Re-evaluating the Community Question from a German perspective

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Abstract

The far-reaching effects of the social systemic division of labor on the organization and contents of primary ties make the Community Question an important issue for many sociologists. This paper looks at the personal embeddedness of families in three German cities (Berlin, Hamburg, and Stuttgart) and examines the Community Question with data collected at the end of 2003. It is based on the theoretical views of Wellman [Wellman, B., 1979. The community question. The intimate networks of East Yorkers. American Journal of Sociology 84, 1201–1231], who used a network analysis perspective to conceptualize “the Community Question”. The results of this German study generally support the results of Wellman’s second East York Study. However, the network structures analyzed in my study vary from the three ideal-type models. Cluster analysis shows that Wellman’s typology can be replicated relatively well in Germany. In contrast to traditional discourse related to the Community Question, particular network types are not associated with low levels of social relations. Moreover, structural factors do not explain the existence of different network types. Thus, the networks are not a product of only one community model. They suggest that it is less helpful to talk about “Saved”, “Lost”, or “Liberated” communities than it is to regard communities as a mixture of strongly-knit nuclear clusters and of broader, sparsely-knit relations that provide access to different groups and their resources.

Keywords: Far-reaching effects; Community Question; German

1. Introduction

The Community Question has been widely discussed among sociologists who address the question: “what effects does the far-reaching social systemic division of labor have on the organization and content of primary relationships?” (Wellman, 1979; p. 1201). Discussing the Community Question should also throw some light on a major question in current family
sociology: what social effects did modernization have on the family and on its meaning and function as a community in today’s society? In this paper, I describe some theoretical assumptions of the debate on the Community Question to date and introduce the design and findings of our 2003 study conducted in Germany.

1.1. Community lost

Wellman (1979) has described arguments related to the Community Question: the contentions that the “community” has been “Lost”, “Saved”, or “Liberated” (see also the discussions in Wellman and Leighton, 1979; Wellman et al., 1988; Wellman, 1999, 2001). In the late 19th Century, Tönnies (1887) conceptualized the process of modernization in terms of a typological contrast between pre-industrial societies (Gemeinschaft) and urban industrial societies (Gesellschaft). He described modernization as a cause of individual alienation, indicating that modernizing environments may force people towards social isolation, thereby depriving them of social integration.

This skeptical view of modernization – its perceived threat to social cohesion, integration, and solidarity – was taken up later by scholars of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology, who discussed the negative consequences of urbanization as a loss of a sense of community. Wirth (1938) further developed these ideas in Chicago, claiming that urbanization’s new forms of social interaction replaced the old primary, kinship, and neighborhood relationships of the rural community with the secondary relationships of the urban society. He alleged that what was once a true community had become an anonymous mass society characterized by social isolation, alienation, and lack of individual autonomy.

Since the mid-1950s, there have been debates extending this analysis of societal disintegration and isolation. These debates have not only discussed the place of individuals in society, but also of family units. For example, Schelsky (1953; p. 122) argued that after World War II, the German family has shown divergent tendencies. On the one hand, there has been a tendency towards the social exclusion and isolation of the family as well as a decreasing interest in social ties connecting them to the wider society. On the other hand, by contrast, there has been an increasing interest in intimate relations, familial or otherwise. Together, these two tendencies have led to scholarly suggestions of a loosening of social relations outside the family, possibly making family and intimate relations more important (see also Nave-Herz, 1984).

Such “Community Lost” contentions have continued. In the 1980s, the German theorist Beck (1986) proclaimed that the disintegration of families from society was a result of the “release dimension” of modernization (Beck, 1986; p. 209). He argued that families are the “losers of modernization” (Beck, 1986; p. 211) because of their loss of social ties with the rest of society. This loss particularly affects those who lack resources, multiple forms of capital (e.g., social capital, human capital), and the time to build and maintain lasting social relationships. A decade later, Rainer Diaz-Bone analyzed data from the DJI (Deutsches Jugendinstitut: German Youth Institute) family survey and concluded: “those types of families with children are more likely to be spatially and familiarly disintegrated and that people who live in such types of families maintain few relations beyond the household” (Diaz-Bone, 1997; p. 214). However, the research instruments used up until now have been insufficient to assess the presence of family networks because they have not been appropriately accounted for and recorded a wide enough range of the relationships used by families for support.

