

SOCIAL SPACE AS A GENERATIVE IMAGE FOR DIALOGIC ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Victor J. Friedman, Israel Sykes,
Noam Lapidot-Lefler and Noha Haj

ABSTRACT

Social space, the central construct in field theory, offers dialogic organization development a generative image similar to open systems for diagnostic OD. Social space imagery enables people to think, feel, and act in ways that exercise greater choice over the realities they construct and that construct them. This process is illustrated through a “transitional space” that enabled people with severe disabilities to overcome stigma and isolation. Social spatial imagery moves dialogic OD away from systems imagery and language, addresses ambivalence about self and mind, clarifies the meaning of reality, and reconnects it to its Lewinian roots.

Keywords: Social space; field theory; dialogic organization development; transitional space

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this chapter is to offer the concept of social space, as understood in field theory, as a generative image for dialogic organization development. Field theory views social reality as the ongoing creation and recreation of social spaces comprised of actors, relationships, meanings, and rules of behavior (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; Friedman, 2011). Fields emerge through interaction processes in which people construct social spaces and then are shaped by the very spaces they construct (Friedman, 2011; Friedman & Sykes, 2014). Generative images are words or phrases that enable people to see familiar situations in novel ways that stimulate new ways of thinking and open opportunities for different ways of acting (Bushe & Storch, 2015). Field theory, as we are developing it, offers ways of seeing, thinking, and acting that enable people to exercise greater choice over the mutual shaping process through which they construct reality and reality constructs them.

Field theory can also guide OD interventionists and action researchers who wish to create spaces that enable people to challenge dominant fields and create conditions for individual and collective change and growth (Lapidot-Leffler et al., 2015). In this chapter we will describe one such space for change – “transitional space” – that enables people, both at the individual and collective level, to disengage from dominant fields so that they can think, feel, and act differently. Transitional spaces enable people to free themselves, at least to a certain extent, from the shaping power of dominant fields and to “expand the realm of the possible” for themselves and for others.

The term “dialogic” organization development has been used to distinguish between a group of relatively new interventions – including, for example, appreciative inquiry, future search, open space technology, and some forms of action research – and a more traditional “diagnostic” organization development approach (Averbuch, Marshak, & Bushe, 2015; Bushe & Marshak, 2009, 2014). Diagnostic OD aims at facilitating adaptation through systematic data gathering that compares an organization’s current state to desired state so as to guide subsequent action. It has been guided by a biological generative image, drawn from open systems theory that regards organizations as if they were organisms that continually need to adapt to an objective environment.

Dialogic OD, on the other hand, focuses on discursive, meaning-making, and self-organizing processes that engage people in constructing new joint realities. From this perspective, change in organizations can emerge as a

result of changes in everyday conversations and organizational discourse. Interventions therefore focus on creating spaces where organizational members come together to share their understanding of the multiple social realities and to create alignment for decisions and actions. While dialogic organization development interventions draw on a variety of postmodernist, constructivist, and discursive theories, [Bushe and Marshak \(2009\)](#) note that it has no theory akin to systems theory ([2009](#)).

In this chapter we argue that social space offers dialogic OD a simple, compelling generative image that includes not only discursive realities but also the ways that individual thinking, feeling, and acting are influenced by social fields. Discourse is central to dialogic OD but it represents only one pole in an ongoing dialectic of mutual shaping between individuals and fields. The social space image suggests that dialogic processes aimed at change must adopt a “self-in-field” perspective that takes into account both the individual and the collective poles of reality construction. Furthermore, social space as a generative image offers a way of (a) clarifying what is meant by “reality” in dialogic OD and (b) reconnecting dialogic OD to its Lewinian roots.

The chapter begins with a brief introduction to field theory as a meta-theory that offers social space as a rich generative image for guiding organizational and social change processes. It will then demonstrate the use of social spatial imagery by presenting the idea of “transitional space” and illustrating it through a case study of the Pathways to the Community program, in which people with disabilities effected fundamental change in themselves and their relationships with the community. In the discussion, the chapter will argue that social space and field theory offer a simple and compelling imagery for enhancing the comprehensiveness and coherence of dialogic OD interventions.

SOCIAL SPACE AND FIELD THEORY

Field theory was the conceptual basis upon which [Lewin \(1936, 1948, 1951\)](#) built his revolutionary approach to psychology that spawned many of the concepts, research methods, and practices of organizational change and development. Nevertheless, Lewin’s field theory was largely abandoned as a conceptual framework for ongoing theory building and guiding practice ([Burnes & Cooke, 2013; White, 1978](#)). Field theory was also taken up by [Bourdieu \(1985, 1989, 1993, 1998\)](#), [Bourdieu and Wacquant \(1992\)](#) as

the basis for developing a “reflexive sociology” that challenged mainstream sociological theory and method. As with Lewin, many of Bourdieu’s concepts and methods were influential, but his systematic approach to field theory was largely left behind.

