

## 1. Heritage Community (van Knippenberg)

### Short definition

In contemporary literature, (heritage community) is one of the more difficult words to take issue with as it is often difficult to label people as part of a group (Crooke 2010). Back (1996) has argued that “communities do not exist sui generis, they are created and imagined on a, more or less, daily basis” (p.238). In social psychological terms, communities are ‘lived’ through the negotiation of social representations and, as a consequence, through the co-construction of community identities. A heritage community is therefore best to be understood as a social creation that is continuously in motion, rather than a fixed entity (Waterton and Smith 2010). A heritage community can thus best be defined very broadly as those who signify material and immaterial heritage.

### Links to other OH Glossary terms:

- Cultural heritage
- Civic minded environment
- Open Heritage

### Key Discussion

Waterton and Smith (2010) note that community is one of the handful of words within the wider social sciences that are continually used, abused and reused, so that it is difficult to take issue with. Originally the term was used to describe a collection of people. But since scholars, and most notably Anderson (1983) started to move away from this dominant, nostalgic idea of a community and started to criticize the straightforward and unambiguous use of this term it became clear how difficult it is to identify a community as it is often difficult to label people as part of a group (Crooke 2010). Waterton and Smith (2010) define communities as social creations and experiences that are continuously in motion, rather than fixed entities and descriptions, in flux and constant motion, unstable and uncertain. Scholars now note that community is highly contested (e.g. Howarth 2001) and that communities are not very community-like (Brint 2001). Indeed, as Crooke (2010, 16) mentions “community is a multi-layered and politically charged concept that, with a change in context, alters in meaning and consequence”. Crooke (2008) underlines this as she states that a community can be whatever is needed or desired at the time and, even when formed, will adapt to the situation. Howarth (2001, 233) adds to this that

communities are not simply groups to belong to. They may be imposed onto one; they may threaten one's self-esteem; they may be a source of empowerment.

This is also particularly relevant for the field of heritage. Here too, community can be defined in various ways. A heritage community can be defined as those groups of, for example citizens or individuals, who value and define material and immaterial heritage in a specific spatial context (-> see OH glossary term: cultural heritage). A heritage community can at the same time be defined as those being subject to heritage management and preservation. Waterton and Smith (2010, 11) explain this as follows: "community or group identity becomes the object of regulation through the heritage management process, not only reinforcing the power differentials in community-expert relations, but also ensuring the legitimacy of essentialist notions of 'community' and their continual misrecognition". A heritage community is thus also highly formalised and institutionalized in a context of government officials and consultants, academic researchers, legal experts and, perhaps more recently, commercial actors who created a specific thinking, speaking and acting about heritage conceptualization and accordingly heritage management practices. These actors not only define heritage, but in a way also impose a conceptualization of heritage on other groups or communities. Within the domain of heritage, including communities' understandings of heritage, has become an integral part of heritage management. This counts for both material and immaterial heritage as Watson and Waterton (2010, 2) state that "community engagement with heritage is more overtly linked with cultural distinctiveness, identity and nationalism, or exists as an articulation of ancestral links with important places, traditions and narratives". Hence, many scholars in the field of heritage are studying issues of community involvement (e.g. Mydland and Grahn 2012, Parkinson et al. 2016). These scholars note that communities' understanding of heritage can emphasize a broader range of meanings, including also immaterial aspects and that heritage becomes a cultural tool that communities, and individuals use to express, facilitate and construct a sense of identity, self and belonging. In fact, this means that there are as many understandings of heritage as there are communities or individuals who express this understanding of heritage. There is also literature to be found about the link on immaterial and material heritage and communities. Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek (2013) for example investigate the importance of heritage (being it material or immaterial) in creating and enhancing social capital, as they call it. Social capital is defined as a concept to define the socio-economic development of particular groups, communities or neighbourhoods. A heritage community can thus best be defined as those who signify material and immaterial heritage.

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