Some American sociologists (e.g., Bellah et al., 1991) have also contended that the processes of urbanization have created an environment in which families are so preoccupied with everyday life that they do not have the time to maintain social relationships outside of the nuclear family
unit. They argue that the personal networks of families are small and show few meaningful relationships. Thus, the potential for support from these networks is inadequate.

In short, the Community Lost argument has held many urban phenomena to be concrete and concentrated manifestations of industrial bureaucratic societies. It contends that the division of labor in these societies has reduced communal solidarities. Primary relationships in the city are now “impersonal, transitory and segmental” (e.g., Wirth, 1938; p. 12). Instead of being fully incorporated into a single community, urbanites are seen as being limited members of multiple social networks: sparsely-knit and loosely-bound. Their weak, narrowly defined and disorganized ties are rarely sustainable or helpful in dealing with contingencies. Consequently, urbanites are now bound to the city by webs of secondary affiliations (see the summary in Wellman, 1979; p. 1204).

1.2. Community saved

Many urban scholars have been dismayed by the “Lost” argument’s emphasis on urban disorganization. In response, they have developed the “Saved” argument during the past 30 years, using surveys and ethnographies to demonstrate that neighborhood and kinship solidarities have continued to flourish in industrial bureaucratic social systems. The Saved argument asserts that such communal solidarities have persisted because of their continued efficacy in providing support and sociability, communal desires for informal social control, and ecological sorting into homogeneous residential and work areas (see the summary in Wellman, 1979; p. 1205).

1.3. Community liberated

The Liberated argument has emerged out of the analytic juxtaposition of the Lost and Saved arguments. It affirms the prevalence and importance of primary ties, but maintains that most ties are not organized now into densely-knit, tightly-bound village-like networks. This argument sees the following as causes of this change in community structure:

(a) The separation of residence, workplace, and kinship groups involves urbanites in multiple social networks with weak attachments.
(b) High rates of residential mobility weaken existing ties and retard the creation of strong new ones.
(c) Cheap, effective transportation and communication reduce the social costs of spatial distances, enabling the easy maintenance of dispersed primary ties.
(d) The scale, density, and diversity of the city and the nation–state, in combination with widespread facilities for interaction, increase possibilities for access to loosely-bound multiple social networks.
(e) The spatial dispersion of primary ties and the heterogeneity of the city make it less likely that those network members to whom an urbanite is linked are linked to each other (see the summary in Wellman, 1979; p. 1206).

1.4. Sequence, alternatives or complements?

Some analysts (e.g., Wirth, 1938; Jacobs, 1961; Gans, 1962; Tilly, 1978; Bott, 1971; Fischer et al., 1977) who have used the Lost, Saved, or Liberated arguments to address the Community Question regard the different viewpoints as parts of an alternative description of Western society’s developmental succession of community forms: beginning with the pre-industrial saved-
Table 1
Wellman’s theses: implications for types of personal networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theses</th>
<th>Lost</th>
<th>Saved</th>
<th>Liberated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of networks</td>
<td>Very small</td>
<td>Very large</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origins</td>
<td>Friends, organizations</td>
<td>Kin, neighborhood</td>
<td>Friends, workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Mostly short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles</td>
<td>Acquaintances</td>
<td>Kin, neighbors</td>
<td>Friends, co-workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociophysical context</td>
<td>Public, private</td>
<td>Communal spaces</td>
<td>Private spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential separation</td>
<td>Somewhat dispersed</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Highly dispersed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of contact</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High (much in-person)</td>
<td>High, much phone use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural embeddedness</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network context</td>
<td>Dyads</td>
<td>Large group</td>
<td>Small clusters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>Moderate overall, with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>dense clusters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster overlap</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1 big cluster</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of network pieces</td>
<td>Many small fragments and isolates</td>
<td>1 big cluster, no isolates</td>
<td>Several small clusters and isolates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(components + isolates)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster dominance</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, by 1</td>
<td>Yes, by several</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abundance of aid</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of aid</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation with large-scale social system</td>
<td>Little (only companionship)</td>
<td>Defensive coping demands, companionship</td>
<td>Ways of accessing resources, companionship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialization</td>
<td>Specialized ties</td>
<td>Multistranded ties</td>
<td>Specialized ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>Low, only dyadic</td>
<td>High, communal</td>
<td>High, within circles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


community, followed by the lost community, which was in turn succeeded by the post-industrial liberated community model.

