

Emotional Co-responsence Links

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ABSTRACT

This contribution deals with a special design of participation processes for empowerment of participants. Usually this processes last for two or more years. The focus of the design of this processes is based on interdisciplinary research results about knowledge construction and decision making in groups.

As a planner I organize participative planning processes to develop a common goal in space. A participative planning process occurs in a shared constructed reality. Shared reality emerges out of *interaction* and *communication* in groups. My research results point out that concrete experienced emotional co-responsence in a group links participants and leads to grounded knowledge construction and decision making in participative planning processes.

In my planning practice I have organized the mutual experience of *concrete situations* to create co-responding structures between participants. Groups of people affected by a plan are invited to show me their daily environment, the “object” of the plan. We start our contact with walking together. I call this a *moved planning process*.

This paper analyzes the changing structure of the attentive subgroups of participants. Empirical evidence shows that networks between participants are strengthened because of the common experience in concrete situations. The usual structures are broken and new ones rebuilt by experiencing movement; an emotional co-responsence emerges. Walking contributes to the decision process in groups because it links participants in changed structures.

1 INTRODUCTION

Planners create a process of encounter with participants. In this process, information has to be emotionally and cognitively perceived and accepted by the group to arrive at decisions on future plans. Group awareness and group identity enable the participants to construct a shared reality. Shared reality emerges out of *interaction* and *communication* in groups. To point out how participants are linked I want to describe the phases of the moved planning process, the effects of shared experience of movement, and how concrete, experienced emotional co-responsence in a group links participants. This leads to grounded decision making in participative planning processes.

This paper analyzes my practical experience in planning in small rural towns in the light of different theories about interaction, communication, and understanding. It is based on a field experiment which showed how participants experience emotional co-responsence and the effects of this experience. Planning participation here is more than the transfer of information. It deals with knowledge construction and processes of decision making in groups. In other papers, the focus was on the relation between physically motion and emotional correspondence (Rottenbacher 2004), and on knowledge construction and decision making of a group (Rottenbacher 2004a). In this contribution, the focus is on the changing structure of the attentive subgroups. Networks between participants are strengthened because of the common experienced concrete situations. I discovered that walking contributes to the decision process in groups and links participants in changed structures. The research results about communication processes in groups relate to Barabasi’ s book “Linked” (Barabási 2003), in which phenomena of building networks are described. The result of this analysis is to identify the processes which strengthen the structure of the group in enabling an emotional co-responsence.

2 PHASES OF THE MOVED PLANNING PROCESS

To initiate a process of building trust I organize walks to create a shared situation. The aim is to break up the usual structure of participation and decision making in the village. Each meeting during the planning process is structured into a phase of walking and a following phase of sitting together to reflect. The arrangement enables a process of contact within the group. This I call an encounter of a group.

Welcome: Each meeting starts with a welcome, where I explain the aim and the structure of this meeting. People are asked to show me their daily environment. Then we start and go through the space to be planned.

Arrival: Initially the participants arrive in the situation, the location and the other arriving participants. Participants experience movement and space. They get familiar with the situation, find their style of interaction and take over roles as experts of their daily life.

Attending: During walking we identify the important topics and speak about them. We participate in a process and integrate new experiences and information.

Common decisions: During walking we see what has to be done. At the end of the meeting we sit together and collect ideas, recognize the needed activities and decide the next steps until the next meeting.

Sharing of responsibilities: Everybody is assigned a task to complete before the next meeting. The previous experience of a joint activity creates the motivation to contribute. Joint activities help to get into contact and to come to a mutual understanding.

3 SHARED EXPERIENCE OF REALITY

For communication it is necessary to get into *contact* and to come to a *mutual understanding*. Mutual understanding is possible if the participants have *co-responding* perceiving capacities and interpretation patterns (Schmid 2004). In my planning practice I have organized the mutual experience of *concrete situations* to create co-responding structures between participants.

Our experiences are corporal and sensorial. If we meet in *concrete situations* our bodies tell about our experiences. This is a simultaneous perceiving and expressing. When we talk our bodies communicate information about our state and attitude (Argyle 1975). When we walk we simultaneously perceive, decode, and make decisions about our daily environment and on acting in it. Perceiving and expressing are shared actions, not individual actions. For example if people sit together and speak, they copy postures from each other. We all know how contagious yawning or laughing is. Depending on our empathy we feel the sadness of another close person in the breast or his anger in the stomach (Hakansson 2003).

