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Vogel, H.; Klomp, M.C.M.; Barnard, M.

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Singing Apart Together

Communities and the Heritagization and Eventization of Genemuider bovenstem Psalm Singing in the Netherlands

Henk Vogel | ORCID: 0000-0002-2985-9084

Practical Theology, Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

henkvoegel1992@gmail.com

Mirella Klomp | ORCID: 0000-0002-6659-2411

Practical Theology, Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

m.c.m.klomp@pthu.nl

Marcel Barnard | ORCID: 0000-0001-8725-9784

Practical Theology, Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

mbarnard@pthu.nl

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Abstract

Genemuider bovenstem is a particular style of psalm singing, originating from the town of Genemuiden in the Netherlands, in which a higher voice is added to the Genevan melody of the psalms. It has roots in liturgical contexts, and has been designated as Intangible Cultural Heritage. This article discusses the construction of singing communities in *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing as performed both in the Sunday worship practices of strictly Reformed church communities, and in collective regional singing events on weekdays that receive financial and practical support from the Dutch government. We present the results of empirical research in Genemuiden, demonstrating the existence of a mutually reinforcing overlap between church communities and the publics who attend psalm-singing events. Our work serves to further nuance extant theories that suggest that the eventization and heritagization of religious practices lead

to a diminution in the status of church communities and of their control and ownership over their practices.

Keywords

psalms – eventization – religious heritage – collective singing – ecclesioscapes – strictly Reformed – church

1 Introduction

Every Sunday morning in Genemuiden (a relatively small town of ca. 10,000 inhabitants in the Netherlands), a unique style of communal psalm singing can be heard coming from the church buildings. This style of singing is known as *Genemuider bovenstem* and it has acquired a particular association with the three strictly Reformed churches in the town. In these churches, metrical psalms are sung to the tunes of the Genevan psalter, a practice that is characteristic of strictly Reformed liturgy throughout the Netherlands. Genemuiden's variant, however, has acquired its own particular uniqueness due to the addition of a second melody, or descant, referred to as the *Genemuider bovenstem* (literally "Genemuiden's upper voice"), above the Genevan psalm tune.¹ Similar practices can be found in other countryside villages lying in areas known for their strictly Reformed population, such as Urk and Yerseke. Nevertheless, out of all of these, *Genemuider bovenstem* is the most well-known tradition, partly due to efforts by local groups to popularize it through collective-singing events and partly through its accreditation as Intangible Cultural Heritage.² With the help of heritage and media institutions, these efforts have resulted in a resurgence and proliferation of the practice beyond the church communities in the town of Genemuiden.

The transformation of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing can be understood as "heritagization," meaning that this religious practice of church communities (partly) transforms into a practice to be preserved for its significance as (local) culture.³ Furthermore, its transformation can be understood as "even-

1 See one of the many examples on YouTube, with the *Genemuider bovenstem* sung in the second verse: <https://youtu.be/2SckJZ3dLo> (accessed 19 May 2023).

2 See, Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Upper Voice Singing with Psalms in Genemuiden," <https://www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/en/bovenstemzingen> (accessed 19 May 2023).

3 See, Birgit Meyer, "Recycling the Christian Past: The Heritagization of Christianity and

tization,” which means that a routine practice transforms into a leisure activity that stands apart from the routine and provides participants with “heightened emotional experiences.”⁴ Heritagization and eventization are related processes of (re)sacralizing (religious) practices for their cultural significance and aesthetic attractiveness.⁵ Scholars of heritage, events, and religion have shown that, often, the heritagization and eventization of religious practices transform the communities engaged in these practices into more loosely connected networks, and that the initial communities’ levels of control over their practice often decrease (see below). Therefore, we pose the following central question: How does *Genemuiders bovenstem* psalm singing serve to construct communities in light of the heritagization and eventization of religious practices?

The aim of this qualitative empirical study is to reconsider theories that state that the heritagization and eventization of religious practices imply either the fluidization or the dissolution of local (religious) communities. The case of *Genemuiders Bovenstem* psalm singing offers a unique insight into the ways in which communities are constructed both in church services and in “heritage events,” and it sheds light on the question of whether or how any fluidization or dissolution of communities takes place. Furthermore, this study shows how this particular tradition and its transformation are new articulations of “community” in the history of collective psalmody. This is of interest for the study of psalms and their reception, and for the study of the (collective) performance of religious texts in biblical theology and practical theology.

2 Heritagization, Eventization, and Community

Heritage scholars have argued that processes of “heritagization” are often accompanied by transformations of community and redistributions of power.⁶

National Identity in the Netherlands,” in Rosemarie Buikema, Antoine Buyse, and Antonius C.G.M. Robben (eds.), *Cultures, Citizenship and Human Rights* (London: Routledge, 2019), 65, 70–71, 79; Oscar Saleminck, Rasmus Rask Poulsen, and Sofie Isager Ahl, “Sacred But Not Holy: Awe, Spectacle, and the Heritage Gaze in Danish Religious Heritage Contexts,” *Anthropological Notebooks* 26/3 (2020), 71–72.

4 Michelle Duffy, “Music Events and Festivals,” in Judith Mair (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Festivals* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 309.

5 Saleminck, Poulsen, and Ahl, “Sacred But Not Holy,” 72–73.

6 Janet Blake, “Further Reflections on Community Involvement in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage,” in Natsuko Akagawa and Laurajane Smith (eds.), *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 17–35; Min-Chin Chiang, “Intangibility Re-Translated,” in Natsuko Akagawa and Laurajane Smith (eds.), *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage* (New York:

Scholars of heritage and religion, meanwhile, have used the notion of heritagization to describe how, in secular and postsecular societies such as the Netherlands, “religious media that pointed towards the presence of God are now recast as secular media that convey a sense of a shared Christian past.”⁷ We do not assume that *Genemuiders bovenstem* has necessarily and entirely been recast as a “secular” practice. However, it has certainly begun to extend beyond the worship practice of local church communities without disappearing from them, and is now framed in terms of intangible heritage, most explicitly so through its designation as Intangible Cultural Heritage.⁸ Similarly, event scholars note that the “eventization” of communal practices often results in the transformation of communities. Event scholars Michaela Pfadenhauer and Ruth Dowson use the term “eventization” to describe the reframing of the religious practices of a religious community as spectacular, memorable events in order to attract audiences in a pluralized context.⁹ Greg Richards, David Jarman, and others have investigated the ways in which communities are challenged and constructed when “iterative events” (cyclical and emphasizing “tradition” and “local content”) give way to, or are transformed into, “pulsar events” that are “relatively rare.”¹⁰ Through its designation as Intangible Cultural Heritage, and its extension from the Sunday worship practices of church communities in Genemuiden into collective singing events (which are relatively rare compared

Routledge, 2019), 84–101, at 94–98; Ming-chun Ku, “ICH-Isation of Popular Religions and the Politics of Recognition in China,” in Natsuko Akagawa and Laurajane Smith (eds.), *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 187–199, at 197.