By contrast to this view, Wellman and associates see these arguments as alternative structural models that exist parallel to one another.

Each model speaks to a different means of obtaining and retaining resources: the direct use of formal organizations (Lost), the membership in densely-knit, all-encompassing solidarity groups (Saved), or selective use of specialized, diversified and sparsely-knit social nets (Liberated) (Wellman et al., 1988; p. 135; Wellman, 1999, 2001).

Wellman and associates suggest that although one model or another might dominate within a social system, it is probable that all three models co-exist to some degree in contemporary times, and possibly even in the past (Table 1). A single community may consist of a mixture of closely-knit core clusters and a few loosely-knit ties to different groups and their resources (see Wellman et al., 1988). For example, Wellman (1979) found few network structures in his first East York study that could be attributed to the lost thesis. Rather, the networks corresponded to the forms of the other two models. However, many could not be attributed to either the Saved or the Liberated model exactly because they possessed characteristics of both.

2. Hypothesis and methods

My intention is not only to evaluate Wellman’s typology, but also to develop an instrument to describe the embeddedness of families with children in social contexts. I want to see which forms of embeddedness can be found, and also to show how Wellman’s typology can be operationalized in large surveys.
My analysis of the Community Question is based on a 2003 study conducted in three German cities: Berlin, Hamburg, and Stuttgart. Our research group selected two districts in each of the three cities: one in the city center and the other in the outer suburbs. The overall sample size is 1953 families with children. One parent in each household with children under the age of 18 was interviewed, as this segment of the population is of special interest for understanding the effects of modernization on family relationships.

Among other matters, the study was designed to test Beck’s (1986) and Diaz-Bone’s (1997) arguments that families are isolated, or disintegrated, from society. To test the hypothesis that family networks are supportive, our research group used a social network approach developed by the DJI that is based on Weber’s (1964) concept of Oikos, derived from the Greek word for the house or household.

The goal of our DJI study was to analyze the current forms and developments of family and marriage in Germany. Our aim was not only to develop a definition of families as households, but also to study the people with whom the family activities are carried out, as well as how and with whom families really live (Bertram, 1991; Bien and Marbach, 1991; p. 77). To obtain information on the strong ties of family networks, we conducted an ego-centered network analysis slightly adapted to our needs. It used six name generators from the (DJI Family Survey; Diaz-Bone, 1997) family survey. The six DJI name generators considered interactions and intimate relations in the households or the nuclear families, such as intimacy, daily trust, and familial solidarity (see generators 1–6 in Fig. 1).

Not only do social relationships always take place in specific contexts that influence relationships, they also change with these relationships. Hence, it was important to create name generators that made it possible to consider such contexts. Until now, the most commonly used instruments for gaining insights into the network context of relationships have been those of Burt (1984), Fischer (1982), Wellman (1979) and Wellman and Wortley (1989, 1990). These did not seem appropriate for our study because they were developed to approach different research questions. As such, I developed my own generators to analyze the outside relationships of families with children (generators 7–11 in Fig. 1). Hence, our second set of name generators record some of the weaker ties that families have in society. They consider the opportunity structures in the environment of families with children, as well as their specific support functions. They measure how families use different social relationships at different times, which they can utilize to care for children, organize daily tasks, and so on.

2.1. The interviews

Respondents received a list with empty, numbered lines to fill in the names of network members. Respondents filled in the names of network members for each name generator. To ensure privacy, they did not name the network members themselves, but gave the numbers assigned to each network member. For example, if their sister’s name was written next to #4 on the list, they said “#4” rather than “Gretel”. The respondent could name 5 persons per generator for the first 9 generators and 10 persons for the generators pertaining to one’s neighborhood (numbers 10 and 11 in Fig. 1). We also recorded detailed information about 20 of the network members named, including: age of network member, gender, frequency of contact, residential distance, relation to respondent (partner, friend, etc.), length of relationship with respondent, and existence of family ties to respondent.

If the respondents named more than 20 network members, we used numbered cards to select 20 randomly. The cards listed all the network members, and we placed them upside down on a table. Respondents then drew 20 cards from these cards and read out the numbers to the interviewer.
Detailed information was only recorded for the network members who were selected from the pile of cards.

