Communitas Digitas workshop

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Project assignment intentions:

To understand the *communitas* of digital communities by analyzing their community charter, modes of communication--through features and functions and content--and support of the five elements of community experience:
01 Historical Consciousness
02 Life Goals
03 Organizational Structure
04 Agency
05 Relationships

Project assignment instructions:

01 Select a digital community with various aspects of "learning" part of it. This can be a broad as "learning" about products (ex. EBay, Slashdot, iTunes) or as specific as an educational institution (ex. MIT OpenCourseware).

02 Define the common values (i.e. charter, constitution) of the community and how they are made tangible to community members.

03 Define the major categories of features, functions, and content on the digital platform that make manifest those values and represent the ritual behaviors of the group.

04 Rank on a 5-point Likert scales (from Completely weakens, Partially weakens, Neutral, Partially supports, Completely supports) the extent to which the top 10-15 major features, functions, and/or content support historical consciousness, life goals, organizational structure, agency, and relationships.

05 Visualize the *communitas* of the community using your scales, categories, and values.

06 Report your findings to the group in a 15-minute presentation. Try to make your presentation capture the essence of the *communitas*.

Definition of key terms*:

Agency: People's ability to control, or at least influence, decisions about the things that impact their communities and themselves.[4]

Communitas (Existential): The direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities which, when it happens, tends to make those experiencing it think of mankind as a homogeneous, unstructured, and free community. [2] p. 193.

Communitas (Ideological): A label one can apply to a variety of utopian models or blueprints of societies believed by their authors to exemplify or supply the optimal conditions for existential communitas. [2] p. 194

Communitas (Normative): Under the influence of time, the need to mobilize and organize resources to keep the members of a group alive and thriving and the necessity for social control among those members in pursuance of these and other collective goals. [2] p. 194

Imagined communities: [Concept of the nation as] imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. [1]

Historical consciousness: People's understanding of where they come from and who they are. Their ability to openly express their history and to find themselves in the public image of their community affects the degree to which they feel they belong to that community. [4]

Life goals: People's articulation of what matters most to them. This is often things like helping other people, having an impact, supporting friends and family, and professional development. [4]

Liminality: An interval between two distinct periods of intensive involvement in structured social existence. Liminal individuals are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony. [2]

Organizational structure: Mental map that provides people with an understanding of how they fit within and contribute to the greater whole. Often in groups, it outlines who is responsible, or what and how decisions are made. [4]

Relationships: The basic units of community, through which people establish the trust and understanding needed to rely upon each other. People evaluate relationships based on their (1) *Depth,* whether one-dimensional or multi-dimensional; (2) *Time,* their frequency and duration; and (3) *Tools,* the modes of communication and the spatial environment in which they take place. [4]

Ritual: A performance planned or improvised that effects a transition from everyday life to an alternative context in which the everyday is transformed. [5] p. 140.

Key Readings:

[1] Anderson, Benedict. "Introduction." *Imagined Communities.* New York: Verso. (1999), pp. 1-8.

[2] Turner, Victor. "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal." *History of Religions*, Vol. 12, No. 3. (Feb., 1973), pp. 191-230.

[3] Wilson, Samuel, and Leighton Peterson. "The Anthropology of Online Communities*." Annual Review of Anthropology*. Vol 31. (2002), pp. 449–67.

Not provided:

[4] Sapient. "Communities Project Phase I and II Reports." (March 31, 2000).

[5] Bowie, Fiona. *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction*. New York: Blackwell. (2005).

* Definitions taken from the key readings.