7 Meyer, “Recycling the Christian Past,” 70; cf. Avi Astor, Marian Burchardt, and Mar Griera, “The Politics of Religious Heritage,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56/1 (2017), 126–142, at 127–129.

8 It is not clear whether the practice originated in church or whether, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, groups of men sang psalms during work and at home, and introduced the practice into church services. See, E. van Dijkhuizen, “Sommige Zelfbewuste Tenoren Gingen Staan,” *Reformatorsch Dagblad*, 15 February 1991. https://www.digibron.nl/viewer/collectie/Digibron/id/tag:RD.nl,19910215:newsml_faad6c2a5cbf3d7d_d99821cba0d62002 (accessed 30 May 2023).

9 Michaela Pfadenhauer, “The Eventization of Faith as a Marketing Strategy,” *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 15/4 (2010), 382–394, at 382; Ruth Dowson, “Religious and Spiritual Festivals and Events,” in Judith Mair (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Festivals* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 313–322, at 318.

10 David Jarman, “Festival to Festival: Networked Relationships between Fringe Festivals,” *Event Management* 25 (2020), 99–113, at 100, 103; cf. Greg Richards, “Events in the Network Society: The Role of Pulsar and Iterative Events,” *Event Management* 19/4 (2015), 553–566; Jens Kaae Fisker, Grzegorz Kwiatkowski, and Anne-Mette Hjalager, “The Translocal Fluidity of Rural Grassroots Festivals in the Network Society,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 22/2 (2019), 250–272.

to the weekly church services), *Genemuiders bovenstem* psalm singing is subject to heritagization and eventization.¹¹ Note that we refer to both contexts (Sunday worship practices and events on weekdays) as “ritual-musical contexts,” which means that we focus on the ritual and musical (meaningful sound) qualities of these contexts.¹²

In this article, we draw a distinction between three different social categories: groups, communities, and networks. Groups are characterized by a shared purpose or interest, to which individuals, nevertheless, can have different levels of commitment.¹³ We define community as a group of individuals that share a “sense of togetherness or connection with one another” that cannot be boiled down to a single or identifiable set of shared purposes.¹⁴ Communities are heterogeneous and performative, which means that community results from repeated interaction between individuals, rather than existing as a fixed entity producing individuals’ interactions.¹⁵ Our use of the term network is informed by the work of Manuel Castells and its application in the field of event studies.¹⁶ Networks are characterized by a multiplicity of connections between groups and individuals within an open dynamic structure. Often, these connections are temporary.¹⁷

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- 11 From the viewpoint of heritage studies, eventization could be described as a specific variant of heritagization. From the viewpoint of critical event studies, heritage could be an additional label to certain eventization processes where the conservation of traditions is an important element. We consider them as different but related processes, without assuming a hierarchical relationship between the two.
 - 12 See, Henk Vogel, Mirella Klomp, and Marcel Barnard, “Sing after God a New Song: Ritual-Musical Appropriations of Psalms in Dutch Culture between 1990–2020,” *Yearbook for Ritual and Liturgical Studies* 35 (2019), 33–35.
 - 13 Cf. Esther McIntosh, “Community and Society: John Macmurray (1891–1976) and New Labour,” in Sebastian C.H. Kim and Pauline Kollontai (eds.), *Community Identity: Dynamics of Religion in Context* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 69–87, at 71; Berdine van den Toren-Lekkerkerker, “Community as Mission,” PhD diss. (Groningen: Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, 2021), 21.
 - 14 Kenneth C. Bessant, *The Relational Fabric of Community* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 16–17; cf. McIntosh, “Community and Society,” 71–72; Emma Waterton and Laura-jane Smith, “The Recognition and Misrecognition of Community Heritage,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16/1–2 (2010), 4–15, at 5.
 - 15 Birgit Meyer, “Introduction: From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations,” in Birgit Meyer (ed.), *Aesthetic Formations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1–28, at 4, 7; Waterton and Smith, “The Recognition and Misrecognition of Community Heritage,” 8, 12.
 - 16 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of The Network Society*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000); Manuel Castells, “Afterword: Why Networks Matter,” in Helen McCarthy, Paul Miller, and Paul Skidmore (eds.), *Network Logic* (London: Demos, 2004), 219–225.
 - 17 Castells, “Afterword,” 224; Jarman, “Festival to Festival,” 103; Greg Richards and David Jarman, “Events As Platforms, Networks, and Communities,” *Event Management* 25/1 (2021),

Community is one of the major themes in the study of psalms and their reception and performance histories. Deeply embedded in traditions of psalmody lie questions such as: who is allowed to join the performance, who is/are represented in the texts, etc.? The canonical texts contain lively descriptions of individuals' emotions, but also hint at collective performance through, for instance, the use of refrains, plural pronouns, and different, alternating voices. Through the psalms' reception history, the individual and/or collective nature of their performance has been articulated in many different ways—from solo recitals, to all-male choirs, to psalmody entirely by congregations.¹⁸ In the present article, we study the handling of these questions in a specific example of collective psalm singing characterized by heritagization and eventization, and partially governed by other-than-religious authorities.

Doing so, we deliberately avoid taking the church context as the norm. Theologian Mirella Klomp has coined the notion of “ecclesioscapes” as

a tool offered to acquire deeper understanding of gatherings around Christian repertoire, which practices and meaning-making are particular, plural, and complex—and that may be applied to a gathering whether or not the groups in questions [*sic*] identify themselves as church ... thus avoiding placing the church in a central position that relegates other gatherings around Christian repertoire to the margin.¹⁹

1–7, at 3; Ilja Simons, “Changing Identities Through Collective Performance at Events,” *Leisure Studies* 39/4 (2020), 568–584, at 568.