To calculate network density, we asked: “which of the persons named above is the most important in this situation?”. The interviewer listed the named numbers into a matrix and asked whether the network members knew each other well, not so well, or not at all. This meant that respondents had to indicate whether or not there were relationships among the network members. If respondents were uncertain or did not know, the answer was coded “no”. As it would have been impractical to confirm these answers with the named people or to go into the details of the relations, we have relied on the respondents’ interpretations and perceptions of these relations.

2.2. Overlap and non-overlap in the network generators

For all the name generators taken together, a respondent could name a maximum of 60 people:
10 × 5 generators (1–9, 12) = 50 plus,
1 × 10 neighbors generator (10) = 10.

In practice, the actual size of the networks varies from 2 to 30 persons, with a mean of 11.35 network members. Thirty-six percent of the respondents named more than 13 persons. When the “Rate of Naming” is defined as the relationship between the number of people it is possible to name and the number actually named, there is a mean Rate of Naming of 19% (11.35/60). Overlap – naming the same person in more than one generator – is not taken into account in this calculation.

Each generator creates the possibility of additional people being named as network members. In this study, the addition of generators 7–11 to the original 6 DJI generators increases the number of network members named by 50%. This confirms my assumption that the consideration of social contexts in the network name generators – the focus of generators 7–11 – increases understanding of the specific relationships of families.

The *Primary Naming* variable refers to the generators (1–11) in which a network person is named for the first time. This is important for evaluating the redundancy of items. Fig. 2 shows the proportional distribution of newly named network members for each generator. It also shows the cumulative percentage distribution of all the newly named network members across the eleven generators.

No new persons were allowed to be named for generator 11 (neighboring); respondents were asked only to specify the interactions related to contacts with the neighbors named in generator 10. We achieved this with a statistical margin of error of only 0.1% per generator. Together, all the generators produced 94% of the namings. At least 1951 respondents mentioned 22,164 network members.

Fig. 2. Primary namings of network persons *Note:* The line indicates the cumulated percentage shares of all atteris. The columns indicate the percentage share of all newly added network persons for each generator. *Source:* German Research Foundation, Social Networks Project 2003, N = 22,164 network member.
members in their networks. The remaining 6% of the network members were not named in relation to the interactions presented in the generators.

3. Relationships and networks

3.1. Social contexts and roles

To examine the supposed isolation of families, we first observed variations in the social contexts in which the respondents are involved. We use the term “social context” to describe the conditions within which respondents live different aspects of their everyday life. Since action fields arise from the roles that people play in particular contexts, we label the respondents’ social contexts with the role relationships that influence their conditions for action.

Specific name generators tend to be disproportionately associated with particular types of social ties (Table 2). Most relations (60%) are based on contacts with relatives, especially immediate kin (45% of all relations) and extended kin (15%).1 Friends (21%) and neighbors (11%) are also represented.

The DJI generators (1–6) predominantly record the respondents’ embeddedness in immediate kinship relations (Fig. 3). They show that 90% of all immediate kin are named in generators reflecting the Oikos model (Weber, 1964). They capture strong relations, especially relations between those who share meals, share close emotional ties, and give financial support. The exception to almost complete kin predominance is the name generator questions for the persons with whom one discusses important personal issues and with whom one shares most of one’s spare time. Although 70% of those named are immediate kin, more than 20% are friends.

The second set of name generators (7–11) predominantly records embeddedness within networks of neighbors, friends, and acquaintances. Friends play an important role in providing childcare in urgent situations. They also provide support when respondents, or their children, are ill.

1 Immediate kin: spouse, own child, child of the partner, foster child, mother/father, sister/brother, grandparents, and great grandparents. Extended kin: ex-partner, brother or sister-in-law, son or daughter-in-law, mother-in-law/father-in-law, sister of partner/brother of partner, grandchildren, and other relatives. Wellman’s definition of immediate and extended kin differs somewhat from mine: he excludes grandparents from immediate kin, but includes parents-in-law and siblings-in-law (Wellman, 1979; Wellman and Wortley, 1989). However, Wellman reports that the low absolute numbers of network members in these discrepant role relationships would not make an appreciable difference in the comparative percentages between Germany and East York (personal communication).
Practical support varies depending upon the relationships and the specific needs. In the case of immediate kin and friends, practical support includes childcare assistance and help in times of sickness. By contrast, extended kin, acquaintances, neighbors, and friends look after children at the playground and help with tasks around the home, such as shopping or watering flowers during absence. Respondents tend to ask neighbors, friends, and acquaintances for advice about raising children. Over 40% mention neighbors and acquaintances as important contacts in their environment.

