

Children in Maritime Communities of Practice

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This Poster is part of a current PhD project: *Maritime logistics in late Viking Age warfare*, supervised by Associated professor Henriette Lyngstrøm, University of Copenhagen, Associated professor Carsten Jahnke, University of Copenhagen and Research coordinator Anton Englert, PhD, The Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde.

Summary

Maritime communities face the sea and interact with it on a daily basis. This interaction forms both a community of practice and an identity among the community's members. The process of becoming an experienced member of a community of practice is socially constructed. The traditions and tricks of the trade are transferred from one generation to another in a dialectic interaction between the individuals and the structure of the community.

In historic maritime communities of practice, many basic skills were learned and adopted during childhood. Children became involved, and thus acculturated, by watching able seamen and fishermen at work, hearing maritime tales and re-enacting situations related to life at sea. Viking-Age ship models, interpreted as toy boats, are used here as an archaeological example of how toys might be understood as tools, allowing children, through play, to make first contact with seamanship and perceptions of life at sea.

Communities of Practice

A community of practice should be understood as a specific practice that is shared by actors and which is defined and delimited by the structure of the practice community (Fig. 1.). By focusing on practice, the relationship between the actor and the structure becomes the focus of attention. The actor and the structure are placed on an equal footing and are not perceived as working against each other. They only exist in the context of their relationship and they can only be understood in their totality, by studying the relationship between them (Hjelmslev [1943] 1966, 21f).

A community of practice is both unique and universal. It is unique in the sense that it is determined by social and resource conditions, and is thus determined by time and place. It is universal in the sense that the common practice creates a relationship across time and place.

Participation

Educational theorist Etienne Wenger has worked extensively with communities of practice. According to Wenger, the community of practice is characterised by relationships between three types of participation, *Full participation*, *legitimate peripheral participation* and *marginal participation*. The relations between the participants and the structure of the community are analysed through the concepts of: negotiation of meaning, learning in practice, creation of community and creation of identity (Fig. 1) (Wenger 1998, 5f & 47f).

Children as marginal participants

When children play, and thus approach the community of practice, they can be perceived as marginal participants. They have a desire to one day become part of the adults' community of practice. Their actions, i.e. the play, will not be perceived as directly contributing to the community of practice, but once their actions are no longer regarded as a game, but as legitimate participation, their activities then become legitimate within the structure of the community of practice, but peripheral in relation to its full members (Østergaard 2009, 137).

Toy boats

Ship models are an archaeological group of artefacts that might help clarify maritime learning in historical times. Ship models are found all over Europe and were produced in many different shapes and sizes (Fig. 2).

Some are extremely detailed and several of these are interpreted as toy boat, even with holes for the mast and oars (Crumlin-Pedersen 1997, 172). It is also likely that miniature anchors and sails were used with the toy boats (Drescher 1983, 184).

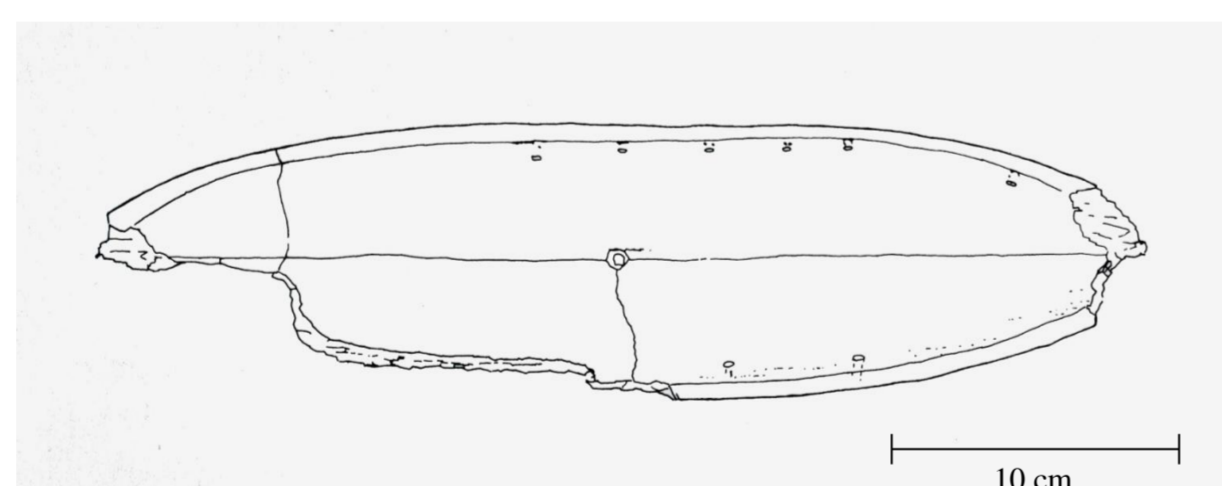


Figure 2: Ship model excavated at Haithabu.
Please note the hole, probably for the mast, and the numerous oar ports. The hole to the right could have been used for the attachment of a side rudder. Drawing: Wikinger Museum Haithabu.