- 18 Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 2011), 111–114, 21–25, 207–208; William P. Brown, “The Psalms: An Overview,” in William P. Brown (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–23, at 1, 5; Alan Cooper, “Some Aspects of Traditional Jewish Psalms Interpretation,” in William P. Brown (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 253–268, at 260; Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, “The Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms,” in Rolf A. Jacobson (ed.), *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 77–92, at 83, 85–86; Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, “The Meta-Narrative of the Psalter,” i in William P. Brown (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 363–376, at 368; Frederick W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Poetry of the Psalms,” in William P. Brown (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 79–98, at 84; Joel M. LeMon, “Saying Amen to Violent Psalms,” in Rolf A. Jacobson (ed.), *Soundings in the Theology of Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 107–109.
- 19 Mirella Klomp, “Ecclesioscapes: Interpreting Gatherings Around Christian Music in and Outside the Church,” in Andrew Mall, Jeffers Engelhardt, and Monique M. Ingalls (eds.), *Studying Congregational Music* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 246–265, at 260. See also: Jeffers Engelhardt, “Congregation and Choral: Fluidity and Distinction in the Voicing of Religious Community,” in Andrew Mall, Jeffers Engelhardt, and Monique M. Ingalls (eds.), *Studying Congregational Music* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 140–155, at 140, 147–

The notion of ecclesioscapes incites us to take the layeredness and complexity of the groups that do not necessarily identify themselves as church(-related) seriously, while the notions of heritagization and eventization provide us with a vocabulary for the discussion of our findings. We will critically reflect on these concepts following the discussion of our findings. First, however, we will describe *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing in more detail, elaborate on the Dutch and strictly Reformed context, and present our methodology.

3 *Genemuider bovenstem* in Context

Genemuiden is a relatively small town. Demographic statistics and reports show that, in comparison to average figures for the rest of the country, Genemuiden's inhabitants are geographically stable (low relocation figures), form relatively large households, have relatively low levels of education, and often work in family companies in Genemuiden's carpet industry.²⁰ In a 2008 report on social cohesion in Genemuiden and the other towns in the municipality of Zwartewaterland, Genemuiden is characterized in terms of its strong social cohesion, mostly via work and church.²¹ Voting figures show that the strictly Reformed political party (Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij) has a significant majority in Genemuiden, whereas it is one of the smallest political parties in the Dutch parliament.²²

Both these voting figures and the visibility of church in social life serve to highlight the significant connection that exists between Genemuiden's population and the strictly Reformed subculture in the Netherlands.²³ Genemuiden

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- 148; Monique M. Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5; Andrew Mall, "Beer and Hymns' and Community: Religious Identity and Participatory Sing-Alongs," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 6/2 (2020), 33–52, at 33–34, 33–39.
- 20 See, AlleCijfers.nl, "Statistieken woonplaats Genemuiden," <https://allecijfers.nl/woonplaats/genemuiden/> (accessed 20 May 2023); Gemeente Zwartewaterland, "Omgevingsvisie—thema wonen," <https://www.zwartewaterland.nl/omgevingsvisie-thema-wonen> (accessed 20 May 2023).
- 21 See, P.G.A. Versteeg, F.H. Bredewold, and R. Kuiper, *De stukjes en de Puzzel: Sociale Samenhang en Leefbaarheid in Zwartewaterland* (Zwolle: Centrum voor Samenlevingsvraagstukken, 2008), 15–17. <https://surfsharekit.nl/objectstore/013eag16-b8bf-49ef-a46e-c8525a-a54903> (accessed 20 May 2023).
- 22 See, AlleCijfers.nl, "Verkiezingsuitslagen voor de gemeente Zwartewaterland," <https://allecijfers.nl/verkiezingsuitslagen/zwartewaterland/> (accessed 20 May 2023).
- 23 Martin Tijssen, *De Krant en het Pand: Het Reformatorisch Dagblad en de Ontwikkeling van de Bevindelijk Gereformeerde Gemeenschap* (Utrecht: KokBoekencentrum, 2018), 10–13. According to historian John Exalto, the demographics of this subculture are most visible

is located in the Dutch “Bible Belt,” which stretches from the southwest to the northeast of the Netherlands and is known for having the highest concentration of strictly Reformed Calvinists in the country.²⁴ These Christians form a small but visible minority group that is conservative both in terms of religion and culture.²⁵ The strictly Reformed subculture, which cuts across a number of different Reformed church denominations, can be understood to constitute a reaction against secularization and against liberal streams within Protestantism. The subculture is characterized by a certain inwardness and by emphases on traditional values and customs, in daily life (long hair, skirts, and dresses for women; short hair for men), politics (opposing abortion, euthanasia, and same-sex marriage), and in the context of church.²⁶ One example of the latter is the strict limitation placed upon the musical repertoire that can be used in church services: metrical psalms are performed by congregations in “old rhyme” (the metrical translation from 1773), at low tempi, with all notes having an equal length (isometre), and with organ accompaniment.²⁷ In this way, collective psalm singing has even become an important marker of strictly Reformed group identity.²⁸

in Reformed Political Party voters: John Exalto, “Kerk, School en Partij: De SGP als Politieke Representatie van de Bevindelijk Gereformeerden,” in Hans Vollaard and Gerrit Voerman (eds.), *Mannen van Gods Woord: De Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij 1918–2018* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2018), 47–68, at 67. A voters’ map can be found at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_Belt_\(Netherlands\)#/media/File:Sgpstemmen1.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_Belt_(Netherlands)#/media/File:Sgpstemmen1.png) (accessed 20 May 2023).

- 24 Paul Schnabel, “De Biblebelt: Groot in Geloof, Klein in Getal,” in Tanja Kootte and Fred van Lieburg (eds.), *Bij Ons in de Biblebelt* (Gouda: Dutch Bible Belt Network, 2020), 39–48; Jan Dirk Snel, “Waarom Daar?,” in Fred van Lieburg (ed.), *Refogeschiedenis in Perspectief* (Heerenveen: Uitgeverij Groen, 2007), 51–91, at 57, 60–61.
- 25 Snel, “Waarom Daar?,” 60. Theologically, strictly Reformeds are reminiscent of Pietism and Puritanism, with an emphasis on personal belief, conversion, and salvation through God’s grace. See: John Exalto, “Welkom in de Strijd: Dynamiek en Desintegratie van de Bevindelijk Gereformeerde Narratieve Gemeenschap,” in Fred van Lieburg (ed.), *Refogeschiedenis in perspectief* (Heerenveen: Uitgeverij Groen, 2007), 92–117, at 92; Fred van Lieburg, “Toe-eigening van de Bevindelijke Traditie,” in Fred van Lieburg (ed.), *Refogeschiedenis in Perspectief* (Heerenveen: Uitgeverij Groen, 2007), 7–30, at 10.
- 26 Paul Schnabel, Rob Bijl, and Joep de Hart, *Betrekkelijke Betrokkenheid: Studies in Culturele Cohesie* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2008), 412; Herman Johan Selderhuis (ed.), *Handboek Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis* (Kampen: Kok, 2006).
- 27 Herman Paul, “Een Verleden zonder Historiciteit,” in Fred van Lieburg (ed.), *Refogeschiedenis in Perspectief* (Heerenveen: Groen, 2007), 159–189, at 158–159, 181; Snel, “Waarom Daar?,” 89.
- 28 Historian Martin Tijssen describes the strictly Reformed subculture as an imagined community, which is internally diverse and divided between different church denominations, but symbolically imagined as a coherent whole: Tijssen, *De Krant en het Pand*, 9–10; cf. Exalto, “Welkom in de Strijd,” 93; Paul, “Een Verleden zonder Historiciteit,” 159; Niek Schu-