4. Network structure

4.1. Variables

I aimed to record the network information from our data collection in such a way that the spectrum of information is consolidated in only a few structural measurements. Attribute information about network members is captured in role and gender diversity measures. 

- **Network Size** records the number of network members,
- **Multistrandedness** measures the proportion of network members with whom respondents maintain multiple role relationships,
- **Reciprocity** shows the proportion of network member who stand in a reciprocal exchange relationship to ego,
- **Information** about the frequency of contacts and the distance of the network member was measured in ordinal scales.
The constructed variable *Network Members in One’s Neighborhood* contains all relationships that are played out in the area beyond one’s household that includes nearby streets that the respondents’ subjectively see as their wider living space. The constructed variable, *Network Member with Whom there is Frequent Contact*, pertains to the network members with whom respondents have contact at least multiple times per week, including face-to-face, phone, and email contact. The constructed structural variable *Role Diversity* is correlated with the variable *Proportion of Relatives Within the Network*, because role diversity also includes relatives. The structural variable, *Proportion of Kin among Network Members in the Neighborhood*, is conditioned by two variables: *Proportion of Kin in Network* and *Proportion of Network Members in Neighborhood*.

The means of *Gender Diversity* and *Density* are high, indicating that the proportion of men and women in the networks are relatively balanced (Table 3). Many relations are multistranded, containing multiple role relationships. The proportion of kin in the networks is also high.

There are a lot of different roles in the individual networks; there is a high mean of role diversity. It can be assumed that the relatively high proportion of kin among the network members are, in part, an effect of the network instrument, particularly the name generators oriented to the *Oikos* model: with whom one shares meals, with whom one feels a close emotional tie, and from whom one receives financial support.

### 4.2. Factor and cluster analysis

An exploratory factor analysis identified different structural dimensions in the data (Table 4). Structural variables are grouped by the factor analysis, providing information about the extent to which the network instrument affects structural data.

The factor analysis identifies three structural dimensions.² The first factor isolates the structural variables that describe the respondents’ embeddedness in their neighborhood relationships. The second factor loads highly on all structural variables that are related to the proportion of kin. The higher the proportion of kin, the lower the role diversity and the higher the network density. That *Proportion of Kin Among Network Members in the Neighborhood* loads highly on the second factor.

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² The factor analysis method used was principal components, with orthogonal varimax rotation. Reciprocity was not part of the factor analysis because it was only calculated as an example for two variables and thus not meaningful.

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**Table 3**
Mean and standard deviation of the structural variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender diversity (IQV-index)</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role diversity (IQV-index)</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiplex ties</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network size</td>
<td>11.35</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of network members with whom there is contact multiple times per week</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of network members in neighborhood</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of kin among network members in neighborhood</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of kin in network</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N* = 1953 respondents, IQV, index of qualitative variation (Mueller et al., 1977).
underlines the importance of kin. The third factor represents the range of the networks: their size, multiple role relationships, and diversity. The greater the range, the easier it is to access different types of social support (Burt, 1983; Wellman and Gulia, 1999). Gender diversity, tie multiplexity, and network size load onto this factor. The higher the network size, the lower the tie multiplexity.

5. Relation of the German data to Wellman’s theses

The factor analysis provides the basis for a non-hierarchical cluster analysis that was used to assign people to three types of network integration. The ideal types of Wellman’s (1979) typology were used as cluster centers: Lost, Saved and Liberated (Table 1). Non-hierarchical k-means cluster analysis is a good method for this because the number of clusters can be predetermined (Steinhauser and Lang, 1977; p. 117).

Unlike the factor analysis that groups variables, the cluster analysis groups respondents according to the three variable clusters in which they best fit:

1. Three variables assess neighborhood embeddedness: proportion of Network Members with whom there is Frequent Contact, Proportion of Relatives among Network Members in Neighborhood, and Proportion of Network Members in the Neighborhood.
2. Two variables assess the dominance of kin: proportion of Relatives in Network and Density.
3. Two variables assess network range: multistranded Ties and Network Size.