Both Lewin and Bourdieu built their field theory on the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer (1923/1953, p. 9, 1944, 1961), who made a critical distinction between a “substantialist” and a “relational” logic of reality. Substantialism holds that reality is composed of concrete, independent *things* that can be observed through our senses (Cassirer, 1923, pp. 291–292). “Relationalism,” on the other hand, holds that reality is best grasped as an *ordering* of elements of perception through a mental *process* of construction that gives them intelligibility and meaning. Relational concepts are fundamentally “rules” that connect the different elements of experience and determine their behavior. They originate in the mind but find their expression in the order they bring to the various elements of perception (Cassirer, 1923, p. 17). Cassirer (1923) also demonstrated how, in the natural sciences, relational thinking gradually replaced substantialist thinking, paving the way for many great advances of knowledge.

What made these advances possible was the use of the concept of geometric space as a totally abstract way of representing physical relations. Space is not a physical concept, but rather a mental creation that can be used to *think relationally* about making order from any given set of elements. Both Lewin and Bourdieu adopted this idea of space as an essential construct for theorizing about the *social* world. Social space forms out of links created when we enact our thinking and feeling and elicit responses from other(s), which then shape our thinking, feeling, and action. If interaction is temporary or fleeting, then a social space is unlikely to form. However, when interactions are sustained over time and become patterned, they take on a particular configuration that differentiates them from other patterned interactions. *Differentiation* is a mental act that leads to the creation of a space that has an existence outside, but not wholly independent, of the individuals that constitute it. Once formed, social spaces take on a life of their own. Social space constitutes the fundamental building block of the experienced social realities that people construct together. Essentially all human relationships are social spaces. They can involve as few as two people or an entire society. Groups and organizations are spaces but so are less formal configurations such as the “the field of organizational development” or even “the market.”

The concept of field was borrowed by Lewin and Bourdieu from physics as a way of accounting for *causality* in social space. By

the 20th century, physics increasingly faced problems that could not be solved through Newtonian mechanics, which attributed causality to the behavior of physical bodies when subjected to forces or displacement from each other (Cassirer, 1961, pp. 165–167). The main difficulty was explaining how certain bodies seemed to influence other bodies without direct contact (e.g., electro-magnetism). The turning point was the Faraday-Maxwell concept of the electromagnetic “field” in which causality is attributed to the influence of a field on the elements that constitute it. Thus, fields can be understood as spaces that not only link different elements into a kind of network, but also exert force on and shape the behavior of its constituents. At the same time, a field, and its power, is continually recreated or enacted by its constituents and never exists as an independent entity.

Friedman (2011) revisited the concepts of social space and field theory, suggesting that theory building and practice based on a relational understanding of organizational change can help people and organizations continually expand the realm of the possible. Friedman and Sykes (2014) explored the ways in which an understanding of social space could reveal a deep structure of the theory and practice of organizational learning. Friedman, Sykes, and Strauch (2014) used the concepts to formulate and illustrate a relational conceptualization of the process of social entrepreneurship. Finally, Lapidot-Leffler et al. (2015) used the concepts to understand processes of social exclusion and to design constructs for the evaluation of social programs that aim to promote social inclusion.

Interestingly, our return to these concepts occurred almost exactly at the same time as, but totally in parallel and without awareness of, the sociologists Fligstein and McAdam’s (2011, 2012), who were building a general theory of strategic action fields. According to their framework, strategic action fields are meso-level social orders that constitute the basic structural building block of modern political and organizational life (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012, p. 3). However, while they wrote that “social life as dominated by a complex web of strategic action fields” (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012, p. 8), we would argue that social life *is* a complex web of strategic action fields. This distinction is important because the statement “social life as dominated by fields” implicitly treats “social life” and “fields” in a substantialist way, as if they were separate entities or variables, with the latter influencing the former. All spaces are fields, though with varying degrees of organization, complexity, and force. We suggest that *all* social life can only be understood as a complex web of fields, some stronger and some weaker, through which action takes place.

Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p. 10) offered a very useful framework for analyzing strategic action fields in their critique of the use of the concept “institutional logics” to characterize the understandings that are fashioned over time and give a field its particular character. They distinguish between four categories of shared understandings:

First, there is the shared understanding of what is going on in the fields, that is, what is at stake ... Second, there is a set of actors in the field who can generally be viewed as possessing more or less power ... Third, there is a set of shared understandings about the nature of the “rules” in the field ... This is the cultural understanding of what forms of action and organization are viewed as legitimate and meaningful within the context of the field. Finally, there is the broad interpretive frame that individual and collective strategic actors bring to make sense of what others within the strategic action field are doing ... we expect to see different interpretive frames reflecting the relative positions of actors within the strategic action field. (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012, pp. 10–11)

We slightly revise these distinctions to suggest configurations that are characterized by four interrelated components (Friedman, 2011; Friedman & Sykes, 2014): (1) the individual and collective actors who constitute the field; (2) the relationships among these actors, with a particular focus on their positions relative to each other (e.g., hierarchical or equalitarian); (3) the shared meanings that signify what is going on in the field and make it intelligible, and (4) the “rules” that guide action within it. We agree with Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p. 11) that shared meanings and rules do not necessarily mean consensus and that there can be considerable variation according to position within a field. However, we suggest that there must be a kind of “meta-theory” or higher level logic that makes behavior intelligible and, in this way, holds a field together despite variation (Friedman, 2011). Meaning holds the *social* field together and exerts a truly human force that differentiates social fields from fields in the world of nature (Cassirer, 1961).