Genemuiders bovenstem psalm singing can be found in three strictly Reformed church communities in Genemuiden. These are the Hervormde Kerk (Netherlands Reformed Church, part of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN) which retains the name it had before joining the PCN in 2004), Gereformeerde Gemeente (Reformed Congregations), and Hersteld Hervormde Kerk (Restored Reformed Church, consisting of congregations that refrained from joining the PCN in 2004, see above). In each service, the congregations sing a number of psalms that are selected by the (male) minister leading the service. Some psalms come with a descant, and in the descant psalms, a regular first verse in unison is usually followed by a climax-building organ interlude, leading to a verse in which a group, mainly of men with high voices, add the descant, the *Genemuiders bovenstem*, to the regular psalm tune. Many of these descant singers know their part by heart, especially in the popular psalms, and the harmonies played by the organist offer them support.

The earliest reports of *Genemuiders bovenstem* psalm singing in church date back to the nineteenth century.²⁹ When, halfway through the twentieth century, the tradition began to wane, a group of enthusiasts decided to found a choir for the promotion of *Genemuiders bovenstem* psalm singing. The male choir STEREO produced and sold a number of recordings, and decided to open all their rehearsals and performances (including later concerts of different repertoires) with *Genemuiders bovenstem* psalm singing. Half a century later, *Genemuiders bovenstem* psalm singing is very much alive, especially at collective psalm-singing events.³⁰ Throughout the country, but mainly in what is known as the Bible Belt, more than twenty choirs similar to STEREO have emerged, and continue the tradition of (*Genemuiders bovenstem*) collective psalmody in their own regions. Each week, mainly on Wednesday, Friday, or Saturday evenings, (*Genemuiders bovenstem*) collective-singing events take place, throughout the Bible Belt region.³¹

man, *Drama van Crisis en Hoop: De psalmen: Gedicht, Gebundeld en Gebeden* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2008), 241–242; Snel, “Waarom Daar?,” 89.

29 See, Jaco van der Knijff, “Genemuiden en de Bovenstem,” *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 30 November 2010. https://www.digibron.nl/viewer/collectie/Digibron/id/tag:RD.nl,20101130:newsml_28378aa0c1548ae1c9b25ca2fb62bfca (accessed 20 May 2023).

30 See, van Dijkhuizen, “Sommige Zelfbewuste Tenoren Gingen Staan”; van der Knijff, “Genemuiden en de Bovenstem.”

31 A search with the term “bovenstem” on the websites of the strictly Reformed broadcasting company (<https://reformatorischeomroep.nl/concertagenda>, accessed 20 May 2023) and strictly Reformed newspaper (<https://www.tijdenplaats.nl/evenementen/rubriek/1/muziek>, accessed 20 May 2023) provides an overview of upcoming collective singing events.

These events, some of which are exclusively aimed at *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing, often take place in large, monumental and significant church buildings, celebrated both for their acoustics and for their historic organs, which are often played by organists who are well known in strictly Reformed circles. These events are organized relatively independently from the local church communities that normally (on Sunday, at least) hold their services in any particular building. In these events, male choirs who specialize in *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing play a central role in the performance, and are often positioned on stage wearing similar suits, a contrast to typical Sunday performances, in which the descant singers consist of regular churchgoers who stand out neither by virtue of their positioning nor clothing.³²

In 2012, STEREO, together with the newly founded Stichting tot Behoud van de Genemuider bovenstem (Foundation for the Preservation of Genemuiden's Descant), and the Bovenstemgroep Genemuiden (descant group Genemuiden) applied for the practice of *Genemuider bovenstem* to be indexed as Intangible Cultural Heritage, precisely in order to consolidate this popularity. These three groups consist of members and affiliates belonging to a range of different church communities, and members who are not (anymore) affiliated with any church community. STEREO has around 140 members, consisting of men aged "between 14 and 90 years old," belonging to the wider region around Genemuiden.³³ The Stichting consists of a board representing the three strictly Reformed church communities where *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing takes place. Thus, while the Stichting is formally independent of the churches, it nevertheless maintains a formal connection to the churches through the membership of this board. The Stichting organizes collective singing events, invites choirs and organists to perform, and publishes background materials relating to *Genemuider bovenstem* singing, including notations of the (originally improvised) *Genemuider bovenstem* melodies for educational purposes. The Bovenstemgroep Genemuiden has no board or members, instead it represents a common designation referring to any group that comes together to sing the descant in collective singing events outside Genemuiden. It is not a formal choir, but an ad hoc collective of enthusiasts traveling to another place to sing together. Nevertheless, the Bovenstemgroep Genemuiden is named as

32 A photo impression of a collective singing event with male choir 'STEREO' can be found at Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Upper Voice Singing with Psalms in Genemuiden."

33 Cf. Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, *Overijssel* (Arnhem: Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, 2017), 11. <http://www.enterserfgoed.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Immaterieel-Erfgoed-Overijssel.pdf> (accessed 20 May 2023).

one of the three applicants behind the Intangible Cultural Heritage proposal. In Genemuiden, there is another male choir, Harpe Davids (David's Harp) that performs *Genemuider bovenstem* psalmody, but this choir was not involved in the heritagization of the practice.

In 2013, the practice was indeed designated by the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage, the institution that implements UNESCO policies as laid down in the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.³⁴ The convention states that “heritage communities,” such as the applicants of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing, should receive support as owners of their cultural heritage.³⁵ The Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage is responsible for offering practical knowledge for the conservation of intangible heritage, and for supervising applicants.³⁶ The applicants are obliged to engage in activities such as the singing events in order to hold on to the practical and financial support they receive from the Dutch government via the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage. Additionally, the provincial government (the province of Overijssel) provided financial support for the conservation, and the Reformatorische Omroep (strictly Reformed broadcasting company) offered additional support by making and broadcasting video recordings of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm-singing events.³⁷ Furthermore, collective-singing events are announced in the national strictly Reformed newspaper (*Reformatorisch Dagblad*), which helps to attract audiences from a wider region, and some YouTube videos showing *Genemuider bovenstem* performances have reached over two million views.³⁸

Thus, we conclude that *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing is performed by a range of different groups, including church communities, male choirs, and audiences who take part in collective-singing events. Additionally, control over the practice is also handled by a range of different groups and institutions,

34 Cf. UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention> (accessed 20 May 2023); Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, *Kennisagenda Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland 2017–2020* (Arnhem: Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, 2018). <https://www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/nl/document/5143?slug=kennisagenda-kenniscentrum-immaterieel-erfgoed-nederland> (accessed 20 May 2023); Blake, “Further Reflections on Community Involvement in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage,” 17.

