way of life outside mainstream society (Poldervaart 2001). Various criteria have been used to characterise intentional communities. The most cited criteria are the following (see, for example, Jansen 1990; Miller 1999; Pitzer 1997b; Shenker 1986; Zablocki 1980): (1) no bonds by familial relationships only; (2) a minimum of three to five adult members; (3) membership is voluntary; (4) geographical and psychological separation from mainstream society; (5) a common ideology that is adhered to by all members; (6) sharing of (a part of) one's property; and (7) the interest of the group prevails over individual interests. These criteria encompass a wide range of intentional communities that practise varying degrees of withdrawal from mainstream society.

In realising this withdrawal, the common ideology of the community is important. Ideology can be defined as "a highly articulated, self-conscious belief and ritual system" (Swidler 1986, p.279). According to Cresswell (1996), ideology exists at three levels: it defines what exists and what does not, what is good and what is bad, and what is possible and impossible. Ideologies connect what exists, what is good, and what is possible through power relations. For example, in order to change the organisational structure of an intentional community which is ruled by one charismatic leader, first, the existence of a structure has to be acknowledged by the members, which then is perceived as bad, and subsequently seen as possible to change. To summarise the above definition, intentional communities can be seen as places, or meaningful locations (Cresswell 2004), with a high level of interaction among their members.

In current cultural geography, intentional communities are particularly interesting for two reasons. First, the changing conceptualisation of community opens up space for discussing intentional communities. Liepins's (2000a; 2000b) definition in particular is applied in this study. Second, intentional communities can be recognised as an alternative phenomenon. They are created by people who intend to be different from the mainstream. Mainstream society is constructed through the dominant capitalist and scientific discourses of Western societies (Holloway & Hubbard 2001). These discourses have traditionally been dominated by white, heterosexual, able-bodied, sound-minded, middle-class, middle-aged men. Such dominant groups have inscribed landscapes with their (moral) ideologies, which has commonly led to the social and spatial marginalisation of Others. Both social and physical barriers have led to the exclusion of particular social groups from society (Sibley 1995),

such as women, people with disabilities (Kitchin 1999), the elderly (Russell & Schofield 1999), young people (Shucksmith 2004), homeless people (Cloke *et al.* 2000; Cloke *et al.* 2001), and ethnic minorities (Bancroft 2001; Sibley 1981). Others are an important subject of the 'new' cultural geography, with its focus on "everyday social practices, relations and struggles, which underpin social group formation, the constitution of social systems and social structures, and the social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion", or the "'romance of the real'" (Philo 2000, p.37). Through its focus on people on the fringes, on the daily lives of largely neglected groups, and the meaning of their lives for both the communities themselves and mainstream society, this study contributes to the current field of cultural geography.

1.5.2 Liminality and heterotopia

As alternative places, intentional communities can be related to two concepts: liminality and heterotopia. Liminality is derived from *limen*, the Latin word for threshold. The term liminality was introduced by anthropologist Victor Turner in 1969, who described liminality as a condition of being neither here nor there, which "slips through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (Turner 1969, p.95). Liminality can be seen as a state in which mainstream norms are suspended, and everything is "betwixt and between" (Shields 1990, p.48). The concept has traditionally been applied to rites of passage, for example by Turner (1969). More recently, various liminal spaces have been discussed, such as rural areas (Lawrence 1997), urban space as used by teenage girls (Bain 2003), cemeteries (Teather 2001), and the Habsburg empire (Bialasiewicz 2003). Liminality is always a transitional stage towards a more stable situation (see, for example, Abrams *et al.* 2004).

Brown (2002a) considered intentional communities in the context of liminality. Kamau (2002, in the book by Brown), put forward four reasons for considering intentional communities as liminal places. First, intentional communities in both rural and urban areas attempt to achieve a certain degree of spatial isolation. They are often located in remote areas, far from mainstream, urban society. However, members of intentional communities do not experience these rural areas as liminal places. Rather, they experience cities as liminal urban jungles, from which they intend to escape. Thus, a mutual state of liminality is observed by and of intentional communities and mainstream urban society. Second, there is likely to be a disagreement with dominant capitalist economic norms, which is expressed in various ways. Some communities grow their own food; others barter and attempt to live without money. A third reason is a negation of traditional sexual roles, where members become either celibate or promiscuous. Finally, religion, ideology and worldview often differ from the societal norm. This study attempts to uncover how intentional communities sometimes function as liminal places, and how they move beyond liminality, and establish a more stable way of life.