These variables were all z-standardized. The three cluster centers were pre-set, influenced by the results of the factor analysis.³ Table 5 shows the de-standardized average values in relation to the variables chosen for the analysis. The categorization and naming of cluster centers with respect to the Community Question thesis was achieved by observing correlations between expected values (Table 1) and actual values (Table 5). There are some discrepancies between our 2002 German results and Wellman’s (1979) expected network structures for the three community

³ Since these cluster centers approximate the three traditional models, of lost, saved and liberated. I label them as such. However, as they are somewhat different from the models, I refer to them as cluster centers and not as models.
theses. We find the proportion of German data supporting the Lost and Liberated theses to be higher than the values in Wellman’s theses, due to the overall higher proportion of kin in our networks. Moreover, we find multiplex ties of over 50%; yet following Wellman’s thesis (see Table 1), we would expect Lost and Liberated networks to be uniplex. This also applies to the frequency of contact: Wellman’s theses indicate a lower contact frequency for the Lost model and a higher contact frequency for the Liberated model.

Other results also partially contradict Wellman’s operationalization of the community theses (Fig. 4). Sparsely-knit networks (present in the Liberated model) could be expected to have a lower frequency of contact, and the difference should lie not only in the face to face or telephone modes of contact (Wellman, 1979). This contradiction can also be found for network size because network size is supposed to be especially high for the Saved model and not as high for the Liberated model. Yet the wide branching and the low connectedness of networks in the Liberated model could lead to very large networks. At the same time, we could expect the networks to be smaller in the Saved model, which is supposed to contain more strong ties. We can see that our study has captured networks that resemble but do not identically fit the ideally constructed models, with many networks containing elements of more than one of these models.

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**Table 5**
Profiles of variables in cluster centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural variables</th>
<th>Cluster centers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lost (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of kin in network</td>
<td>0.521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiplex ties</td>
<td>0.713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of network members in contact multiple times per week</td>
<td>0.608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of kin among network members in neighborhood</td>
<td>0.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of network members in neighborhood</td>
<td>0.434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>0.781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 1953 respondents</td>
<td>871</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1953 respondents

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Fig. 4. Network types according to social context. Source: German Research Foundation, Social Networks Project 2003, N = 22,164 network member (results in percent per Community Model).
None of the German models show a loss of community: there are relatives, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances in all three of the cluster centers. The difference lies in the proportions. All three models have a communal and a societal element to their networks. The key difference is in the spatial dispersal among the different network types. The Saved model networks show mostly local ties, the Lost model shows somewhat more dispersed networks, and the Liberated model shows the most widely dispersed networks (Fig. 5).

Most ties are more than 10 years old, which means that the respondents have appreciable numbers of stable, traditional ties at the core of their networks. Overall, the contact frequency among the network members is high. However, there are small differences between the cluster centers among those whose relationships have lasted less than 5 years. The two cluster centers that resemble the Liberated and Lost models show more of such shorter relationships than does the cluster center corresponding to the Saved model. Although this corresponds to Wellman’s thesis, the overall duration of the relations in all three cluster centers is high.

6. Summary and conclusions

6.1. Situating Wellman’s theses in 21st Century German reality

In summary, the network structures I analyzed in my study differ somewhat from Wellman’s three ideal-types. Nevertheless, cluster analysis shows that Wellman’s typology can be replicated

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4 Most respondents live in multi-family apartment buildings. Because of this, the phrases “living in the same household” and “living in the same house” refer to different spatial representations, with the latter meaning that network members live in another apartment in the same building. “In the neighborhood” means living in another house, but on the same street or in the same neighborhood. As the residential districts in the towns quite greatly, there is also the category “living in the residential district”. “Living in the same location” means living in another residential district but in the same municipality. The category “another location” means, that the network member lives in another municipality. “Lives far away” means living more than 1 h apart.
relatively well in contemporary Germany. Moreover, in contrast to traditional discourses related to the Community Question, we did not find any loss of social relations associated with particular network types.

