

So What Do You Do?: Experimenting with Space for Social Creativity

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This chapter will present an analysis of the results of a series of “action experiments” that we conducted in order to learn how to design a “Studio for Social Creativity.” It will focus on the use of non-verbal and spatial data in sharing different forms of knowledge with the aim of generating new action-oriented knowledge about processes of social innovation.

The experiment stemmed from the question of how to use the resources of a public college to stimulate development in Israel’s northern periphery. This region is characterized by socio-economic exclusion as well as on-going tension between its Jewish and Palestinian Arabs inhabitants.¹ The idea of a Studio for Social Creativity was originally based on the following propositions:

- 1) Regional development in this peripheral region can be framed as social inclusion.
- 2) 'Social entrepreneurship' is an effective strategy for promoting “social inclusion.”
- 3) The college can better mobilize its resources and core tasks in the service of regional development by functioning as an “incubator” for social entrepreneurship.
- 4) In divided societies like Israel, social entrepreneurship can have a greater impact on regional development when combined with “conflict engagement.”

The discovery of a large art studio at the college offered the physical location for these activities. This unique space had a powerful effect on us, especially because we had already begun to pursue an interest in the arts as a stimulus for organizational learning (Berthoin Antal 2010). As a consequence, we formulated two additional propositions:

- 5) Social entrepreneurship and conflict engagement are processes of *social creativity*.
- 6) Social creativity can be greatly enhanced by integrating artistic practices into social entrepreneurship and conflict engagement processes.

The theoretical and empirical foundations for these propositions were expounded in a “theory of action” for the Studio for Social Creativity (Friedman & Desivilya, forthcoming). Nevertheless, there remained a considerable gap between this theory and the question of how to actually use the studio in order to promote processes of social creativity. In short, we were faced with the question “so what do you do?”

In order to answer this question, we conducted a series of experiments in which we brought together not only social entrepreneurs, conflict engagement practitioners, college faculty, and students but also artists. Our current explorations of artistic interventions in organizations suggested that bringing artistic people, products and processes into the experiment would open additional avenues of exploration and communication by addressing multiple senses (Darso 2004; Carr and Hancock 2003). In particular, we hoped that integrating the arts would help in the process of moving “from talking to doing.” Unlike most artistic intervention projects, which tend to privilege the arts, we decided to integrate the artistic way of knowing on an equal footing with the other forms of knowing. We asked the participants how they would use this space to combine their different types of knowledge and experience in ways that would mobilize resources from the college in the service of regional development. In June 2009 we held six such sessions, lasting 2 hours, each with a different mix of participants, involving in total some 70 people, both Jewish and Palestinian Arab. The participants were asked to bring with them “materials” or “tools” they typically use in their practice and the researchers provided artistic materials that could be used by the group members of each

¹ These are the Palestinian Arabs who remained as citizens Israel after 1948, as opposed to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and today make up approximately 20% of the total population of the State. In the northern region, however, Israeli Arabs comprise approximately 47% of the population.

session as part of their creative process. These sessions were recorded on video, audio-tape, snapshots, and by hand. For this chapter we will analyse the data with a focus on the non-verbal, material, artistic and spatial elements of the process of “social creativity”.