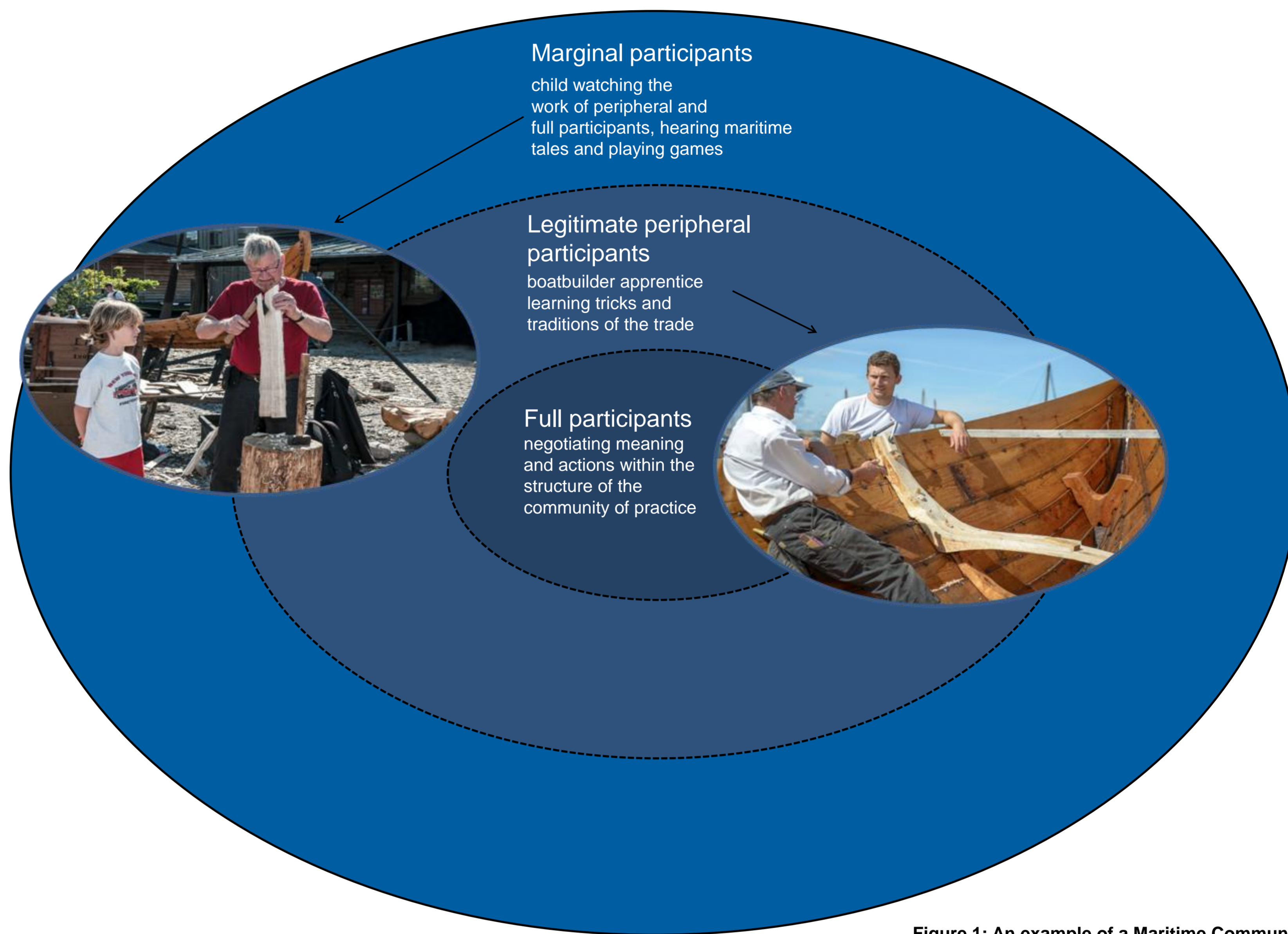


Figure 1: An example of a Maritime Community of Practice: boatbuilding.
Photos: Werner Karrasch, Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde.

Maritime-oriented play

Children of the past, who grew up in maritime life-modes, have followed and marginally participated in the adults' work of fishing, trans-shipment of goods, building and maintaining boats and ships etc. They have heard sailors talk about long voyages and military expeditions to distant places, and perhaps their father, mother, uncle or the children themselves have made a toy boat. Through maritime-oriented play, e.g. with toy boats, the long voyages and dangerous adventures were constructed anew. Together with the marginal participation, their play prepared the children for later legitimate, peripheral participation.

Mobilising the workforce

The transfer of tradition in a community of practice begins with the youngest of the marginal participants, the children. Through a growing participation and reification, children form the basic preconditions for the subsequent actual learning process. Children's play is an important element in the mobilisation of labour and the continued creation of knowledge and skills within the community of practice and society in general.

Acknowledgements

For help and support I would like to thank research coordinator Anton Englert and photographer Werner Karrasch both from The Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde, and Diarmuid Kennan from ABC Translation.



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