Connected Communities

Temporal Connectivities:
A scoping study of the available research on time and community

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Executive Summary

Despite the complicated and wide-ranging role of temporality in some of the most pressing questions about social mechanisms of connectivity and belonging, the research on 'time' and 'community' has remained fragmented and underdeveloped. The aim of this study, then, is to gain a better sense of what research is currently available and to identify cross-cutting and emerging themes, as well as any significant gaps. This study utilised desk-based research and a collaborative workshop to produce a rapid 'mapping', or overview, of an extensive range of relevant research. 885 references were included in the study, with 85 proving to be highly relevant. Eleven key analytical links between time and community were inferred from this sample. With the inclusion of a broader selection of references, a number of cross-cutting concerns emerging, including the role of time in social inclusion and exclusion, in the possibilities of social change and in the legitimation and evaluation of social action. The outcomes of the study include an annotated bibliographic resource, with references coded according to six key criteria, further resources produced at the collaborative workshop (available from the project website) and an article length write-up of the study.

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Key words

Community, Time, Temporality, Inclusion/Exclusion, Social Change, Politics

Temporal Connectivities: A Scoping Study of the Research Available on Time and Community

This scoping study begins the work of developing a systematic framework that will support research into the interconnections between time and community. Research from across the humanities and social sciences, highlights the complicated and wide-ranging role of temporality in some of the most pressing questions about social mechanisms of connectivity and belonging, however research explicitly exploring 'time' and 'community' is fragmented and underdeveloped. This has meant that knowledge both within and between disciplines has not been adequately connected up and that researchers have not been able to build on each other's insights easily. This scoping study thus strengthens and broadens current theoretical approaches to community by providing an overview of the current cross-disciplinary literature on time and community.

Method

From the outset it was clear that the body of work that needed to be surveyed as part of this study is extremely diverse and quite fragmented. In addition, it has not previously been systematically reviewed. It was thus decided that a scoping study, rather than a research review, would be of greatest benefit for initially addressing the research area. The narrower range of the in-depth research review would not accomplish the key specific aims of mapping the work available and drawing out the main cross-disciplinary themes. As Mays et al. have argued, scoping studies aim:

> to map *rapidly* the key concepts underpinning a research area and the main sources and types of evidence available, and can be undertaken as stand-alone projects in their own right, especially where an area is complex or has not been reviewed comprehensively before (Mays, Roberts, & Popay 2001, p. 194, quoted in Arsky and O'Malley 2005).

Guiding this scoping study then, was a concern to quickly develop a broad overview of what is currently available, in order to provide researchers with a framework of orientation within a highly complex field. The study design followed what has come to be known as the 'Arksey and O'Malley framework', which sets out the key steps for a scoping study.

After deciding the focus of the study, relevant studies were identified using a number of methods, including database searches, hand searching key journals, analysing bibliographies of already identified studies and soliciting recommendations through a number of channels. Reference details for all the studies were then filled out to include abstracts and online links, as part of developing a useful resource for future researchers. The studies were then coded according to six criteria: relevance, discipline, methodological approach, geographical focus, key authors and key themes. The themes that emerged as a result of the coding process were then examined in greater depth and simplified in order to develop a sense of the most important cross-cutting issues. A full analysis was then written up and will shortly be finalised for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

Given the time and personnel restraints, as well as the aim of rapidly getting a sense for the breadth of an area, it is important to emphasise that this study does not represent a comprehensive analysis of all relevant literature. For example, the thematic analysis of references was carried out in reference to abstracts rather than the full text. What the study does provide, however, is an extensive sample of 885 references that illustrate the variety of approaches that researchers across multiple disciplines have taken to the problem of time and community. Articles included range across the social sciences and humanities, as well as a small number of references from the sciences. The large majority are peer-reviewed publications, but grey literature has also been included.

