



## **Dorpsidentiteit: op zoek naar eenheid in verscheidenheid**

Vijf methoden waarmee dorpsbewoners hun dorpsidentiteit expliciet kunnen maken

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## Summary

This report deals with the identity of villages. The commissioners of this research, De Brede Overleggroep Kleine Dorpen in Drenthe, Doarpswurk and the Vereniging Groninger Dorpen support villages with the development of a vision for their future development. The identity of a village plays an important role in the way people deal with social and spatial developments in their village, whereas these developments can impact the identity of the village.

The main objective of this research is to develop methods that citizens can use to define the identity of their village. They should be able to use this method with little or no supervision. The main research questions that guides the research is:

*Which concepts and methods are suitable to define the identity of villages?*

The first step in answering this research question was an extensive literature review in order to gain further insight in the concept of identity and how identity is constructed. This review was used to develop a number of methods for defining the identity of villages. To test the theoretical assumptions and the practical application, the methods have been applied in three villages. The reflection of the application of the methods in different context was used to refine the methods.

*What is identity and how does it come into being?*

Villagers who talk about the identity of their village, look for characteristics that are special to them. They focus on similarities within the group as well as on differences with other groups. They use language (concepts and ideas) to construct meaning about themselves and their environment. The ensemble of concepts and ideas that help to describe reality is called a discourse. The identity of a village can be subtracted from the discourses that villagers use to think and talk about themselves and their relationships with others.

The identity of a village is not the sum of all identities from individual citizens. Citizens are part of multiple social networks and use multiple discourses, depending on the context on a specific moment. We can only talk about village identity if the people living in that village identify as a group. Interaction plays an important role in shaping the discourse. People exchange and negotiate meanings within their everyday conversations and thus shape a specific discourse. A number of issues are often discussed: characteristics of citizens, their mutual relationships, historical events, values, norms, rituals, activities, objects, places and spatial qualities. People use these issues to define what makes their villages special, what unites them and what distinguishes them from others.

Finally it is important to recognize that a group identity is always created in relation to a specific situation. Villagers identity and present themselves for example as a group in response to governmental plans, developments in a neighboring village or because they want to develop something within their own village, like a playground or a community centre.

*Five methods for making the identity of villages explicit*

Five different methods have been developed drawing upon the theoretical elaboration: (1) the photo method, (2) the living room discussion, (3) the (historical) excursion, (4) the speed date, and (5) the scenario method. Chapter 3 presents an overview of these methods and describes the activities, the underlying principles and relation to identity and the expected result. The methods have been used in three villages. Based upon the experiences from the application within these villages it was assessed to what extent the methods are suitable for defining the identity of a village.

The number of participants varied between 15 and 45. The participants discussed the village and the surrounding in small groups of 4 to 6 persons. Students from Wageningen University introduced and explained the method and helped during the discussions.

*The application of the methods in practice*

The relation between the theoretical background of identity and the results of the application of methods within the different villages was analyzed to assess whether the results gave a representative picture of the village identity. An additional reflection was made to assess to what extent the practical aspects influenced the results of the different methods.

The participants were able to execute the assignment of the various methods very well. Providing additional explanation was necessary, however. Participants wanted to know what the underlying purpose of the methods was and what the results were going to be used for. They were especially eager to learn what was expected from them. Once the villagers got going with the assignment, everything went smoothly. Discussions were lively, but the results not always written down.

The methods introduced new themes to the participants, but this did not lead them to create entirely new discourses. When asked to think about the themes new to them, participants used their own discourses and concepts to attribute meaning to them. The varied discussions, based on the photos, future fantasies and developments, caused various discourses to become explicit. Which identities became explicit, depended to a large extent on the situation in the village at that very moment. Current developments were discussed often. Because not every inhabitant of the village was present at the meetings, it was difficult to determine whether or not the result was representative for the whole village.