35 Cf. UNESCO, Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

36 The Dutch version of the Intangible Cultural Heritage webpage shows which “safeguarding actions” the applicants have agreed upon: Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, “Bovenstemzingen bij psalmen in Genemuiden,” <https://www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/nl/bovenstemzingen> (accessed 20 May 2023).

37 See, for example, Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, “Overijssel.”

38 See, for instance, <https://youtu.be/yd7HzRu2gCQ> (accessed 20 May 2023).

including all-male church councils, the boards of male choirs, the organizers of collective-singing events, governmental heritage institutions, and the strictly Reformed media organizations that broadcast and publicize collective-singing events.

4 Methodology

This article is based on ethnographic research undertaken in 2020 and 2021, in which we utilized a number of different methods for data gathering and analysis. We gathered textual materials, such as newspaper articles and heritage policy documents, and we interviewed seventeen individuals with different roles in the performance, heritagization, and eventization of *Genemuider bovenstem*. Among these were Arend Booij (the organist who standardized and notated the descant for educational purposes), Henk Beens (a local historian), and Albert van der Zeijden (a researcher at the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage), all of whom were involved with the heritagization of *Genemuider bovenstem*. We also interviewed Harm Hoeve (organist and conductor of STEREO), singers, and other enthusiasts (practitioners, listeners, attendees), whom we have given pseudonyms: Agatha, Arjen, Arthur, David, Erik, Geke, Frits, Lammert, Peter, Ruben, Rutger, Sara, Wietze.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unable to attend any performances of *Genemuider bovenstem* for the purposes of this research, although the first author experienced this tradition twice, some years ago. For this reason, our fieldwork involved showing interviewees a YouTube video of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing, and extensive conversations regarding live experience.³⁹ The interview with singers Erik, Arjen, and Lammert took place in the Grote Kerk (Great Church) of Genemuiden, and we sang *Genemuider bovenstem* psalms together in the space where it is sung every Sunday. Some of the interviews took place via telephone or video call, and we made initial contact with twelve of the interviewees by placing an invitation in two of Genemuiden's local newspapers. Although we emphasized that we were looking for a variety of respondents, it is likely that individuals who are less enthusiastic about *Genemuider bovenstem* or its heritagization would have avoided responding.

Interview transcriptions and other textual materials were coded using Atlas.ti software. A round of initial coding was followed by a categorization

39 The video that we showed (with the *bovenstem* sounding in the second and last verse): <https://youtu.be/VQcarYh1ODg> (accessed 20 May 2023).

of these open codes into different thematic groups.⁴⁰ The resulting themes focused on participation in collective *Genemuider bovenstem* performance, namely biographical backgrounds (such as gender and place of residence), experiences (such as hearing descant singing as a child), collectives (such as choirs and church communities), actions (such as teaching children to sing the descant), motivations (such as the desire to increase the national visibility of Genemuiden), and broader societal processes (such as secularization, to which certain organizers respond with their actions). After this, we analyzed the inter-relatedness between different themes and codes using axial coding and with the help of the co-occurrence tool in Atlas.ti.⁴¹

5 Findings

The interrelations which we traced between different themes and codes showed that experiences often depend both on the biographical backgrounds of participants and on membership within certain existing collectives. Together, these form a basis for the actions of individuals within the context of (new) collectives, sometimes in response to broader processes. This thematic coding also highlighted the way in which the two different ritual-musical contexts of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing (Sunday worship, and collective-singing events) are, to some extent, two different domains, where biographical backgrounds, experiences, collectives, actions, motivations, and processes are meaningful in different ways for participants. We will discuss both ritual-musical contexts in detail, and then make comparisons between them.

5.1 Genemuider bovenstem Psalm Singing in Sunday Worship

Interviewees that perform *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing in Sunday worship are usually churchgoers, and born and raised in the area. They have usually learned this style of descant singing in church or primary school, or by imitating their fathers or grandfathers. Our analysis shows that individuals' biographical backgrounds—whether Genemuiden is their (former) place of residence, their gender, primary school, and family—influence the likelihood of them becoming familiar with and participating in *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing.

⁴⁰ Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 48, 81–85, 139–145.

⁴¹ Saldaña, *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 159–163.

We can observe, first, that the churchgoers performing *Genemuider bovenstem* usually live in Genemuiden or the surrounding area. According to Henk Beens, a descant singer and local historian who wrote a book on *Genemuider bovenstem*, there are around “600 proud *Genemuider* descant singers” in Genemuiden.⁴² The practice of *Genemuider bovenstem* is strongly tied to the town of Genemuiden, and is a source of local pride.⁴³

Second, we can see that it matters whether an individual attends church at one of the three strictly Reformed church communities that engage in *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing in Genemuiden. One strictly Reformed church community, the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk (Christian Reformed Churches) congregation does sing isometric Genevan psalms, but without descants. This is because “they are somewhat lighter,” and less strictly Reformed, as Henk Beens explained in an interview. The performance of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing appears to be related to the degree of strictness of a certain congregation or denomination. The three churches where *Genemuider bovenstem* is sung show stylistic differences, and interviewees mentioned that the different church communities are somewhat separate from one another. Churchgoers would only rarely, if ever, visit church services at one of the other churches. Theological differences even divide families and other groups, as the split in 2004 between the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk and Hersteld Hervormde Kerk serves to demonstrate.⁴⁴ Thus, the congregation they grow up in significantly affects whether and how individuals become familiar and involved with *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing.

Third, it is clear that gender is an important factor in the roles that individuals are able to fulfill in a performance. Boys and girls are raised to participate in *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing in different ways. Erik is a descant singer, organist, and teacher at a primary school in Genemuiden, where he instructs the children to sing *Genemuider bovenstem*: “I say to the girls: just stick to the melody, then I will sing the descant with the boys!” to which he adds: “Yeah, maybe that’s racist or whatever, I don’t know, but that’s what I do.”⁴⁵ Women are limited in the roles they can play in the performance and organization of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing: they are expected to sing the regular psalm melody, are excluded from church councils and from being a minister. Although women are allowed to play the organ in church services, it appears

42 Interview, 14 October 2020.

43 Interviews with Henk Beens, Erik, Lammert, and Arjen on 20 August 2020, and with David and Sara on 13 November 2020.

44 Interview with David and Sara.

45 Field notes 5.

that, in reality, all organists are men. The broader theological anthropology of these church communities limits the role women are able or (dis)encouraged to play. Remarkably, all our interviewees, women included, prefer the descant to be sung by male tenors.

