

ABSTRACT

“Think not how Arima is insignificant to the world but how the world is insignificant to Arima”: The Role of Cultural Heritage in Supporting Community and Sense of Place in the Borough of Arima, Trinidad

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Fundamental to the safeguarding of heritage sites is their meaning and significance to the local population and local communities. For each of us, a place has a unique reality, existing through a series of direct and indirect experiences and memories that turn space into place, into cultural landscapes. In forming communities, we recognise shared meanings that create and reinforce connections between people and places. We seek to hang on to the uniqueness of place in an attempt to maintain the uniqueness of an individual or community. With perceived threats of cultural globalisation and homogenisation, the contemporary protection of cultural heritage has become a popular response to affirm local identities. This research explores the contemporary relationship between people and place in order to understand the role of cultural heritage places and the cultural landscape in shaping the Arimians’ sense of place. The reader will see how exclusion and inclusion are implicated in the development of social relationships and between people and place. It also explores the relationship of the cultural landscape to community identity, demonstrating how the intangible memories and stories surrounding the tangible artefacts of the landscape support a ‘storyscape’ of belonging, where personal stories are shared to define, authorise and support community membership. Focusing on the Borough of Arima, Trinidad and Tobago, this research uses in-depth interviews as well as focus groups to acquire narratives. This study explores the act of community building and the way this process can be exclusionary; with stories and memories of events and objects used to demarcate borders in response to contemporary cultural landscape changes. Consequently, the cultural landscape plays an important part in the lives of the people of Arima as it is used to validate their past and their identity.

Keywords: Kara Margaret Roopsingh; Cultural Heritage; Arima; Community; Sense of Place.