Intentional communities can also be described as heterotopias, a concept introduced by Foucault (1986). He described heterotopias as "counter-sites […] in which [real sites] are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (p.24). In heterotopias, people criticise and invert their representations of their places of origin, or their own cultural baggage. Hetherington (1997, p.9) similarly characterised heterotopias as "spaces of an alternate social ordering". He stressed that heterotopias by definition only exist because of their Otherness in relation to 'normal' places. Intentional communities often contest and invert

mainstream norms, such as individualism, which they contest and invert through their focus on communal living. Therefore, intentional communities can be classified as heterotopias, which is useful as it underscores their capacity to challenge mainstream norms and values.

1.5.3 Utopian communities

Some authors use the terms intentional and utopian community interchangeably (see, for example, Poldervaart 2001; Shenker 1986). However, there are some key differences between the two, which are discussed here. Intentional communities are defined by a common purpose (Rigby 1974b), which mostly encompasses an alternative family life in which the community replaces the traditional nuclear family (Kanter 1972). Some communities, however, go further, and attempt to realise an alternative social order outside the mainstream. Such communities can be seen as utopian communities. To understand the meaning of utopian communities, it is necessary to explain the concept of Utopia. Utopia refers to an alternative society, a perfect but unreal world, which is both a good place (*eu topos*) and no place (*ou topos*) (Schehr 1997). In other words: "Utopia is the imaginary society in which humankind's deepest yearnings, noblest dreams, and highest aspirations come to fulfilment, where all physical, social and spiritual forces work together in harmony, to permit the attainment of everything people find necessary and desirable" (Kanter 1972, p.1). Essential to Utopia is that it is an ideal world, which is by definition impossible to achieve (Achterhuis 1998; Crombag & van Dun 1997; de Geus 1996; Kanter 1972; Pitzer 1997c; Schehr 1997; Soja 1996). Since Thomas More wrote his *Utopia* (1516), many different Utopias have been created by as many authors, for example *New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon (1627), *A Modern Utopia* by Herbert Wells (1905), *Island* by Aldous Huxley (1962) and *Darcy's Utopia* by Fay Weldon (1990). Every one of these Utopias is a personal statement and that it is impossible to create one perfect society, independent of place, time and other circumstances (de Geus 1996). Utopian communities are small attempts at forging Utopia, they exist on the margins of the society they escaped from. I use the adjective intentional rather than utopian for the communities in this thesis, as most communities that were studied could hardly be seen as attempts to create a perfect world; they are rather practical in the way they are run and in their dealings with society at large.

1.6   Constructing ruralities

As the focus of this thesis is on rural areas, this section provides a theoretical framework concerning the construction of ruralities. Constructions of three main groups of rural people are considered, followed by a discussion on the contested nature of ruralities. There is no one representation of the countryside; different groups of people perceive and use it in different ways (see, for example, Haartsen *et al.* 2000; Halfacree 1993; Halfacree 1995; Pratt 1996; Smith & Phillips 2001). In the context of this thesis, I compare the ways in which members of intentional communities construct rural space with the ways two other rural groups do this: the 'original' population and middle-class in-comers who are part of the widely documented counterurbanisation movement. Woods (2003; 2005) identified three similar groups – or social movements as he called them – who construct their own ruralities. He labelled these reactive, aspirational and progressive ruralisms. Reactive ruralism is advocated by a "self-defined 'traditional' rural population" (Woods 2003, p.318), and pertains to an agrarian, natural and traditional way of life. An example is the group of people in favour of hunting in the British countryside. Aspirational ruralism is

characterised by middle-class in-migrants who intend to "defend their fiscal and emotional investment in rural localities" (Woods 2003, p.318), represented by their construction of the rural idyll. For them, rurality is a value in which they have invested, and which they protect. Progressive ruralism is oriented toward a simple way of living and the self-sufficiency of rural areas. Intentional communities can be associated with this last group. Although reality is much more complex than this categorisation suggests, in comparing the groups described, the contested nature of rural space becomes evident (see also Meijering *et al*. forthcoming 2007).