Joint walking increases an *intercorporeal* existence of the group. This intercorporeal existence is the basic human experience of relationship. This existence contains all information of experiences and knowledge, and influences our feeling, thinking, and acting patterns (Merleau-Ponty 1966). In this intercorporeal existence you can feel, see, and interpret the actions and intentions of other participants (Lewin 1951).

In the mutual experience of concrete situations communication is based on the expectation that all participants share this knowledge about capacities, practices and stances towards objects (Burkart 1998). The symbolic meaning of roles, things, and situations motivate movement and actions, and give a shared orientation. The capacity of people to understand the acting of the other is an evolutionary adaptation. Individual development differentiates from common actions (Geertz 1983). Older experiences are brought in as common sense, and symbols, used like gestures or words, get their meaning from the context implied and understood (Joas 1980).

During walking the meaning of symbols are related to the ever changing shared experiences. The previously constructed reality of individual participants often differs from the encountered reality during the walk. In our shared experience and speaking about it we explain our realities, our understanding of behaviour and symbols.

We progress from collecting data and abstract concepts to a common experienced reality. This ultimately touches upon the feeling of identity of the people affected (Damasio 1999). I am able to show them in which relationship their ideas stand to attitudes of society at large and norms, which are manifest in the use of space, and in the use of land.

4 GROUP INTERACTIONS

needs, wishes, aims, and tasks. In the A group is determined by group characteristics and participant characteristics. Groups consist of individuals. Each individual is looking for security, communication, acceptance, acknowledgement, and cooperation. The dynamic of a group is more than the sum of the actions of participants (Lewin 1951). There emerges a dynamic, independent of the possibilities of the participants. In the *moved planning process* everyone gets the possibility of personal experiencing, communicating, and acting. Everybody finds space for personal *moved planning process*, I create a mood for mutual esteem to enable joint actions. Everyone is an expert of his or her personal life and must be respected for this and his contribution encouraged.

The first decisions at the first encounter in a participative planning process lead immediately to first realizations. The experience of the outcome of acting together develops a spiral of decisions, each related to realizations, which changes the base of interaction patterns of the group, the trust, and the tolerance in frustrations for further actions.

The main resources of group influence to increase dynamics are the personal attendance, the public obligation, the social contribution, and norms of the group.

4.1 Individuals

The personal acting has a self referential meaning to give continuity and identity to the own being and acting. The "I" is a live system which has emotional, spiritual, and cognitive abilities. It is adapting permanently to the changing environment. For the internal structure of self it is crucial to have self awareness for these changes and anchor it to ones own identity (comp. Damasio 1999, Varela 1997, Roth 2001). We experience a personal history and we develop through our experiences. We acquire new competences through the contact with others.

From the base of this "I" we are able to get into contact with "You" and with the experiences of the "You" (Buber 1995). Within this context we are able to understand behaviour of the others as an expression of their "I". At an encounter and during a walk this concrete context is strengthened. People find a common rhythm and breath, and have joint experiences. This immediate behaviour evokes patterns of existence and less patterns of thinking.

"I" experience with my feelings, bodily sensations, with my mood, and passions. "I" perceive and interpret with my mind. It is a continuous process of self fulfilment, perception, acceptance, integration, and takes new things in (Dreitzel 1992).

In the moved planning process "I" experience the changes of my environment, of my interactions, as effects of my acting. My bodily experience, in movement, between being a body and having a body, enables, that "I" express in movement my knowledge about this situation, and that it is possible to be seen and understood by others. In movement "I" experience, and reflect the concrete situation and make decisions on acting in it. In movement the integration of new emotional and cognitive experiences are contributed.

Essentials for the contribution of participative processes are that:

Participants experience a personal development. Social interactions have an effect on personal development. The effects increase a self-organization of the group (Geser 1983).

Participants experience repeated processes of socialization. They experience improvement, enlargement, and confirmation of their behavior, attitude, and acting (Dreitzel 1992).

The behaviour of the participants depends more often on the actual situation than on previously developed thinking and feeling patterns. They speak more about current experiences and less about abstract opinions acquired from outside sources (Dreitzel 1992).

4.2 Subgroups

Independent of participant characteristics the participant take roles depending on group structures, emotions, affections, likes and dislike. During usual participative meetings participants sit around a table and expect motivation and ideas from the planner. They sit beside friends, building subgroups repeating the social structure of the village. The subgroups have about three to five participants. These subgroups remain mostly constant during the meeting. There are few possibilities for dissolving the groups and that the participants experience themselves mutually in a new context.