Fourth, as Erik's quotation has already shown, we can see that primary schooling is also a factor affecting whether individuals become acquainted with *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing. At the strictly Reformed Rehoboth primary school, children sing isometric Genevan psalms every morning, often with the descant.⁴⁶ At the Netherlands Reformed (Hervormd) primary school, this practice is waning. Peter (11 years old), who attends that particular school, thinks that "there's one classmate who sings the descant, and also my cousin. For the rest, I'm not so sure."⁴⁷

The fifth factor is family context. Our analysis of interviews shows that families play an important role in the process of becoming participants in *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing. Often, descant singers like Peter, who sits next to his grandfather every Sunday, begin by imitating their fathers or grandfathers. Sara describes how she is surrounded by family in church: "My husband David sits next to me, my father behind me, and my son on the other side. And all three sing the descant!"⁴⁸ Family members both demonstrate how to sing the descant and encourage young boys to sing the descant themselves.

Thus, one's place of birth and residence, church congregation, gender, primary school, and family all play a role in whether and how an individual experiences *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing: in becoming familiar with the practice, in feeling encouraged by others to participate in certain ways, and in appreciating the activity of performance. Indeed, interviewees report appreciating the performance of *Genemuider bovenstem* collective psalmody. They describe it as "like heaven, and like home" (Sara), "goosebumps!" (Arend Booij), "beautiful" and "intense" (Arjen, Lammert, and Geke).⁴⁹ Like Sara, many interviewees report that *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing makes them feel at home.

5.2 *Genemuider bovenstem in Collective Psalm-Singing Events*

Some of the men from the three strictly Reformed church communities that practice *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing on Sundays have undertaken different actions in order to preserve the practice. Some of them mention that

46 Interview with Arend Booij, 20 August 2020.

47 Interview, 11 November 2020.

48 Interview, 13 November 2020.

49 Interview with Geke, 11 November 2020.

their actions were a response to the slow decrease in the practice's popularity, the "concerning" decay of other local customs (traditional dress and craftsmanship), and the emergence of other musical styles (pop songs, worship music, hymns).⁵⁰

Organist Arend Booij suggested in an interview that the collectives dedicated to the conservation of the practice are relatively independent from the church councils. The only exception to this is the male choir Harpe Davids (David's Harp), which is tied to the Gereformeerde Gemeente (Reformed Congregations). According to different interviewees, Harpe Davids is not so eager to perform with STEREO, and is sometimes prevented from performing in the church buildings of other denominations, such as the Hervormde Kerk, by the Gereformeerde Gemeente church council.⁵¹ Harpe Davids was also not involved in the Intangible Cultural Heritage application. This suggests a tension between the eventization and heritagization of *Genemuiders bovenstem* psalmody, and local church communities, at least the Gereformeerde Gemeente community.

The members of STEREO come from different church communities, and also from outside Genemuiden. Some participants are not church members. Erik explains that new members from elsewhere often become members via friends from Genemuiden:

Entire groups of friends are joining. At first, I was the only one, and my friends thought that I was crazy, but after a while, some became curious and wanted to take a look, and now, the whole squad has become a member!

Several interviewees (Erik, David) described how an atmosphere of "men having fun together" is an important aspect of the choir. Again, in the words of Erik:

We're a group, really! Having a get-together, men among themselves. Having some beer, having fun ... eating snacks, when someone has a wedding anniversary, that kind of nonsense. It's fun going there.

Similarly, the Bovenstengroep (an ad hoc *Genemuiders bovenstem* descant group, and one of the applicants for Intangible Cultural Heritage) was

⁵⁰ Interviews with Arend Booij and Henk Beens.

⁵¹ Interviews with Erik, Lammert, Arjen, Arend.

described by interviewees as a group of enthusiast singers going on a trip and having a nice get-together. Initiator Arend reported: “With the Bovenstem-groep, we have been to quite a few places, with a bus full of singers!” The social aspect of these gatherings appears to be important for the interviewees.

The Stichting tot Behoud van de Genemuider, takes the lead in the organization of a part of the collective-singing events. Although the Stichting is formally independent from the church councils, board member Arend Booij reported that the councils do sometimes set limits on musical repertoire and public speakers when the collective-singing event takes place in their church. He mentioned that the Stichting had the intention of inviting Jan Terlouw as a public speaker for a Liberation Day event with *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing, but that “some people were not so happy with that, as he is of D66,” which is a liberal and progressive political party. Henk Beens confirmed that church councils are often stricter than those who “just want to sing *Genemuider bovenstem* together,” but that the organizers of events often find ways to perform *Genemuider bovenstem* collectively despite these restrictions, for example by searching for alternative venues in the region.

The applicants for the Intangible Cultural Heritage designation described several motivations for their application, which appear to be similar to other interviewees’ reasons for participating in collective-singing events: celebration of their local culture in a space outside of their own region, preservation of their specific style of isometric psalm singing, praising God, and compensating for the number of Intangible Cultural Heritage practices that lack any religious association.⁵² For some, however, performing *Genemuider bovenstem* outside of Sunday worship is inappropriate, especially if that performance is accompanied by a feeling of local pride. Rutger, organist and descant singer, for instance, thinks that, when it comes to singing for God, “I think it’s wrong to be proud ... although cherishing and preserving *Genemuider bovenstem* has my first priority.”⁵³ In contrast to Rutger, most individuals do not find the combination of local pride and religious practice to be particularly problematic. Erik, for instance, states that “it really is a part of Genemuiden, just like church is, and being Christian is just part of us ... it’s folksy and churchy at the same time.” Arjen has even noticed how often they are able to move listeners from elsewhere. He thinks that “we shouldn’t be ashamed to sing *Genemuider bovenstem*, even in unusual places ... maybe God employs us to reach people.” For participants like Arjen, the heritagization and eventization of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing are also ways to evangelize.

52 Interviews with Arend, Erik, David, and Sara.

53 Email conversation, 3 November 2020.

In general, we were able to observe a desire to increase the public visibility of descant singing as an emphatically local and religious practice, despite the fact that this entails the involvement of singers, speakers, and organists from outside Genemuïden, and performing *Genemuïder bovenstem* in a ritual outside Sunday worship, somewhat removed from the authority of church councils.

5.3 *Comparing Psalm-Singing Practices in the Two Contexts*

There are overlaps as well as differences between the two ritual-musical contexts when it comes to participants' biographical backgrounds, their experiences, their actions, the collectives they are affiliated with, and the processes they respond to. The overlap can be found in the fact that, in both contexts, many singers have a strictly Reformed background or upbringing and are, thus, familiar with the congregational practice of isometric Genevan psalm singing. Other similarities between the two ritual-musical contexts include the lack of entrance fee, the location in church buildings, male leadership, and participants' experience of the music as "beautiful" and "impressive."

