

Place and identity: networks of Neolithic communities in Central Europe

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ABSTRACT – *The multi-layered and multi-scalar nature of the term ‘community’ makes it a useful tool for both particularistic studies and cross-cultural comparisons, connecting scales of community to regional scales of settlement, exchange and mobility. This paper explores three general themes of community: community as place, as identity and as network. A case study of Neolithic communities in eastern Hungary and Lower Austria demonstrates a spatial and geoarchaeological approach to understanding the relational aspects of places, networks and identity to develop a social archaeology of communities.*

IZVLEČEK – *Večplasten in večnivojski izraz ‘skupnost’ predstavlja uporabno orodje tako za partikularistične študije kot za medkulturne primerjave, saj povezuje obseg skupnosti z regionalnimi poselitvenimi vzorci, menjavo in mobilnostjo. V članku proučujemo tri glavne teme: skupnost kot kraj, skupnost kot identiteto in skupnost kot omrežje. S študijskim primerom neolitskih skupnosti na območju vzhodne Madžarske in Spodnje Avstrijske bomo prikazali vidike odnosov krajev, omrežij in identitet ter razvili družbeno arheologijo skupnosti.*

KEY WORDS – *community; relationships; geoarchaeology; Neolithic; Carpathian Basin*

“We are in community each time we find a place where we belong.” (Block 2008)

Introduction

People want to live in a community, and are constantly reminded that we should live in a community. Government agencies develop ‘Community Action Plans’ to ‘empower’ people. In medicine and education, we talk about ‘communities of practice’ and Anglophone archaeology has a new focus on ‘community archaeology’. Robert Putnam wrote in his book *Bowling Alone* (Putnam 1995) that America has lost its ‘sense of community’, whilst academic departments and business want to be seen as promoting this ‘sense of community’. For example, a press release on a generous donation to the University at Buffalo used the word community four times with at least two different meanings. ‘Giving to one’s community’, the philanthropist views the university as sharing their ‘sense of community’, and they are pleased to contribute because it ‘offers the

school a renewed sense of community’ (Cochrane 2009). Anthropologist George Murdock (1949), on the other hand, placed the community with the nuclear family as the only universal social units, making it something difficult to lose.

So what exactly do archaeologists mean when we use the word community? Is community a fundamental social unit? Is it a feeling of shared mores, social ties and dependency (*sensu Neustupný 1998a*), is it tangible, or imagined (Anderson 1991)? The frequency and variety with which the term is used shows that it resonates powerfully in our daily lives, as well as in the social sciences. Unfortunately, the term community, like household and process, has been treated as having a common sense understanding. For ‘household’, this problem has been address-

sed over the past decade (e.g., Borić 2008; Souvatzi 2008; Webley 2008). There have also been several works in recent years dealing explicitly with community in an effort to define and illuminate this concept (e.g., Amit 2002; Canuto, Yaeger 2000b; Hutson et al. 2008; Knapp 2003). However, work remains to be done if we are to use ‘community’ coherently, connect the concept to archaeological data (i.e., spatial, temporal and fragmentary), and develop a social archaeology of community. We need to ask ourselves what the conditions for, and perceptions of, community were through time, and we need to explore how we can see evidence for these conditions and perceptions in archaeological remains.

What follows is a discussion of what archaeologists might mean when using the term community – that is, which concept(s) we may have in mind. Community is presented here as multi-layered and a useful tool for interpretations at multiple analytical scales. I present three themes of community that together create a sense of community, and then explore how we can use archaeological data to investigate community.

What do we mean by community?

Archaeologists frequently talk about communities without defining the term, and William Isbell (2000: 243) suggests that we eliminate the ambiguities in our use of the concept, because “*the importance of ‘community’ as a tool for investigation is not matched by its clarity or unambiguous use*”. Margaret Stacey (1969) argued that it is too awkward to even bother struggling to define, and suggests instead that we use ‘local social system’, or ‘locality studies’, terms which are even more awkward. I suggest that while incoherent usage is problematic, the ambiguity inherent in the concept is not the real problem, because community functions at multiple scales and in multiple ways. Therefore, we need to be clear about which scales and which forms of community we are talking about, but removing all ambiguity is both undesirable and impossible.