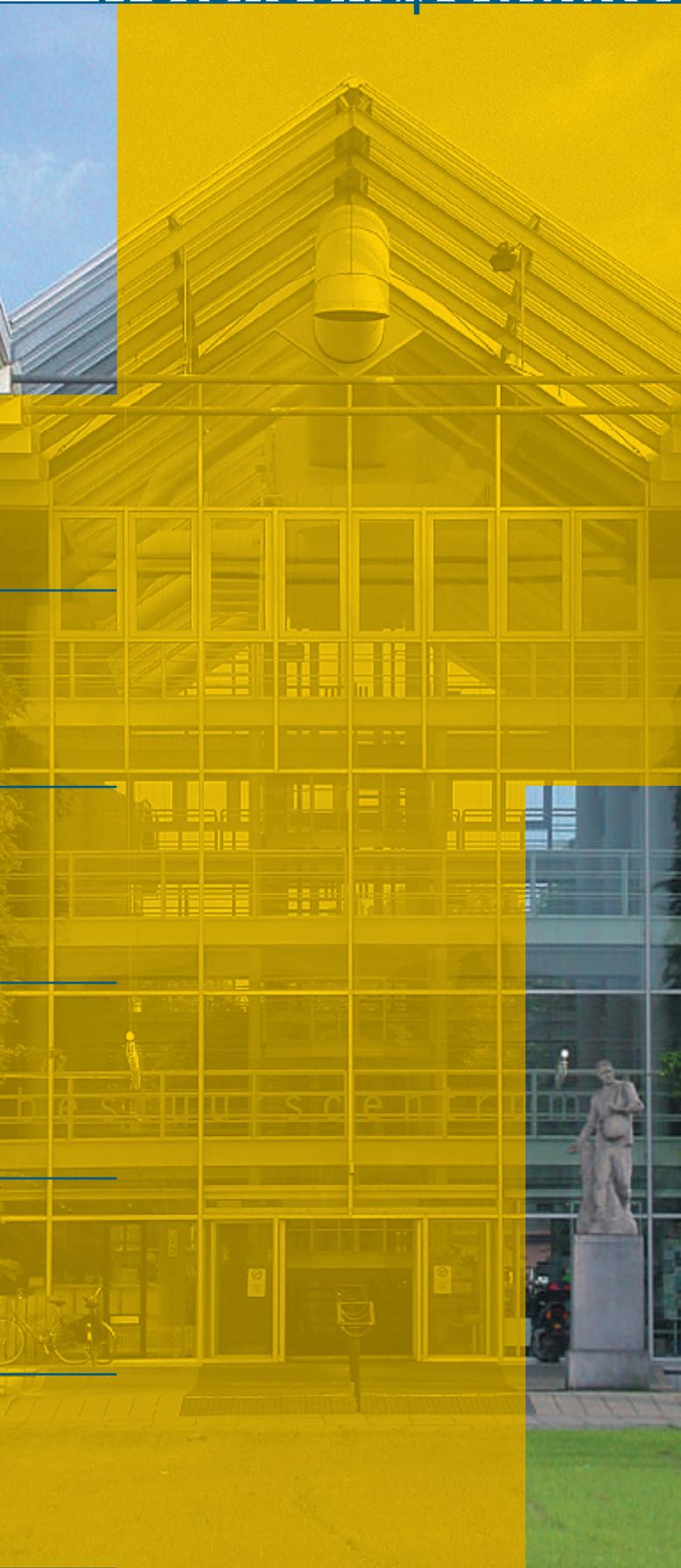
The participants emphasized the importance of organizing the village meetings, because it strengthened the social coherence in the village. The discussions during the evenings caused the participants to identify with each other. The negotiations within the group allowed the group to develop its problem definition. In turn, this caused the discourse to become a basis for influence on others.

### *Conclusion*

The applied methods are suitable for making the identity of a village explicit. The interaction and limited influence of the methods, allow the discourses of the villagers to become explicit. The research shows that, from a scientific point of view, *the* identity of a village cannot be defined. The identity of a village is better understood as the whole of shared identities concerning the village. Because the methods encourage the interaction between the villagers, it allows them to further develop these shared identities.

*For this research, a Capita Selecta was organized on identity, quality of life and social-spatial developments. Students could take (guest) lectures about these subjects. After meeting with the village councils, the students participated in the village meetings. They help the villages in executing the assignments and gave a reflection on the methods afterwards. These reflections were used in this report.*

# Wetenschapswinkel



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