The differences concern the degrees of variety that can be observed when it comes to participants' place of residence, church denomination, reasons for participating, and experiences of the performance, as well as the distribution of leadership and other roles in the performance. In Sunday worship, participants in *Genemuïder bovenstem* psalm singing are attending a church service at their local church. They describe their experience of *Genemuïder bovenstem* psalm singing in terms of "appropriateness"—whether the descant psalm singing fitted the content of the sermon and the prayers in that particular church service.⁵⁴ Not all churchgoers do enjoy *Genemuïder bovenstem*, but since descant psalm singing is not always a dominant element within the services, they are able to "endure" it.⁵⁵

The collective-singing events, on the other hand, often taking place in churches outside Genemuïden, attract an audience from a wider area.⁵⁶ Descant singers are not necessarily members of the particular church community in whose building the performance takes place.⁵⁷ They have a variety of denom-

54 Interviews with David, Lammert, and Sara.

55 Interviews with David, Sara, Arend, and Henk Beens.

56 Interviews with Henk Beens and Arend Booij.

57 The Bovenkerk in Kampen, one of the most popular venues for *Genemuïder bovenstem* performances, is an interesting example of this. The building is no longer used for church services, but is dedicated almost entirely to organ concerts and events involving collective singing.

inational backgrounds, including individuals who no longer identify as churchgoers. Their participation is based on personal interest and taste, instead of church membership. Interviewees appreciate that, in these collective-singing events, *Genemuider bovenstem* appeals to all listeners, Christians or not,⁵⁸ and that, figuratively speaking, “church walls just disappear.”⁵⁹ Church members who do not enjoy the *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing tend to stay away from these events, whereas “descant fans” are attracted by the presence of famous organists such as Pieter Heijkoop, André Nieuwkoop, or Marco den Toom.⁶⁰ Thus, “taste walls,” so to speak, have emerged where church walls disappear.

Participants who are attracted to the collective-singing events describe their experience of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing as “unforgettable” rather than “appropriate,” which is how descant psalm singing in Sunday worship is more often described. In interviews, individuals often appeared to be very aware of which events they had attended or missed, which shows that their participation in the singing events is less frequent than their or others’ participation in Sunday liturgy, and it shows that the singing events are memorable or perhaps even “spectacular.”⁶¹ Some of them listen repeatedly to recordings made during *Genemuider bovenstem* events: “I listen to those video recordings two or three times a week. I still do that, each week! ... it was one of the most beautiful moments in my life.”⁶²

Furthermore, while in Sunday worship all participants except the church council are mixed in together (men, women, descant singers, other singers), in collective-singing events, descant choirs wear suits and are seated separately from the other participants. Thus, the boundaries between different blocs of performers are drawn more clearly, and these coincide with traditional gender categories: choir singers and leaders in the performance (all male) are distinguished from the audience (men, women, children). This has practical reasons, as the choirs do also perform choral music while the audience listens.⁶³

Many persons who participate in collective-singing events also participate in Sunday worship services, but not necessarily in Genemuiden. However, they behave differently in different ritual-musical contexts, forming different groups, and they describe their experiences differently (“appropriate” versus

58 Interviews with David, Lammert, and Arjen.

59 Interview with Sara.

60 Interviews with Arend Booij and Erik.

61 Interviews with Arend Booij, Erik, Arjen, and Lammert.

62 Interview with Lammert.

63 Interview with Arend Booij.

“impressive” and “unforgettable”). In this way, *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing in both contexts is complementary in nature. Rehearsals and collective-singing events inspire singers and listeners with unforgettable, special experiences, while the regularity and continuity of local congregations’ church services provide (weekly) routine for the descant singers, especially those who are not choir members, and train young singers in the tradition. Nevertheless, local church councils and organizing committees are sometimes in conflict when collective-singing events are (somewhat) at odds with the theological views of church councils regarding the appropriate use of church buildings.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

We have observed overlaps between the different groups and communities involved in *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing, with individuals participating in several groups and communities. Furthermore, our analysis suggested that the two contexts of “iterative” and “pulsar” events, namely Sunday liturgy and collective-singing events, are not opposed, but mutually dependent.⁶⁴ This dependency lies in the fact that the local church communities performing *Genemuider bovenstem* form the breeding ground for individuals to become familiar with the practice and for them to form groups dedicated to it. At the same time, the collective-singing events support the frame of *Genemuider bovenstem* as heritage and event, and thus increase its relevance in a context characterized by the heritagization and eventization of religious practices.⁶⁵

Our analysis shows that the heritagization of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing results in greater awareness of and pride in the tradition within Genemuiden church communities. In this sense, the performance of *Genemuider bovenstem* and its heritagization and eventization allow different communities and groups (male choirs, the Foundation for the Preservation of Genemuiden’s

64 Cf. Richards, “Events in the Network Society.”

65 Michelle Duffy uses the term “experience economy” to describe a context where, “particularly in developed countries, surplus time and money allow for increased participation in leisure activities and heightened emotional experiences”: Duffy, “Music Events,” 309; cf. Vern Biaett and Greg Richards, “Event Experiences,” *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* 12/3 (2020), 277–292, at 283; Meyer, “Recycling the Christian Past,” 70–71, 83; Pfadenhauer, “The Eventization of Faith as a Marketing Strategy,” 382; Greg Richards, Brian King, and Emmy Yeung, “Experiencing Culture in Attractions, Events and Tour Settings,” *Tourism Management* 79 (2020), 1–12, at 2; Chris Ryan, “The Experience of Events,” in Stephen J. Page and Joanne Connell (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Events* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 248–259, at 253.

Descant, the *Bovenstemgroep*) to interact in a network.⁶⁶ For many people, the heritagization and eventization of the practice implies not so much the dissolution of local communities, but new and additional ways for (some of) their members to come together with enthusiasts from outside their communities. The ecclesioscape of *Genemuiders bovenstem* involves both the collective singing of psalms with enthusiasts from a wider region during the week, and singing the same repertoire with local churchgoers on Sundays in Genemuiden.