A second problem is that we often uncritically “*associate the social entity community with the analytical term site*” (Canuto, Yaeger 2000a.xiii). A straightforward link between community and settlement seems untenable, although settlements and communities have often been treated as two sides of one coin. Norbert Elias (1974.xix) defined community as “*a group of households situated in the same locality and linked to each other by functional in-*

terdependencies which are closer than interdependencies of the same kind within the wider social field to which the community belongs”. K. C. Chang (1968) used the term settlement as the archaeological correlate for the social entity of ‘community’. Chang defined an archaeological settlement as “*the local context wherein the community is presumed to have resided and gone about its daily business*”, and “*the physical locale or cluster of locales where the members of a community lived, ensured their subsistence, and pursued their social functions in a delineable time period*” (Chang 1968.3). Despite efforts to link communities with settlements, ‘site’ and ‘community’ are not necessarily equivalent entities (Hutson et al. 2008; Kolb, Snead 1997; Yaeger, Canuto 2000). Communities, in the archaeological and anthropological sense, are composed of people. Settlements, settlement clusters, ‘culture groups’ and longhouses are some of the material correlates of community, but even within these archaeological entities subdivisions and variations exist. Moreover, if we move away from site-focused archaeology and examine landscapes, we find other correlates for other kinds of community. For example, Martin Kuna proposed a community area model for Neolithic communities in Bohemia, suggesting the existence of individual groups with spatially restricted activity zones for agricultural plots, houses, burials, storage pits, etc. within a communal territory (Kuna 1991). Rather than focusing on discrete sites, Kuna connects all of the activity areas within the landscape.

August Hollingshead (1948) distinguishes three definitions of community: as a form of group cohesion, unity and action aimed at common interests; as a geographic area with spatial limits; or a socio-geographic structure merging the two. *Gemeinschaft*, a relationship in which individuals are oriented to a larger association as much if not more than to their own self-interest, provides another interpretation linking these forms of community. People in a *Gemeinschaft* abide by common beliefs about the appropriate behaviour of members of the group to each other and to the group (Tönnies 1963). Ferdinand Tönnies saw the family as the ideal expression of *Gemeinschaft*, but he expected that community could be based on shared place and shared belief as well as kinship. This suggests that, for Tönnies at least, the community is located primarily in the mind, as the ‘sense of community’.

Benedict Anderson (1991) introduced the concept of the imagined community as an idea that people hold in their minds and assume is shared by other people

who they perceive as also being members of the community. Anderson argues that some communities are not based on everyday face-to-face interaction between people, yet still function as communities in terms of ideology and (perceived) shared experiences. This approach has been applied in archaeology by Bernard A. Knapp (2003) and William Isbell (2000). Isbell described two types of community, shared space or residence and shared knowledge and experiences. Communities in this second type are therefore participating in a collective consciousness (Knapp 2003). The imagined community bears some resemblance to the moral community and to the social ties and dependencies that Evžen Neustupný (Neustupný 1998b) uses to define community areas. Each of these approaches community in a slightly different way, but they have in common the basic principles of relationships, shared experience and traditions. The ways that people can interact within these communities suggest that a network approach may also be useful.

Alasdair Whittle introduces another notion of community in his *Archaeology of People*, suggesting that ‘values, ideas, ideals and emotions’ form part of the structure within which people act by providing a ‘moral community’ or ‘moral network’ (Whittle 2003). This forms over time, through “*long and fractured conversations about a variety of themes, from the contingencies of the present to the abstractions of pasts, otherworlds and ‘nature’*” (ibid. 161). Whittle (2005) expands upon this concept, drawing from work on cultural aesthetics and conviviality by anthropologist Joanna Overing (2003). These ideas that people hold, about aesthetics, hospitality, appropriate actions and ideology combine to form a structure within which people do more than simply co-exist; they live a sociable life, in Whittle’s phrase they are “*living well together*” (Whittle 2005.64).