The highest percentage of examined networks (45%) conforms to the cluster center that is closest to the Lost model, although many of these networks are far from being identical to this model. This type of personal network has the lowest proportion of kin and the lowest network density—although the mean density is still high. The proportion of multiplex ties, and of contact frequency, are also high. The mean network size of 9.6 persons is lower than the overall sample mean of 11.5 persons. With regard to the Embeddedness in One’s Neighborhood variable, this group’s networks are spatially more extensive than those networks that are similar to the Saved model and less extensive than those similar to the Liberated model. Contrary to expectations, this network type does not have appreciably lower supportive and sociable relations.

The second largest cluster (37%) resembles the Liberated model. The spatial dispersion of network members is highest in this model and Embeddedness in One’s Neighborhood is lowest. Network size is above average, with a mean of 14.4 persons. The proportion of multiplex ties is the lowest, indicating a more specialized functionality of social relations. However, contrary to the Liberated model, there is a high proportion of kin and high network density.

The third network type (18%) corresponds best to the Saved model. There is much Embeddedness in One’s Neighborhood, a high proportion of kinship ties, a high proportion of multiplex ties, high contact frequency, and high density. Network size is below average, with a mean of 9.2 persons. Overall, most relations (60%) have lasted longer than 10 years, showing that stable, traditional relations continue to exist in some personal networks.

In conclusion, the results of our study partially support Wellman’s (1979) theses, although none of the models were identical to the Lost model and there were no clear ascriptions to the Saved or Liberated model. The classification of the cluster centers fits the ideal-types of Wellman. Comparing the three cluster centers with the ideal-types shows that observed network structure contains the same relation types in all three cluster centers. Only the proportions vary. More so than the original (1979) theses, our results are similar to Wellman and Wortley (1989, 1990) results in their second East York study. As in our analysis, they arrived at the conclusion that the networks of the East Yorkers are not attributable to only one model, but are often mixtures. They found that the most common pattern is a mixture of a stable, Saved kin-dominated core combined with diversified Liberated friendships.

This combination has implications for the provision of the social support. The factor analysis shows that social support is functionally organized, while the cluster analysis showed that different persons provide different types of support in the networks. Emotional support and intimacy are primarily done by partners and children. In the case of illnesses and child support, people consult authorities, co-workers, parents, relatives, acquaintances, neighbors, and organizational ties. Everyday interactions and support take place primarily between friends, brothers and sisters, relatives, and neighbors.\footnote{Subsequent to the analysis reported here, I used the same survey data to relate personal network data to household forms. We did not find that different living arrangements of respondents – “cohabitation with partner (including marriage)”, “living alone”, or “partner living somewhere else” – varies in the size or social integration of their networks. Although there are some variations among the network types with respect to structural factors, they are not statistically significant. We have not yet discovered social factors that can offer an explanation for the existence of different network types.}
6.2. Implications for nuclear families

The application of Wellman’s theses to our study leads to an important conclusion. His typology of describing the situation of individuals also fits the conditions of nuclear family units, typically households. Our findings suggest that Wellman’s theses are valid for nuclear family units with children in Germany and can be applied to questions of familial and social-spatial integration. This is especially true for the respondents’ social-spatial integration in their neighborhoods and for their experiencing of modernization as risk—the potential loss of relationships – and chance – the increased possibilities for the choice in relationships.

What of the earlier argument of Beck (1986) that families are isolated or disintegrated from German society? My results do not support his argument. All networks of families with children under the age of 18 living at home are characterized by having both communal elements – kin – and social elements—friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. This contradicts Beck’s theory of individualization. Persons who voluntarily agree to parenthood also take a distinctive social sense of responsibility. They organize their social relations so that the different needs of the family members can be satisfied in a subtly differentiated and complex society.

The instrument has been successfully applied to German cities. The network structure of all three cities looks relatively similar. There are no appreciable differences in social relations whether one lives in Stuttgart, Hamburg or Berlin. However, the question remains whether the results are a national German phenomenon or a unique effect of the new instrument. At this stage, it can at best be a hunch to assume that Germany is more family oriented than North America. The only way to test this supposition would be to apply this network instrument internationally and to compare the results. For now, the high percentage of kin found by Grossetti (2007) in Toulouse and Bastani (2007) in Tehran suggest that it may be the low percentage of kin in North America that requires more explanation than the high percentages found in Europe and Iran.

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