The three noted groups should not always be considered as intrinsically separate, however, but can rather be seen as hybrid ruralities. The key facet of hybridity is "the idea of integration and diffusion, of a thing that is derived from heterogeneous sources, and composed of incongruous elements. The organic hybrid bears the physical traces of these heterogeneous originating elements, yet emerges as a distinct entity, as a thing in its own right" (Mitchell 2005, p.188). Hybrid ruralities can thus be constructed by different groups and individuals, who have different, conflicting, visions, which can be internally inconsistent at the same time (Cloke 2003; Murdoch 2003). Yarwood (2005) encouraged an approach which considers the multiple contexts within which diverse images of the rural are created. He argued that ruralities can be constructed from characteristics of all four quadrants identified in Table 1.2, which presents contrasting ideas about rural and urban areas.

Table 1.2: Contrasting ideas about urban and rural areas

| Rural idyll	Urban nightmare
Nostalgic/part of national identity	Lacking identity
Traditional	Modern
Problem-free	Crime, poverty, homelessness
Closely knit/friendly	Anonymous/lonely
Better environment	Urban decay
Place of play	Place of fear
Simpler/more natural	Polluted, congested, dirty
Rural anti-idyll	**Urban dream**
Backward	Progressive
Unsophisticated	International/cosmopolitan
Unfriendly	Diverse, freedom to express yourself
Environmentally damaged	Architectural achievement
Dull, boring	Exciting, recreational
Poorly provided with services	Shopping, administrative centres
Sleepy	24-hour city

Source: Yarwood (2005)

For example, the rural can be seen as both closely knit and boring. Different groups can simultaneously form alliances and be in conflict with other groups (see also Meijering *et al*. forthcoming 2007). For instance, both members of intentional communities and counterurbanist in-comers (progressive and aspirational rurals) may view the local population as unsophisticated, and complain about the lack of services, whilst implicitly idealising the cosmopolitan, 24-hour city (Table 1.2). At the same time, the original, mostly reactive, population of rural areas and progressive intentional communities are unified through claiming partly similar ruralities. They largely associate the countryside with a collectivist, pastoral, small-scale community, which they perceive is becoming more individualistic, outward-oriented, and losing its own distinctive character through the influx of middle-class 'urban' people (Woods 2005). They unite against aspirational in-comers, who they see as arrogant city people, attracted by the idyllic countryside, but unwilling to integrate into the local community (Phillips 1998). However, there are also similarities between reactive and aspirational rurals, since they are interested in constructing the rural as a peaceful and 'clean' countryside (Halfacree 1997). They may feel disturbed by the 'intrusion' of intentional communities and perceive them as deviant, dirty, noisy and not integrated into the wider rural community (see also Halfacree 1996). Furthermore, living together as a group can be seen as a transgression of the dominant norm of people living in families, and is therefore experienced as threatening. Additionally, they could perceive practices such as the housing constructions of intentional communities or solstice celebrations as decidedly 'out of place' (see also Meijering *et al*. forthcoming 2007).

Overall, the countryside can be seen as "a site of contestation" (Sharp *et al*. 2000, p.26). Members of intentional communities pursue their alternative lifestyles in the countryside (Woods 2005). They can be part of the ruralities constructed both by locals and in-comers. However, locals and in-comers see them as Others who do not fit into their own, dominant, notion of the rural idyll, and therefore exclude them from it (see, for example, Cloke & Little 1997; Philo 1992). They do not fit into the countryside 'just like that', an experience which applies to other groups as well, such as middle-class counterurbanists (see Cloke *et al*. 1995). Our findings are largely in line with Woods (2005, p.296) who argued that "rural areas can be less of a place of escape than a place of conflict in which power struggles are played out between different lifestyle groups, each in pursuit of their own 'rural idyll'" (see also Meijering *et al*. forthcoming 2007). In various studies on Others in the countryside, similar conclusions are reached. Examples are Sibley's (2003) study on anxiety amongst 'locals' about the settlement of asylum seekers and gypsies in the countryside, and Bell and Valentine's (1995) research about rural lesbians and gays trying to find a place in homophobic rural communities.

To sum up, members of intentional communities seem to belong neither here (in rural areas) nor there (in the cities). Thus, intentional communities can be seen as liminal places. In Figure 1.2, findings from this section and section 1.5 are combined and the position of intentional communities in mainstream society, urban areas, and rural areas is schematically represented.