This brief discussion is meant to provide an overview of some of the definition, problems and critiques that have been offered, as a jumping-off point to a discussion of how we might better employ the concept within prehistory. In the following sections, I discuss three broad themes of community – community of place, community of identity, and community of networks. These are all interrelated, and are types that we can identify and discuss with archaeological data.

Community as place

The first and most general meaning is the sense of people having common residence, a community of

place; ‘locality’ for David Lee and Howard Newby (1983), the shared space of Isbell (2000) or the spatially delimited geographic area of Hollingshead (1948). Community of place used in this way implies that people interact, although it does not require that they do. At the same time, community in this sense is not directly linked to the site or micro-regional level of settlement analysis. People who live in close proximity to each other are more likely to share a sense of place, and work together in the construction of place. We also have numerous examples of several local-scale communities combining their labour to construct place, such as with the Hopewell mound builders of the American Midwest (Dancey, Pacheco 1997), or Neolithic enclosures in Europe (Fig. 1). The community of place exists at any spatial scale, so long as people conceive of it as their place.

Edward Casey’s (1993) theory of place suggests that embodied being-in-the-world depends completely on a sense of place. Place is experienced and sensed by people, and the shared experiencing and sensing is how place is culturally constructed. Furthermore, any space that has not been experienced, that is not a cultural place, “*occasions the deepest anxiety*” (Casey 1993.ix). Place, therefore, is a powerful element in the way people organise their lives, providing coherence for interacting and making a living. We can also imagine the construction of place in the reconstruction of place. The enclosure at Heldenberg seen in Figure 1 not only provides a device for thinking about spatial organisation within prehistoric communities; it also provides a community of place for the team that reconstructed it, for the people who work there and even a community of people who have visited it.

Community as identity

The second sense is the community of identity, including a shared sense of identity and a basis for collective action. It is this shared sense of being that Tönnies (1963) points to when he discusses the existence of three different types of community; the communities of kinship, locality and friendship. For Tönnies, each of these could be analysed, or even observed, individually, as separate entities. Identity is an important part of moral and imagined communities, and communities of kinship or friendship are just two of the potential interrelations making up the larger Neolithic social structure. As archaeologists, we can conceptualise some of the activities and relationships that form a community of identity when we collaborate in multi-national or multi-dis-

ciplinary research projects (Fig. 2). Anthony Cohen (*Cohen 1982; 1985*) argues that the reality of community is tied to the meaning that people give to community symbols, and how people invoke this symbolism in their construction of community identity. This can occur both at the micro-regional and regional scale, and can include that community for whom the archaeological correlate is the 'culture group'. Indeed, in a general way this perspective is the theoretical basis for such concepts as *Kulturkreislehre* (*Rebay-Salisbury 2011*). This sense of identity, the sense of community that is mentioned above and that we use so often in speech, is abstract, but shows itself in concrete ways.



Fig. 1. Communities of place can form through shared habitation, ritual, sport or other activities. The Neolithic enclosure and several houses at Heldenberg in Austria have been reconstructed, creating a place for tourism and linking today with the past.

For example, the sense of identity of many traditional western communities is bound to the local church, and money and time expended in competitive displays of grandeur such as owning a saint's finger bone. In this instance, identity links to place in the sense of community, but the identity is not formed by inhabiting the space, but rather in participating in rites that occur at the place, in assuming a shared worldview (*e.g.*, importance of the finger) and in a shared classification as members of this particular church.