Summary of Work Currently Available

Of the 885 references included in the study, 85 were identified as 'Highly Relevant'. These were articles, books and book chapters that explicitly mentioned both time and community in their titles and/or abstracts. Like the rest of the studies, they ranged across the disciplinary spectrum, with philosophy, sociology and history being most highly represented. An analysis of the studies suggested eleven different thematic links between time and community. First were (1) studies that analysed how communities formed over time (e.g. Holme, Edling, and Liljeros 2004 and Li 2007), or maintained continuity over time (e.g. Dover, Seibold, and McDowell 1992 and Stuckenberger 2006). Then were (2) studies that focused on the need for time spent with a community, either for it to operate effectively, or for one to be included within it (e.g. Hunter 2011, Shulevitz 2010, Maya-Jariego and Armitage 2007). Understandings of (3) the past and how it is shared were identified as critical to the construction of community (e.g. Alonso 1988, Maines, Sugrue, and Katovich 1983, Spanou 2008), as were (4) understandings of the future (e.g. Bezold 1999, Edmondson 2000, Golden 2002). A smaller body of work emphasised (5) the intertwining of both the past and the future in the experience of community (e.g. Royce 1968 and Schäfer-Wünsche 2001). The importance of the notion of 'shared time' is further evidenced by work that explores (6) questions of synchronisation and de-synchronisation (e.g. Anderson 1991, Putnis 2010, Kelly 1998).

Contrasting with the focus on time being experienced 'in common' by community members, were a number of themes that emphasised the role of temporality in conflict and social exclusion. A recognition that time is multiple both within and between communities is evident in work that explores (7) how community conflict is produced in part through conflicts over how time is understood (e.g. Ryan 2008, Hayes 2007, Marrs 2008). Time is also an important element in (8) producing and maintaining boundaries between communities (e.g. Atkinson and Flint 2004, Perry 2000). Consequently, another theme in the work is (9) the way time is implicitly or explicitly transformed in order to produce different kinds of communities (e.g. Das 1992, Haskins 2003, Robert 2011).

Finally, methodological issues were particularly important throughout, particularly (10) the need to study communities as dynamic, rather than static social forms (e.g. Crow 2008, Kenyon 2000, Stephens 2010). There was also a broader group of work that mostly clearly argued that (11) time is not a passive background to community, but needs to be explicitly studied in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of community (e.g. Crow and Allan 1995, Engel 1987, Martin 2008).

Broader Cross-Cutting Themes

In addition to the small number of items in the Highly Relevant category, were a much larger group of 500 articles in the Relevant category. This category includes resources that address the topic, but without explicitly indicating an analysis of both key issues in the abstract. Work in this category thus explores the importance of time for sociality more generally, rather than community *per se*. Analysis of this broader body of work suggested a number of important cross-cutting themes that both support and extend those highlighted by the work that explicitly addresses community and time. One is the role of time in social methods of inclusion and exclusion. This theme highlights the variety of ways different groups or individuals are excluded from communities for not living, embodying or performing time according to normative models. Work in this category can be found within post-colonial theory (e.g. Ganguly 2004, Bhambra 2009, Chakrabarty 2008); feminist theory (e.g. Hemmings 2011, Elliott 2008, Wiegman 2000); queer theory (e.g. Pugh 2002, Freeman 2010, Edelman 2004); and disability studies (e.g. Nespor, Hicks, and Fall 2009), among others. While a second theme, which follows on from the previous, is a significant body of work that focuses on what I have termed 'critical temporalities'. This is work that recognises the role of time in shaping how the possibilities of community are conceived, and offers critiques of dominant accounts of time, often in order to propose new ones (e.g. Athanasiou 2006, Boellstorff 2007, Chatterjee 2001, Mayer and Knox 2006). Particularly important then, is a third related theme – the recognition of time as a symbolic resource that can be used to support a variety of social aims including political legitimation (e.g. Brown 2001, Conrad 1999) and managing perceived threats (e.g. Davison 1993, Fleming 2010, Greenhouse 1996).

Emerging Trends

An important component of this study was its collaborative elements, particularly the collaborative workshop held mid-way through the study. This workshop brought together 40 participants from academic and non-academic backgrounds in order to share their approaches, before developing a collaborative synthesis of the issues raised. We used a variety of participatory facilitation techniques in order to accomplish this, including affinity mapping, open space technology and world café. Participants highlighted a number of emerging themes that included the interaction between lived time and social organisation, the temporalities of academic research and community engagement, the existence of multiple temporalities within communities and an emphasis on the importance of treating community critically.

A number of broader themes were also identified, including an interest in the intersections between power, counter-stories/resistance and methodology. That is, if time is an important tool for maintaining power, how might this be challenged, and, particularly, what methods could researchers use to facilitate this. While another intersecting theme drew together concerns with abrupt change, emergency, power and breaks in time. This theme was seen to be particularly important given the multiple crises of climate change, resource depletion and economic instability. A full list of issues raised is available from the 'Collaborative Sessions' section of the Temporal Belongings website (see links below).