Figure 1.2: Intentional communities in society
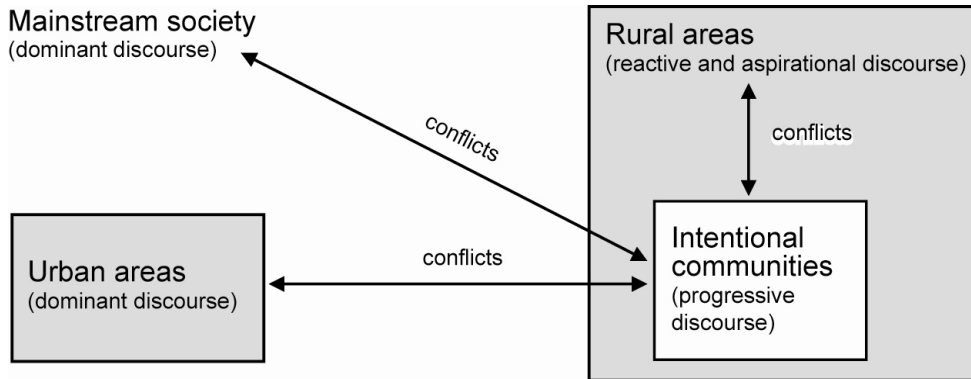
1.7 Including insiders

In this section, the ways in which people are included in and excluded from mainstream society and intentional communities are discussed. Processes of inclusion and exclusion from society serve to explain why people may join intentional communities. Processes of inclusion and exclusion from intentional communities provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the functioning of these communities. I begin with discussing the concept of identity, as that forms the basis for both social inclusion and exclusion from groups.

1.7.1 Identities

At the heart of nonconformist movements away from mainstream society and urban settings are questions of identity, i.e. identification with or against. Identity can be defined as "the story we tell of ourselves and which is also the story others tell of us" (Sarup 1994, p.95). As these two stories may differ significantly from each other, the concept of identity is rather complex. Furthermore, identities are multiple and contested, as they are socially constructed (Groote *et al*. 2000). Identities change continuously: they are fluid (Hatty 1996) and largely developed through the process of Othering. This means that identities are not positively defined in terms of what they consist of, but negatively in terms of what they are *not*, i.e. being different from somebody else (Minh-ha 1994). Thus, identities are created in a process of differentiation (Martin 2005).

The relation between place and identity is important (Martin 2005; McHugh 2000; Mitchell 2000; Teather 1999) and changes in place usually impact upon identity formation at least to some extent. Rutherford (1990, p.24) argued that a feeling of "not belonging", a negative sense of place, or a feeling of displacement (although he does not use this term) is endemic in our society. He argued that a "sense of unreality, isolation and being fundamentally 'out of touch' with the world" is a result of a confusing multitude of potential identities that are ascribed to us (Rutherford 1990, p.24). Where opportunities arise, feeling out of place can result in migration to a different place that may be more accomodating toward one's identities. The migration represents hope for a positive sense of place, in which a new home and identities can be created over time (see also Robertson *et al*. 1994a). Increasing attachment to the new place can consolidate desired identities and/or change them. Feeling

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out of place, followed by migration to a 'better' place is something most members of intentional communities will have experienced.

Perceptions of places are never static, and changes may occur that are at odds with who and where one wants to be at a particular time in one's life. However, even without a physical move, individual identities can be challenged by changes within one's place. If a physical relocation is not desirable or possible, a person may retreat to places from times that already passed, a world that merely exists within, a kind of 'internal migration'. For example, Hörschelmann and van Hoven (2003) described how in the unified Germany, many East German women experienced economic and social displacement. They found it difficult to adjust to changing circumstances, and consequently could not feel at home in the New Germany. Experiences of displacement are of particular interest in the context of the life course of intentional communities. Many of their members moved to communities after feeling displaced in mainstream society. As intentional communities constitute the level of analysis in this thesis, the emphasis is on their *collective,* or shared identities, that are built on and constructing the individual identities of their members at the same time. Collective identities are characterised by a focus on similarities between the members of a group (Jenkins 2004). Castells (2004) identified three types of collective identities. First, legitimising identities are (re)constructed by the dominant group, and serve to strengthen their position. Second, members of minority groups sometimes contest the dominant identity through adopting resistance identities. Third, some groups adhere to project identities, which aim to challenge the dominant group, and to achieve social change. Resistance and project identities are sometimes explicitly adopted by intentional communities. As collective identities are used to define commonalities among the members, they serve to exclude outsiders from the group at the same time, a process which is discussed next.