Likewise, a sense of community can perhaps be extrapolated from the ways that task areas are placed, concentric ditches are dug, or sediments are altered. On Late Neolithic tells, each house cluster, delimited by small fences of stakes (*e.g.*, *Horváth 1987; Raczký 1987*), may be one community, whilst all house clusters at a particular site may form another, larger community. Evidence used to extrapolate identity need not come from the built environment; the spatial patternings of other material elements also inform us about activities and the use of space. Changes in the texture, colour and thickness of some areas within the soilscape can delimit space in a very tangible way. This is construction of the cultural soilscape (*Retallack 1998; Wells 2006*), and while it may often have occurred as an unintended consequence of everyday practice (following *Bourdieu 1977*), this in no way weakens the resultant formation of place. On the contrary, changes that develop through living rather than through plan may have an increased symbolic significance. All of these, from changes in texture and physical appearance to those 'invisible' changes in chemical matrix, would

have a direct effect on people's conceptualisations of their community and place, thus producing a specific sense of group identity. Finally, shared affordances may contribute to shared ways of performing, thereby augmenting a shared sense of identity.

Community as networks

The third meaning of community applied here is that of interactions and shared characteristics other than geographical location, including occupation, clan affiliation or common ideology; the 'local social system' of Stacey (*1969*). Murdock (*1949, 79*) thought of it not only as "*the maximal group of persons who normally reside in face-to-face association*", but also as a "*network of interpersonal relations*" in political, economic and religious roles (*ibid. 82*). Lee and Newby (*1983*) describe this as a community of people linked together in social networks, and Whittle (*2003*) likewise considers the moral community as a network. These networks are profoundly significant for understanding social change; as Christian Peterson and Robert Drennan (*2005, 5*) put it, "*it is in this matrix of inter-action that the forces that produce social change are generated*". I am most interested in two things here - how these different sets of networks can produce interactions between local communities of place, forming extended communities; and how these networks act to reproduce and alter social structures, constraining or affording specific actions. Networks of communities provide for interactions across local-scale communities, and also draw these local communities together into regional and macro-regional communities. This is perhaps the best place to introduce the concept of interdependency, a theoretical construct that helps