During the moved planning process we walk through the space to be planned and stop at special situations. This facilitates and sometimes forces the formation of new subgroups. According to emerging topics, participants build new subgroups.

The first encounter happens in the subgroups. There they find a common rhythm of steps and breath and experience concrete situations. In the subgroups, participants encourage others to report about their experience, about function and meaning of a special situation, to take on the role of an expert. In the subgroups they experience an emotional co-respondence of mutual understanding during walking.

They experience each other mutually in common walking and acting;

the shared emotional state increases;

common activities are arranged, first decisions are arrived at.

4.3 Group

Typically about twenty participants form the whole group. These are people responsible for, affected by, and interested in the outcome of the process. At the beginning it is a heterogeneous group. They bring with them different knowledge about the circumstances and do not have a base for interactions in that special group. This may evoke feelings similar to feel like a stranger. At the beginning, beside the official welcome, the participants of the subgroups start with offering contact. They try to find a familiar style of interaction.

An orientation is given by the structure of the encounter, they know, what we will do in the next two hours. During walking the whole group meets at special stations, situations. There everybody stops, tells about meanings of the things visible, and depending on the topics new subgroups continue.

After walking we sit together and reflect what happened. Old and newly built subgroups sit beside each other. Participants tell about their impressions, and their messages remain side by side (Johnson 1987). In the whole group the co-responding bodily states partially synchronize their mental situation. From physical and mental co-respondence participants reach a consensus about first topics because they "name" what they experienced immediately after this co-respondence. From unconscious experienced empathy they reflect and name what happened, what they perceived, and describe their joint expectations. At that point the planned future is anticipated, and grounded decisions are made.

5 EMOTIONAL CO-RESPONDENCE

The term "emotional co-respondence" comes from a therapeutic context. It is mostly used in person centered relations and in forms of gestalt therapy (Schmidt 2004). Emotional co-respondence describes the communication of emotion, questions and answers without words (Fuchs 2003).

5.1 Communication of Emotions

During encounter participants experience different emotions. Related to experiences of gestalt therapy and gestalt theory these special emotions increase according to the different phases of contact, which every encounter has. The encounter happens first during walking in the subgroups.

The first emotions participants experience are bodily feelings like attraction, you turn towards one person, or you turn away. You try to compensate feelings being strange or insecure with looking for a familiar situation, you turn towards known participants or towards new one, if they look interesting. There the bodily feeling of curiosity is stronger than circumspection (Dreitzel 1992). We can observe this getting into contact expressed in bodily movements, eye contact and the finding of personal space. These emotions are expressed and understood by the participants.

During contact increases an emotional co-respondence. Participants synchronize steps, and breathe, and reach a co-responding emotional state. In gestalt theory this is described as a change of contact boundaries. Within that phase boundaries are opened. The power for this opening comes from our need, our attraction. There our capacities for awareness, for orientation, and for acting are strengthened. Based on this experience at the contact boundary will and actions are motivated and expressed in movement (Hannaford 1995).

After reflecting in the whole group participants experience once more an emotional co-respondence when they talk about topics, which evoke emotions (Clynes 1989), (Smith 2001). There it is observable that they first get slowly in their motions, then they name their decisions, after they have named the decisions they show quicker movements.

5.2 Base for Interactions

To each personal movement (behaviour) belongs a shared movement (behaviour) (Merleau-Ponty 1966). Joint walking creates experiences together, namely the common rhythm of step, the regular breathing, the physical effort, and the feeling of fatigue. We perceive pictures with our senses and I move people to encourage their trust in their senses while moving the body. I encourage them to trust their own understanding of their needs.

Imagination and understanding emerges from our embodied experiences (Varela 1997). Human bodily movement, manipulation of objects and interaction, integrate recurring patterns and develop new ones. We are able to integrate information and transform it into knowledge in a mutual understanding. Joint activities bring up joint experiences; we manipulate objects and interact in the group. Experiencing actions together leads to a mutual understanding in that special situation.

Participants in groups recognize behaviour, character, state, and attitude of others nonverbally (Fuchs 2003). During a meeting participants find a corresponding style of interaction. They improve this style of interaction and communication until they feel comfortable. Often nonverbal communication in groups is ambiguous and tentative.

This context is the backdrop for concrete understanding between participating persons. This relation becomes apparent in behavioural patterns, through acting, and physical movement. It opens the structures of social interaction and renews a new base of contact. The participants experience themselves mutually within every new meeting and the structure of interaction in the concrete situation is defined anew.