1.7.2 Withdrawal and exclusion from the mainstream

Members of intentional communities distance themselves to various extents from mainstream norms and values, such as individualism, consumption, materialism, and a lack of spirituality or religion. At the same time, intentional communities are constructed as out of place by the dominant group. Often, they display resistance identities, contest their limited access to key spaces, and transgress the boundaries of what is 'appropriate' behaviour (Cresswell 1996). Although they can *express* their dissatisfaction with the mainstream, their experience is that they cannot *change* society, either because their numbers are too small, or because they are not heard. This results in feelings of frustration and displacement. Subsequently, they withdraw from society by moving into intentional communities of like-minded people. Often, the withdrawal involves a move from urban space to more rural areas, as was described in section 1.1. There, their ideals can be realised on a small scale. Intentional communities then provide a place where many members feel comfortable, accepted, safe and at home. Although collectively distancing themselves from the mainstream, most communities continue to contribute to it. They adopt various strategies in doing so, ranging from adopting a project identity attempting to change the mainstream, to refusing all contacts with it. However, this is a gradual scale, and most communities are somewhere in between. They continue to use what they need from mainstream society, and reject what they feasibly can. For example, many communities which strive for a 'simpler' lifestyle may still use consumer goods, such as refrigerators, microwave ovens, washing machines, and cars, but attempt to limit their use of these

modern conveniences. In addition, many communities continue to use mainstream services such as shops, banks, insurances, and hospitals, and remain a part of mainstream society in that respect (see also Meijering *et al.* forthcoming 2007).

1.7.3 Excluding outsiders

Intentional communities aspire to "[set] things right in a more intimate setting" (Brown 2002b, p.6). As was discussed above, they can be seen as spaces of withdrawal and resistance, refusing to 'play by the rules' of the mainstream (Winchester *et al.* 2003). In these spaces, most members establish their community homes, providing a safe haven from which outsiders are excluded. Many intentional communities are governed by consensus, which means that the members can participate in discussions on all relevant topics. After all opinions are heard, members attempt to reach a unanimous decision. Members are also actively involved in admitting new members and visitors to the community. Although committed to inclusive procedures such as consensus decision making, the members of many intentional communities can also exclude other people from their home, through territoriality or "the spatial expression of power" (Storey 2001, p.6). It should be acknowledged, however, that processes of exclusion may take place within the community as well. Either explicitly or implicitly, hierarchies often exist (Pepper 2005). For example, long-term residents, or members involved in the foundation of the community, can have a decisive say in the consensus procedure (see also Meijering *et al.* forthcoming 2007).

In spite of their withdrawal from the mainstream, intentional communities can be open towards outsiders. Since they see their own lifestyle as a superior alternative to the mainstream, some communities try to convert outsiders, and practise their own moral geographies in that way (see, for example, Smith 1999). In other words, they see themselves as having a didactic role. Examples include offering courses in holistic healing at Findhorn in Scotland (Sargisson 2001), or women demonstrating against an air base at Greenham Common (Cresswell 1996). Some communities have project identities, and attempt to effect social change, for instance through being part of social movements, such as organisations advocating environmental sustainability and social justice (e.g. Friends of the Earth and the Global Justice Movement). Social movements often strive for autonomy, "a desire for freedom, self-organisation and mutual aid" (Chatterton 2005, p.545). They attempt to create intellectually independent and alternative spaces, a goal which resonates with some intentional communities (Pepper 2005; Schehr 1997). Through being part of social movements, intentional communities can make an important contribution to society (see also Meijering *et al.* forthcoming 2007).
One consequence of providing alternatives with wide appeal is that communities can dissolve into mainstream society, where their views become accepted as 'alternatives' by some people (Brown 2002b). Other communities do not attempt to pass on their ideals and remain more withdrawn. The psychological boundaries of a community (see section 1.5.1) are reinforced through the balance between excluding and including outsiders. In the context of inclusion and exclusion, the everyday geographies as lived by the community members are relevant. The communal practices of everyday life confirm community identities and boundaries. These practices seem to be the key mechanisms underlying the life course of intentional communities.