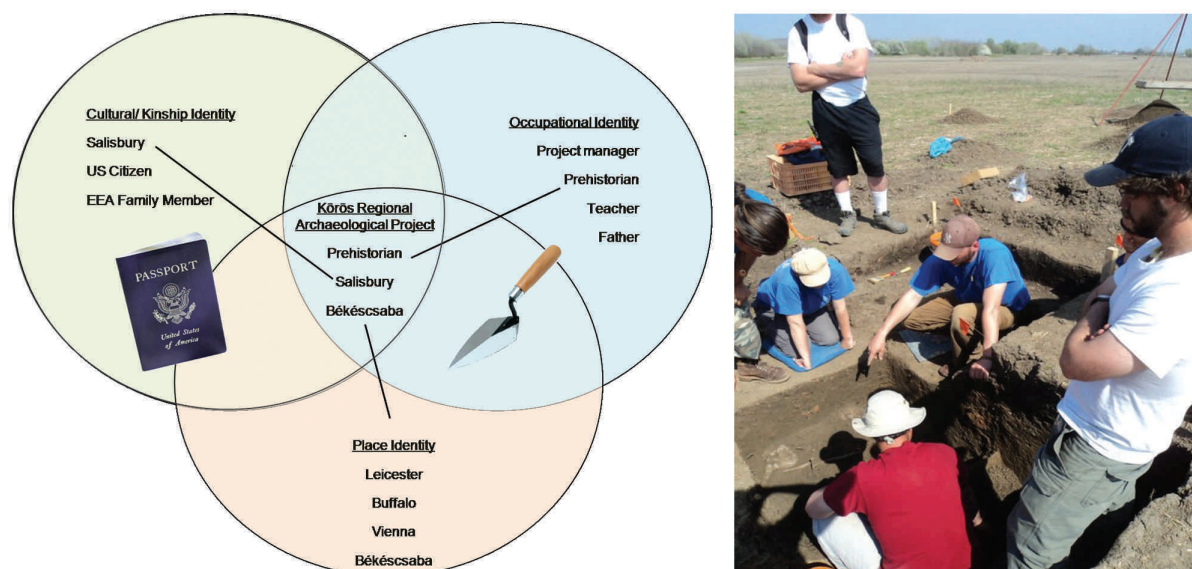


Fig. 2. Communities of identity can form through kinship, ideology, common occupations and experiences or common community of place, among others. The Hungarian-American Körös Regional Archaeological Project is a community of identity produced through common experiences and interactions.

to describe the relationships among people, communities, settlements and sediments.

Neustupný (1998a) describes communities as being bound by intra-group social and emotional ties as well as relations of interdependency. Elias (1974) argued that dependency on other people limits the range of actions and options available to any individual or group. This not only includes necessities such as mating, communal labour and exchange, but also involves aspects of inclusion/exclusion and restriction of access. Through the concept of affordances (Ingold 2000), this dependency can be expanded to include other groups, animals, plants, soils, rocks, and indeed any feature of the natural or cultural environment. It is also important to stress, as Elias does, that interdependencies are completely neutral. This includes the interdependencies between people that Elias spoke of, as well as to interdependencies between people and animals, people and space, people and the physical environment, people and affordances. All of these are neutral in that they do not cause conflict or cooperation, although they may well afford the opportunity for either. In small-scale agro-pastoralist societies, such as those of the Neolithic and Early Copper Age on the Great Hungarian Plain, the networks of interdependencies tend to be all-encompassing; that is, people are dependent upon the members of their community for nearly all aspects of their life.

For the second part, communities are, at every level, essentially a set of networks and relationships (Fig.

3), and it is within these networks that social reproduction occurs. Bruno Latour (2005) argues that society does not exist as an independent and tangible entity in the world, but rather is nothing more (and nothing less) than the endless array of interconnections between people and things. Latour's general approach is to include people, social groups and material objects in an examination of the contexts of interactions. Michael Kolb and James Snead (1997:611) also look to interactions, stating that:

“The role of the local community as a particular node of social interaction appears universal, forming a principal arena in which sociopolitical relationships are negotiated or played out. This suggests that a community possesses a minimum demographic component comprised of a core of individuals who interact regularly and whose repeated interactions socially reproduce that group.”

Within the process of social reproduction, community networks also afford and constrain their members. These networks are dense enough, and the resultant ‘chains of interdependencies’ (Elias 1974) among community members are strong enough to “discourage individual action which goes against local traditions” (Crow, Allan 1994:11). This quote follows from several examples that Crow and Allan cite where the disposition of the local community serves to restrict deviation from social norms. This is not to say that action is closed off, or that changes do not occur, but it does point out the strong regulating effects of community views of accepted prac-

The built environment is an essential part of the quest to interpret community structures in past societies. This is because architecture fills a number of social requirements, ranging from the mundane, such as shelter, to regulating social interaction within a community and facilitating ritual practices. In addition, architecture serves to control contact between individuals, households and communities, especially through the creation of public and private space (Byrd 1994; Kent 1990; Lawrence, Low 1990). By built environment, I mean not only those things deliberately and intentionally built, like houses, fortifications, burial mounds and ovens, but also the unintended construction of things like erosional surfaces and cultural soils. Through the unintentional, habituated practices of everyday life, people change their landscapes in identifiable ways. Through tilling and trampling, fertilisation and agriculture, in clearing fields, digging pits, preparing food, building fires, middens, levees, terraces and many other activities, people change the physical and chemical properties of the soil. These are things we can see archaeologically if we treat soil as material culture; the following case studies present examples of using soil as an artefact.