Participants develop new roles and test them in new behaving patterns. This is the pre-condition that they are able to perceive new contents and information, and integrate it into their personal experience, knowledge, and acting. This flexible interaction enables to anticipate and imagine the future

6 NETWORKS

6.1 Regular and Random Networks

Watts and Strogatz (Watts and Strogatz 1998) defined two extremes of small world networks, namely regular networks, wherein nearby nodes have large number of interconnections, and distant nodes have few; and random networks, which are uncluttered, and have a short path length. The randomness makes it less likely that nearby nodes will have lots of connections, but introduces more links that connect one part of the network to another.

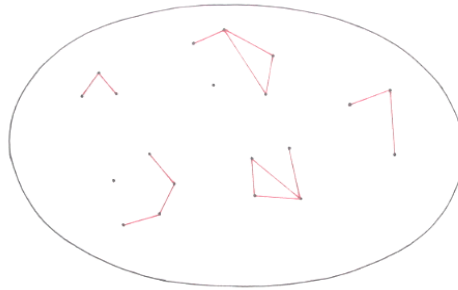
The initial situation in a planning process in a village is closer to a regular network, with strong ties in established groups. During the moved planning process, unexpected links are created. This reduces the path length in the network and allows information – but also emotional co-respondance – to spread more quickly. Nodes have access to more information, and can realize more ideas. Correspondence through shorter path in the network brings synchronization and collaboration in groups. We may relate emotional correspondence to small world networks:

process of interaction in groups in concrete situations	building of networks participants are linked
getting contact trust emotional correspondance mutual understanding decision making realization	network - structure  context - meaning + understanding content - feeling + naming  function of participation - meta level

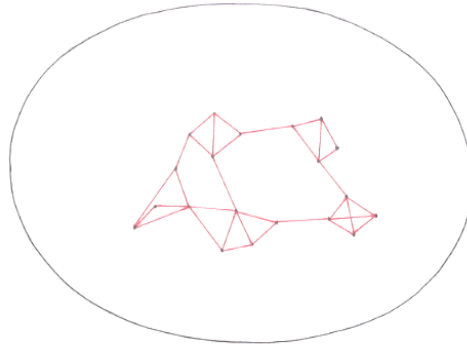
6.2 Networks of Participants

The concrete experienced situations lead to an emotional co-respondance, and the base for interactions is getting better. Trust increases. The common experience of outcome of decisions and realizations lead to a growing tolerance for frustration. Not all wishes of the participants have to be fulfilled right now. The interaction base survives negative experiences and frustrated expectations.

How participants get more and more linked is shown in the next two figures.

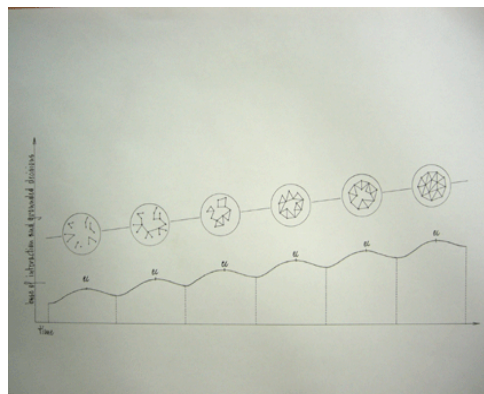


This figure shows the usual structure of the whole group. The subgroups build by the participants relate to the social structure of the village.



After an encounter and after experiencing concrete situations in emotional co-respondence, participants are better linked.

During the moved planning process we have more encounters. The next figure shows the development of the interaction patterns and how participants are more and more linked.



7 ESSENTIALS

Joint walking increases the intercorporeal existence of the group. This intercorporeal existence is the basic human experience of relationship. It contains all information of experiences and knowledge, and influences our feeling, thinking, and acting patterns. This intercorporeal community is important to reach a co-respondence for decision making.

In concrete situations participants experience an emotional co-respondence in the first subgroups. The usual structures of interactions are dissolved and new ones rebuilt. During the moved planning process participants get more and more linked. An essential part of this planning process is to recognize joint tasks and assign duties and responsibilities. The support of self perception, self-confidence, and joint activities leads to grounded decisions.

For a grounded decision it is necessary that participants experience the concrete situation and use less abstract constructions. They experience themselves mutually in acting, movement, decision making, realization step by step, and within the shared experience of outcome. Immediately within the first meeting we realize small steps. Small successes support the process of decisions and acting, and create a shared self consciousness and a shared identity of the group. The shared self consciousness of the group accumulates over multiple interactions, because participants are linked.

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