

Definition of “community” as a bearer of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

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Art. 2 of the Convention for Safeguarding of ICH (the Convention) states that the ICH “means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills...that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage”. Thus “community” is referred to as a bearer of ICH. Since “community” is not yet much discussed in the context of heritage law, it would be beneficial to learn from other fields of science where “community” has been one of the most important objectives for academic debates.

One might find a large amount of literature that deals with the notion of “community”. For example, community social psychologists Garcia, Giuliani and Wiesenfeld¹ point out 9 various ways of the use of the term “community”:

- (1) A group of people sharing characteristics and interests that live within a larger society, from which those features distinguish it.
- (2) The sense in which one belongs to a net of mutually helpful relationships which one can trust in and which do not result in permanent feelings of loneliness that would cause one to act or to adopt a life style that distinguish anxiety and a predisposition to a more destructive subsequent anguish.
- (3) A community can be conceived in three dimensions: a) as a place where the physical environment is thought of as natural or as artificial; b) as a group of people, like a population. Communities however differ in the size of their populations and in the social characteristics of their inhabitants; and c) as a social system. A community as a system can be considered as the totality of interactions among subsystems (health, education, economy, religion, family and communication), because every community has a variety of behavioral rules that satisfy local needs through the specialization of functions and of the people that make up these subsystems.
- (4) A set of population groups that live together in rural or urban places in

¹ Garcia, I., Giuliani, F., and Wiesenfeld, E., 27 *Journal of Community Psychology* 727-740 (1999), at 728-729.

specific conditions of organization and of social and cultural cohesion.

- (5) Like something more concrete than society to which some common denominators that shape it are attributed, such as organization, interrelation, coexistence, integration, functionalism, identity consciousness, some common direction in collective actions etc.
- (6) The community as a whole which has three key components; a) function, b) structure and c) culture.
- (7) A group of individuals that live together in a specific geographical place, that maintains social relations among its members who recognize that they belong to such a community.
- (8) A dynamic social group, that exists prior to the intervention of the researcher that shares problems and interests in a specific space and time.
- (9) A group of people that shares a common territory, a set of common resources, and a common culture, that interacts frequently, and that considers themselves as part of a social group defined as a community.

From these various examples, Garcia, Giuliani and Wiesenfeld draw two major characteristics of community, i.e. a) structural characteristics, i.e. the people and the physical environment, and b) functional characteristics as a result of the structural patterning (the social networks generated in everyday community life).

Garcia, Giuliani and Wiesenfeld further point out that functional elements are expressed in a series of processes that act on the whole community simultaneously. In these processes, affect is involved, the feeling of the members of a community for each other and for the community itself². On this sense of community, McMillan and Chavis³ point out four components, some of which have subcomponents.

- (1) The feeling of membership, which contains a) emotional security, b) belonging and identification, c) personal (material and nonmaterial) investment/contribution, and d) system of shared symbols (ex. special languages, structures, paintings),
- (2) Influence: the influence of a community on its members and the influence of the members on their community,

² Op.cit. p.730.

³ McMillan, D. and Chavis, D., Sense of community: A definition and theory, 1 *Journal of Community Psychology*, 6-23, at 14 (1986).

- (3) **Integration and Need satisfaction:** In a community, a series of processes are established that make personal satisfactions possible while collective needs can also be fulfilled.
- (4) **Shared emotional connections:** According to McMillan and Chavis⁴, this can be appreciated through the frequency and the quality of the interaction, the shared history and the investment that people make in their community.

As these authors show, “community” contains various objective and subjective elements as integral parts. What seems crucial to me is, besides creating a functional definition of “community”, how to deal with subjective elements of “community”.

On the other hand, we should bear in mind that there are critical opinions on communities. It is true as another author⁵ indicates, unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.), that community seems never to be used unfavorably. However there is a significant exception to this observation. An author, following Max Weber, proffers the following definition: “Community” refers simply to “a sense of belonging together”...Since the term is often very loosely applied either to a place or to a collection of people, it is necessary to insist that ... Community is defined by nothing more or less than this subjective state. The sense of belonging together typically combines both affective and cognitive components, both a feeling of solidarity and an understanding of shared identity”⁶.

Some authors as critics of the uses of community point out inherent conceptual fuzziness. For example, two anthropologists discuss the “slipperiness” of the notion of community which they believe is “too vague, too variable in its applications and definitions to be of much utility as an analytical tool”⁷. They argue that terms such as community, also culture, “persist in usage because they evoke a thick assortment of meanings, presumptions and images.” This “thickness does ensure that the invocation of community is likely to have far more emotional resonance than a more

⁴ Op.cit.

⁵ Williams, R., *Keywords* (1976), p.76.

⁶ Brow, J., *Notes on Community, Hegemony and the Use of the Past*, 63 *Anthropological Quarterly* 1-5 (1990).

⁷ Amit, V., and Rapport, N., *The Trouble with Community: Anthropological Reflections on Movement, Identity and Collectivity*, at.13 (2002).

utilitarian term like ‘group’⁸. Another author points out that community “ is often invoked as a unity, as an undifferentiated thing with intrinsic powers that speaks with a single voice”. However “communities are ...nothing of the sort”⁹. He insists on deconstructing univocality and acknowledging instead a heterogeneity of interests that the term may mask. Yet another author suggests an approach to community “as a form of social organization in which the concrete existence of difference, hierarchy, and conflict must be painfully and tediously negotiated if the political goals of development, conservation, and democratic consolidation are to be meaningful”¹⁰. Amit and Rapport observe that for anthropologists in the 21st century who no longer have bounded fieldwork sites “notions of community” offer “a convenient conceptual haven, a location from which to safely circumscribe potentially infinite webs of connection.”¹¹

These rich debates in other fields suggest to us that “community” includes 1) emotional potency, 2) fuzziness, 3) slipperiness, 4) thickness, and 5) conceptual haven¹². These indicators will help us, when we define “community” for ICH.

⁸ Op.cit.

⁹ Watts, M., *Contested Communities, Mailing Markets, and Gilded Governance: Justice, Resource Extraction, and Conservation in the Tropics*, in *People, Plants, and Justice: The Politics of Nature Conservation*, ed. Zerner, C., 21-51, at 37 (2000).

¹⁰ Agrawal, A., *Community-in-Conservation: Tracing the Outlines of an Enchanting Concept*, in Jeffrey, R. and Sundar, N. ed., *A New Moral Economy for India’s Forests? Discourse of Community and Participation*, 92-108, at 104 (1999).

¹¹ Op.cit (note 7) at 17.

¹² Cf. Gold, A.G., *Conceptualizing Community: Anthropological Reflections*, a background paper for *The Collaborative Initiative for Research Ethics in Environmental Health*, 1-17, at p.5.