Neolithic soils, Körös Area

My first case study comes from the Neolithic and early Copper Age in the Körös River Basin of eastern Hungary. I have discussed the methods in detail (Salisbury 2010; 2012a), so a brief summary should suffice. I hand-cored small farmsteads, described the stratigraphy seen in the cores, and collected samples for pH, available phosphates, multi-element chemistry and magnetic susceptibility. Taken together, these data suggest that cultural soils replaced natural soils at settlements. Cultural soils form part of the household cluster, improving our interpretations of human activities. Human inputs of ash, shell and bone, in conjunction with extensive burning on and in the ground, significantly increased alkalinity over time. Phosphate levels in and around sites are much higher than normal, resulting from anthropogenic inputs of organic matter. Tilling, trampling and adding clay to different areas within the house lots, in conjunction with the addition of organic matter, cause changes in soil texture. All of these combine to create a cultural soil and specific activity zones within this soil that people could identify through sight, smell and touch. Through this, a community of place developed, connecting people to specific places in the landscape, which would be recognised in similar places during visits to other settlements.

Daniel Miller (1987) argues that objects can be important not because they are obviously there or obviously constraining/enabling, but because in many cases they are not obviously there. That is, objects are most powerful when they are acting through our subconscious, as part of an exterior environment that both habituates us and incites us to act. This kind of approach helps us understand how people react to soils. Evans wants us to reflect on the phenomenological aspects of “*the closest, most intimate, scale with the land surface that can be experienced under everyday practices of living*”, the “*experience of textures*” beneath our feet and in our hands (Evans 2003:45). These qualities become part of how people identify their locality, and how they fit into the world. The creation of place through the construction of soils (Fig. 4) occurs in a manner analogous to that of landscape construction, and has quite similar results. Each community’s sense of place is linked in a reciprocal relationship with the land, a relationship that helps to structure their use of space and feeling of belonging. This relationship is reciprocal, because as people interact with the natural processes of soil formation, erosion and re-deposition, the changes they sense inform their conceptualisation of community, place and time. The soils then become key elements of the cultural landscape and an important component of identity.

People live in a complex set of relationships, including relations with the environment, architecture, the organisation of space and other people. These relationships influence remembering and identity. Regularities in the architecture of settlement space suggest a widely held set of cultural traditions that acted both as constraint and affordance. This is seen in the use of mud for house construction, and in the geochemical evidence for the organisation of activity zones around the household-cluster (Salisbury 2010; 2012a). Adhering to cultural conventions does not mean blindly following social rules, or fixity due to social structure. Nor does wide variability, for example in the size, distribution and structure of Tiszapolgár settlements (Parkinson 2002; Parkinson et al. 2010), indicate a complete breakdown of traditions. Rather, these traits indicate that settlement space was developed through everyday practice and used as an avenue for negotiation and change following the aggregation and boundedness of the Classic Tisza period. As with diversity within the very structured set of rules followed by LBK people in the construction of their houses (Modderman 1988), the structured use of space within Late Ne-

lithic and Early Copper Age farmsteads and the creation of cultural landscapes around them serves to affirm identity while allowing for divergence from cultural norms. The materialisation of everyday practice in the texture, colour, consistency and fertility of soils in and around the house or hamlet would have made physical the social reality of the community, even as house size changed and populations dispersed. Soil becomes a medium of expression (Salisbury 2012b), relaying strong symbols about the world and about the place of and membership in a community. Thus, the soilscape provides an alternative source of collective standardisation to offset some variability.

Neolithic enclosures

Again, architectural organisation has important implications for the construction of memories and identity. This is evident in the formation of tells, burial mounds or henges, and this realisation has resulted in theories about remembering and landscape (Chapman 1997; Whittle 2005). Regularities in the architecture of settlement space also suggest a widely held set of cultural traditions. I argue that the structured use of space within Late Neolithic and Early Copper Age farmsteads and the creation of cultural landscapes around them serves to affirm identity

while allowing for variations in other cultural traditions. The materialisation of everyday practice in the texture, colour, consistency and fertility of soils in and around the house or hamlet would have made physical the social reality of the community, even as house size changed and populations dispersed.

