

Chapter 4

Sustainable Learning Society Applications: Stimulating Creativity in Groups Through Diversity in Learning Styles

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ABSTRACT

Citizen participation is a key element in sustainably developing cities. When developmental decisions are left to governmental officials and decision-makers, political and economic factors tend to control the process. This leaves little room for humane values. As such, researchers have called for the development of a sustainable learning society, with the creative class and innovators at its lead, in order to direct the participation of citizens in the decision-making process, in issues related to the living environment. Based on the similarity between the environment of organizational creativity of both participatory sessions and design education, this research borrows an application performed in a design context. This takes place, in order to quantitatively and qualitatively test diversity's effect in a group on the creative output. As such, it was concluded that the same relationship is valid for group members working on development projects. Findings suggest tools that can be employed to select participants and to enhance creativity within groups focusing on development planning.

INTRODUCTION

Populations are rapidly growing worldwide in urbanized areas. Up until the 70s of the last century, two thirds of humans were still living in rural areas. In 2014, more than half the world's population has been living in urban areas. In 2050, urban areas are expected to reach 70% of all livable areas (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2017). This research works with the following definition of urban areas, based on built-up areas and human settlements with dense areas of population. Such areas can be either formal or informal. The built environment of informally urbanized areas can be easily influenced by citizens.

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However, if people have the power to participate in decision-making, but lack the proper knowledge, this can threaten society from both a socio-economic and a political point of view. On the other hand, in formally urbanized areas, the power of citizens can be limited, where the environment is affected directly and — sometimes — exclusively by the public and private sectors. It is argued that local communities are aware of their needs and can be resourceful in shaping their own living environment, yet their role is limited in the development process due to various barriers. Understanding those barriers can help build a bridge of trust and understanding between ordinary citizens and both specialists and decision-makers. Those barriers include technical issues, the complexity of problems, and bureaucracy (Ianniello, 2019).

The development process follows the same dynamics of creative organizations, where all ideas are elaborated upon explicitly and the role of leadership in moderating group work is a must. Also, the same applies in the practice and education of the design discipline. The current actors of development are knowledge, expertise, and financial resources (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2017). If the goal of development is to integrate these factors to reach an inclusive output, then the characteristics of such a process match the creative process of the design discipline. Thus, understanding the design process and the behaviour of designers in a group setting can lead to better understanding of its corresponding process in developmental projects. In design literature, there is no single line separating between learning and practice, as they both depend on experiential learning. That is why understanding the learning experience of design can lead to deeper understanding of design practices. Consequently, this will lead to a deeper understanding of the field of development. Also, in the literature devoted to design education, leadership roles notably need to be fulfilled by educators to shape the so-called “learning space”. These roles are almost the same as those applied in workshops and sessions, where citizens participate in helping those in the position of power reach better decisions in developmental projects related to shaping cities.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter starts with highlighting the current urban growth rate and the paradigm shift needed to include citizens in the decision making process and empower them to be able to fulfill this role and help manage such growth. It explores the role of the creative class in each society, yet points out the major role of ordinary citizens in development. Then, it investigates the different levels of participation highlighted in the “Ladder of Participation” by Arnstein in 1969. Afterwards, it explores both obstacles facing effective citizen participation and recommendations introduced in literature. In order to understand the participation process in a deeper manner and explore creativity tools that can enhance it, the term creativity is introduced from the organizational point of view. This term can be applied in multidisciplinary issues, such as the development process, design practice, and design education. With organizational creativity as a point of focus, an analogy is drawn between citizen participation sessions and the creative environment in design studio teaching. In such analogy, it is argued that there is a tight link between design teaching/practice and dynamics inside citizen participation sessions and workshops. This link can lead to many recommendations in development projects, based on lessons learned from the literature of the design education discipline.

When exploring the educational side of the design discipline, one needs to understand the nature of its dynamics, as students learn through putting their experiences in action, then reflecting on the process. Such behavior is elucidated through the ELT “Experiential Learning Theory” by David Kolb. In ELT,

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