Gaps in the Research

In many ways the theme of time and community is itself a gap in the research, in that it is very rarely explicitly thematised. Indeed, the issue of time more generally, is one that is perpetually claimed to be overlooked by researchers. A significant proportion of work included in this study explicitly highlighted time as a missing element of analysis (93 articles). Works highlighting this gap ranged across multiple disciplines, including sociology (e.g. Schlesinger 1977, Michelson 2006, Maines 1987), history (e.g. Jensen 1997, Cladis 2009) and philosophy (e.g. Grosz 2005), with a smaller number of works from other disciplines such as management (e.g. Bluedorn and Denhardt 1988, Lervik, Fahy, and Easterby-Smith 2010). A key concern for many of these authors are issues to do with methodology, particularly their interest in developing a dynamic, rather than static, approach to objects of study (e.g. Rummel 1972, Radu 2010, Macmillan 2011). Other issues included, concern over implicit assumptions about time obscuring the complexity of a research area (e.g. Whipp 1994, Mills 2000, Nellis 2002); the failure to adequately grasp the importance of the symbolic and explanatory role of time (e.g. Mische 2009, Auyero and Swistun 2009); and the need to think time differently to attain political and/or social goals (Fitzpatrick 2004, Casarino 2003).

The study also highlighted a number of key, apparently as yet unidentified, gaps in the research on time and sociality more generally. Perhaps the most striking occurs within research on political communities. While politics was a particularly strong cross-disciplinary theme, it is interesting that while time and nationalism was extremely well represented (with over 80 references addressing this theme, e.g. (Anderson 1991, Bauerkemper 2007, Edensor 2006, Hesford and Diedrich 2008), other approaches to political community were startlingly under-represented. For example, only one article in the study explicitly looked at time and cosmopolitanism (Cwerner 2000), and while issues to do with shared histories are of vital importance within communitarianism, only one article explicitly engaged with communitarian writers around the subject of time (Rosenthal 1996). Undoubtedly, there is more work available that explores these issues, but this study suggests that it is much less well-developed than work on time and other political formations such as nationalism.

Workshop participants highlighted the experience of time as another shared, though perhaps less explored, theme in their work, including the aesthetic and affective aspects of shared time. Exploring this aspect of community and time seems particularly important given the strong emphasis on affect in current research in the humanities and social sciences. There is already some evidence of research into affective embodied experiences of time and their importance for community (e.g. McNeill 1997, Luciano 2007, Guenther 2011), but, once again, it is not explicitly joined up. One niche gap, that may be of interest is an exploration of sound in relation to temporal communities. This gap is noted by Christopher Witmore, in relation to archaeology (2006), and while creative responses noted in the study include Kuldip Powar's *Noise of the Past* (see Puwar and Powar 2010), there is little else. This issue is particularly interesting given Glennie and Thrift's argument (2009, 82), that although time is widely identified with visuality, historically time was more often experienced aurally, for example through bells and chimes.

Recommendations for Future Work

With the vision for the Connected Communities programme in mind, there are a number of recommendations for future work. First, as outlined above, this study suggests that time is an important variable in understanding a number of themes highlighted within the programme, including the conceptualisation of community, conflict within and between communities, and the changing nature of connectivity. More recent themes such as the role of cultural institutions, the diversity of cultural understandings of community and how values and beliefs about community are supported or challenged would also benefit from an emphasis on time. For example, research on 'organisational temporalities' (e.g. Ballard and Seibold 2004, Gross 1985, Crang 1994) would enhance understandings of how cultural institutions manage the diversity of their members, and since cultural values are often embedded within 'common sense' notions of time, the study of values and beliefs also requires an emphasis on time if these issues are to be comprehensively explored. Second, and more specifically, given the interest in understanding the changing patterns of connectivity within diverse communities, as well as connecting up academic research on communities, it seems important to review and synthesise the research addressing the cross-cutting themes identified in this study. In particular, research on time as a tool for social inclusion and exclusion and research on, what has been referred to here as, 'critical temporalities'.

References and external links

Further details of the project, including the full bibliographical resource are available on the project website (www.temporalbelongings.org) and on the CRESC website.

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The Connected Communities

Connected Communities is a cross-Council Programme being led by the AHRC in partnership with the EPSRC, ESRC, MRC and NERC and a range of external partners. The current vision for the Programme is:

> "*to mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected, culturally diverse, communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health & well-being by better connecting research, stakeholders and communities*."

Further details about the Programme can be found on the AHRC's Connected Communities web pages at:

www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/connectedcommunities.aspx