Similarly, the construction of social space through the building of rondels in the Lengyel culture contributed to identity and maintained social networks. Ditched enclosures are known throughout Central Europe from the LBK through the Lengyel and Tiszapolgár (Parkinson, Duffy 2007). During the early fifth millennium BC, enclosures became formalised in design and no longer necessarily enclosed settlements. These earthworks comprise very formal, circular arrangements of banks, ditches, and timber palisades, albeit with local variations. In the classic form, there are four narrow entrances that tend to be opposite each other, as seen here at Hornsburg 2 in Lower Austria (Fig. 5). Roundels are mostly known from aerial reconnaissance and geophysical prospection, and many have been subject to severe erosion, so relatively little is known about them except for their distribution and general physical form, but their construction represents a lot of work.

The very formal circular layout, although differing in detail from site to site, seems to adhere to a preconceived overall plan. This particular feature distinguishes the roundels from other Neolithic enclosures. The ditches were roughly V-shaped in section, up to 5m deep and 8m wide. Sometimes they were re-cut: segments of ditches near the western entrance at Hornsburg 2 in Lower Austria showed signs of multiple episodes of cutting and infilling. John Chapman (1988) has described enclosures as having an

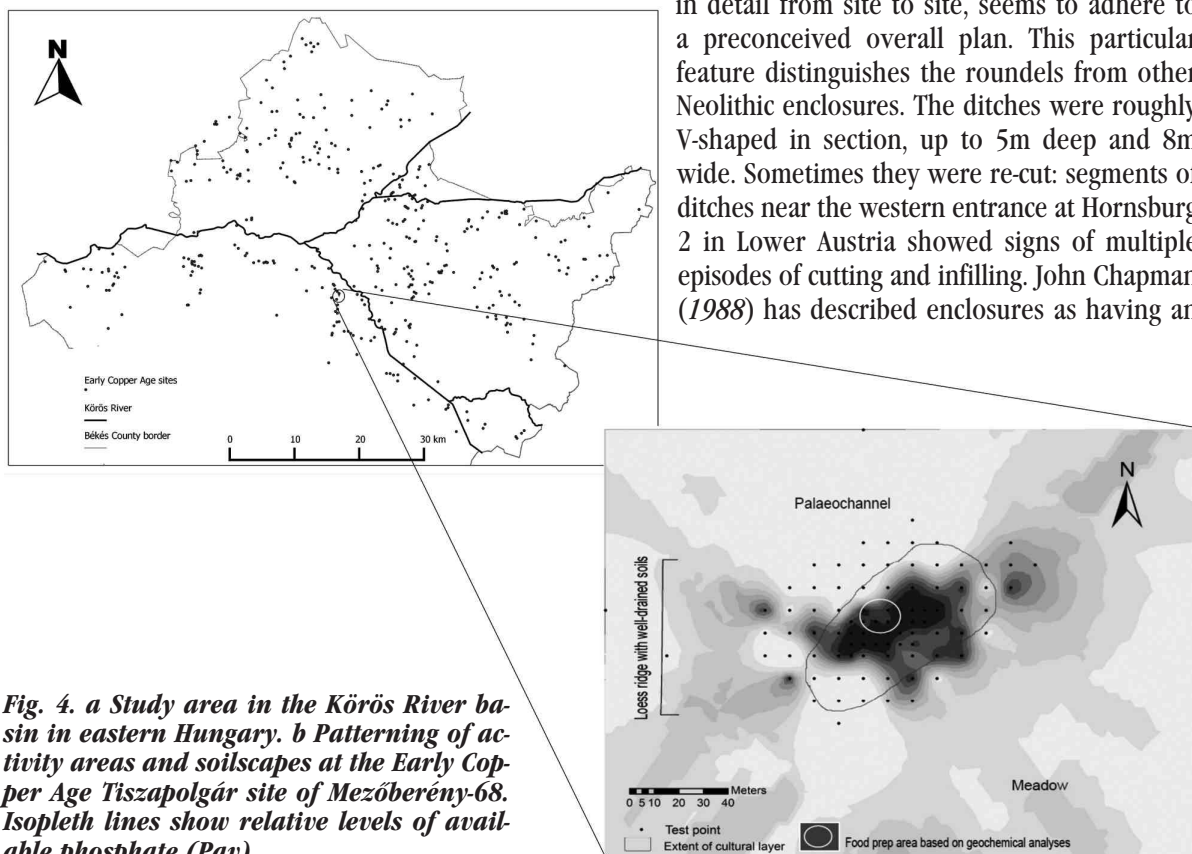


Fig. 4. a Study area in the Körös River basin in eastern Hungary. b Patterning of activity areas and soilscaapes at the Early Copper Age Tiszapolgár site of Mezőberény-68. Isopleth lines show relative levels of available phosphate (Pav).

Fig. 5. *The Neolithic enclosure of Hornsburg 2 in the Kreutal, Lower Austria. The enclosure ditches show evidence of multiple episodes of re-digging or cleaning.*



essential role in translating space to place. Whittle (2003) views the planned and repetitive digging and re-digging of ditches as essential to the maintenance and guidance of collective memory. In other words, the construction of enclosures and other earthworks was important in the formation of common identities and the observance of a shared sense of community. Although more work is needed to learn what went on inside these enclosures, they appear to be a general cultural phenomenon that was established early and remained in cultural memory, but changed and became more highly structured as cultural traditions diverged. With this comes the sedimentation of certain practices within the habitus of a community.

Conclusion