As church members have formed groups, such as the Foundation for the Preservation of Genemuiden's Descant, they have also managed to revive a musical practice within their church communities, by using the intangible heritage frame but without letting *Genemuiders bovenstem* psalm singing slip away from Sunday worship practices.⁶⁷ However, in the collective-singing events, greater emphasis is put on an ecumenical (interdenominational) strictly Reformed, Bible Belt collective identity, as can be seen in the choice of strictly Reformed organists and venues, announcements in the strictly Reformed newspaper, and the involvement of strictly Reformed broadcasting companies.⁶⁸ The use of strictly Reformed symbolic elements in the singing events, the publicity of the events in strictly Reformed media, and because of the fact that participants are glad to meet other strictly Reformed from other denominations strongly suggest that these events express and affirm a shared Reformed identity that the Sunday worship context is unable to provide, while enhancing descant singers' local pride, as they are able to "impress" participants from elsewhere with their *Genemuiders bovenstem*.⁶⁹

66 In Richards' terminology, the performance of *Genemuiders bovenstem* psalmody forms a "platform" for groups and communities to interact: Greg Richards, "The Value of Event Networks and Platforms," *Event Management* 25/1 (2021), 85–97, at 88.

67 This is contrary to Andrew Mall's findings regarding hymn singing in the context of a "pulsar" event (festival), without the connection to the congregational practice of a church community. Furthermore, it differs from Welmoed Fenna Wagenaar's observation that, in the intangible cultural heritagization of Saint Martin celebrations, where (explicit) religious participation and expression are avoided. See, Mall, "Beer and Hymns," 34, 38; Welmoed Fenna Wagenaar, "Moral Management and Secularized Religious Heritage in the Netherlands," in Ernst van den Hemel, Oscar Saleminck, and Irene Stengs (eds.), *Managing Sacralities: Competing and Converging Claims of Religious Heritage* (New York: Berghahn, 2022), 228–248, at 235–245.

68 Cf. Ryan, "The Experience of Events," 253; Simons, "Changing Identities through Collective Performance at Events," 568.

69 Duffy, "Music Events," 304–305. According to Ilija Simons, the performance of collective identity by crowds and audiences has still rarely been studied in critical event studies: Simons, "Changing Identities through Collective Performance at Events," 568–569.

As we have shown, interviewees can clearly remember which pulsar singing events they have attended or not, and they recognize other admirers of *Genemuider bovenstem*.⁷⁰ Of course, belonging to this group of admirers does not necessarily imply that other belongings disappear. Rather, we argue that *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing broadens the participants' range of possible belongings, including specific church communities, male choirs, the population of Genemuiden, a broader strictly Reformed subculture, or, indeed fans who attend collective-singing events. We thus conclude that in the heritagization and eventization of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing, new styles of coming together are added to extant practices.

At the same time, although pulsar events have the potential to disrupt hegemonic social hierarchical viewpoints via collective performance, the organizers of the collective-singing events do not fully employ this potential.⁷¹ We have observed that gender inequalities are maintained, and even enhanced in the eventization of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing, both in its performance and organization.⁷² Gender categories are demarcated more heavily than in Sunday worship because of how authority is distributed, and because of the way in which male choirs and a mixed audience are spatially organized with men on the stage, organ bench, and pulpit.⁷³ It is possible, as liturgical scholar Teresa Berger suggests, that this could be a reaction to the emancipation of women in Dutch society more widely and in the strictly Reformed subculture in particular, as Erik's quotation seemed to hint ("maybe that's racist or whatever, I don't know, but that's what I do").⁷⁴ It could also be that a feeling of unity in

70 Ryan and Simons describe this as a collective "liminal" experience of "communitas": Ryan, "The Experience of Events," 253–254; Simons, "Changing Identities through Collective Performance at Events," 570–571.

71 Duffy, "Music Events," 308; Simons, "Changing Identities through Collective Performance at Events," 569–570.

72 Cf. Teresa Berger, "Congregational Singing and Practices of Gender in Christian Worship: Exploring Intersections," in Andrew Mall, Jeffers Engelhardt, and Monique M. Ingalls (eds.), *Studying Congregational Music* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 209–229, at 213–214; Engelhardt, "Congregation and Chorality," 150; Ellen Koskoff, *Feminist Ethnomusicology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 78, 80, 83, 89, 122; Fiona Magowan and Louise Wrazen, "Introduction," in Fiona Magowan and Louise Wrazen (eds.), *Performing Gender, Place, and Emotion in Music* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 1–14, at 2; Sara R. Walmsley-Pledl, "Transforming the Singing Body," in Fiona Magowan and Louise Wrazen (eds.), *Performing Gender, Place, and Emotion in Music* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 109–126, at 112–113.

73 Cf. Koskoff, *Feminist Ethnomusicology*, 78; Magowan and Wrazen, "Introduction," 6.

74 Cf. Berger, "Congregational Singing," 221; Henk A. Post, "In Strijd met de Roeping der Vrouw: De Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij en het Vrouwenkiesrecht," PhD diss. (Ams-

collective singing transcends the experience of gender inequalities, as female interviewees did not seem to be bothered that leadership roles and singing the descant are restricted to men.⁷⁵ Ethnomusicologists Ellen Koskoff and Fred Everett Maus both emphasize that the meaning of gender and gender roles is contextual, and can be contradictory in different settings.⁷⁶ Thus, the meaning of gender roles in the specific context of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing requires further and detailed study.

In closing, we return to our research question: How does *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing serve to construct communities in light of the heritagization and eventization of religious practices? Through its heritagization and eventization, *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing has served to increase the number of different groups engaged with the practice. Processes of heritagization and eventization do not result in the overruling of communities from the iterative event context (church communities). Rather, church communities demonstrate an overlap with other groups (such as male choirs) and networks (such as fans), gathering together in the pulsar collective-singing events. We conclude that there is a cross-fertilization between the ritual-musical contexts of iterative Sunday worship in strictly Reformed church communities in Genemuiden and pulsar collective psalm-singing events that attract audiences from a broader region. For most “double participants,” there is difference but not discrepancy between participating in iterative and pulsar events. Although the heritagization and eventization of the practice is sometimes at odds with church councils’ theological views, participants generally appreciate the heritagization and eventization of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalm singing, since their local pride grows with its popularity, and their songs to God move admirers beyond their local church communities. Interestingly, this occurs with the support both of secular governmental heritage institutions and of strictly Reformed media institutions. We conclude that singers of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalms relate to each other in multiple ways—singing apart together in the ecclesioscape of *Genemuider bovenstem* psalmody.

terdam: Vrije Universiteit, 2009), 128–129, 253, <https://research.vu.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/42186508/complete+dissertation.pdf>.

75 Sara Walmsley-Pledl argues as such in her chapter on gender and place in Bavarian choral singing; Walmsley-Pledl, “Transforming the Singing Body,” 123.

76 Koskoff, *Feminist Ethnomusicology*, 132; Fred Everett Maus, “Music, Gender, and Sexuality,” in Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (eds.), *The Cultural Study of Music* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 317–329, at 321.

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