Community typically includes an idea of locality as well as identity, and it is in this very respect that it is most evidently multi-scalar. Each of the levels of Neolithic settlement clustering is related to a form of community, and is part of a dynamic network. At large Late Neolithic sites in the Carpathian Basin, house clusters delimited by small fences of stakes (e.g., Horváth 1987; Raczky 1987), may be one community, whilst several house clusters form another, larger community. At the regional scale, we see clustering of small sites around the large settlements (Parkinson 2002), suggestive of micro-regional communities (Salisbury 2010). The relative uniformity of ceramic decoration that makes the Tisza culture, for example, distinct from Lengyel or Vinča, suggests a regional Tisza community, a community that archaeologists refer to as a cultural group. Likewise, the distribution of Lengyel roundels and settlements suggest several layers of Lengyel community.

At the level of the farmstead, the community appears to be one or two households, but these farmsteads are linked to one another through networks of interaction, evident in cultural traditions of spatial organisation, ceramic decorations, communal

construction projects, mortuary customs and exchange. A sense of community can be extrapolated from the ways that task areas are placed, concentric ditches are dug, or sediments are altered. I have shown how the manipulation of soil played a significant role in the process of the construction of community, through the formation of soilscape, through sensual experience and social memory. Changes in the texture, colour and thickness of soils also delimit space in very tangible ways.

In conclusion, while a structural definition of community might seem useful, developing one single definition is not only exceptionally difficult, but also would necessarily be limiting. The multi-layered and multi-scalar nature of the term make it a useful tool for both particularistic studies and cross-cultural diachronic comparison, allowing us to extend our interpretations in directions of both the intersubjective phenomenology of sediments and space and the role that these play across networks of people, communities and materials. Communities are collective actors, transforming their world and their society. Communities are social constructs, which may or may not be related to a shared space, but also to a shared worldview, group affiliation or occupation. Communities are relational entities, composed of networks of people and environment functioning at multiple spatial and temporal scales. The problem is to identify measurable material remains that reflect both the cultural system and the relations between its parts. Soils have these measurable material remains. Documenting multiple themes of community, communities existing at regional and landscape scales, demonstrates some of the very real complexity of life, and archaeology, for Neolithic communities.

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