Field theory provided Lewin and Bourdieu with a construct for understanding the seemingly invisible influence of social structures on individuals and each other (Martin, 2003). What makes field theory so useful is that it focuses neither on the individual nor on the collective as the unit of analysis but rather on the circular, reflexive processes through which individuals, in interaction with others, continually construct and reconstruct their shared worlds (Friedman, 2011). Fields are both phenomenal (i.e., in people’s minds) and structural (“out there”), linking the internal world of people with the external social world through an ongoing shaping process. It is this nature of fields which Lewin tried to capture through the idea of

the “life space” (1936, p. 12) and Bourdieu through the concept of “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 81).

Field theory enables us to trace how thinking and action at the individual level shape, and are shaped by, collective action and what comes to be seen as social structures. It obviates the distinction between agency and structure, seeing them as integrated and analyzable by the same set of constructs. For this reason, both Lewin and Bourdieu believed that field theory provided a general theory that could dissolve strict disciplinary distinctions among the social sciences.

Although field theory points to the power of this mutual shaping process, it is not deterministic. To the contrary, it is precisely the awareness of these processes that affords people a degree of choice:

the formal structure [*Bauplan*] of each living being, and hence the determinate relationship between its stimulus world and its functional world, encloses this being as firmly as the walls of prison. Nor does the human being escape this prison by destroying its walls; he escapes only by becoming conscious of them. (Cassirer, 1961, p. 73)

Becoming conscious refers to an awareness of these processes and an ability to mentally step back and observe one’s thinking, feelings, and action in relation to larger fields within which we are embedded. The development of an ongoing awareness of self in context is the essence of “reflection-in-action” (Friedman & Sykes, 2001; Schon, 1983).

DIALOGIC OD AND TRANSITIONAL SPACE

From a field theory perspective, dialogic organization development can be seen as the creation of spaces that generate change within existing fields (i.e., organizations, communities). Dialogic OD interventions produce new configurations of actors, relationships, meanings, and rules of behavior that challenge dominant fields, opening new ways of being and acting. The change process always takes place through interaction through which people enact changes in themselves and in the fields of which they are a part.

In a previous paper (Friedman et al., 2014), we described “enclaves,” spaces defined by their constituents as significantly different from the dominant field in which they are embedded and that explicitly challenge the larger, incumbent field and carry on interchanges with it aimed at reconstructing it. We illustrated how a social entrepreneurial organization functioned as an enclave that played an important role in transforming the

field of services for children with developmental disabilities and their families in Israel.

In this chapter we wish to illustrate a different kind of space that we call “transitional space,” one that we believe is akin to spaces that many dialogic forms of OD intervention implicitly strive to create. Transitional space can be defined as *a space that enables individuals to disengage from a dominant field so that they can begin to think, feel, see, and act in ways that significantly differ from the relationships, meanings, and rules imposed by the dominant field*. Although we “discovered” transitional space through a variety of action research projects, we found that other researchers had described similar phenomena. The psychoanalyst, Winnicott (1971), for example, introduced the idea of a “transitional phenomenon” to explain the process through which an infant goes from experiencing its mother as a part of itself to perceiving her as a separate being. Transitional phenomena point to “an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute” (Winnicott, 1971, p. 2). They “represent the early stages of the use of illusion, without which there is no meaning for the human being in the idea of a relationship with an object that is perceived by others as external to that being” (Winnicott, 1971, p. 8). In field terms, infants mentally disengage from a dominant field (oneness with the mother) so as to make a transition to a different experience of the world (as containing separate beings) and acting accordingly.

According to Winnicott (1971), transitional phenomena involve the child’s first use of illusion so as to bridge the gap between subjective experience and objective reality. In later life this intermediate area of illusion provides an important source of artistic, religious, and philosophical creativity (Winnicott, 1971). [Pragline \(2006\)](#) compared Winnicott’s transitional phenomenon to Buber’s concept of “in-between” (*Zwischenmenschliche*) to describe a space of potentiality and authenticity, located neither fully within the self nor the social world, in which the most authentic and creative aspects of people’s personal and communal existence are given artistic, scientific, and/or religious expression.

[Foucault \(1998\)](#) used the term “heterotopias” to describe spaces that are “utterly different from all the emplacements that they reflect or refer to ... a kind of contestation both mythical and real of the space in which we live” ([Foucault, 1998](#), pp. 178–179). These spaces enable people to escape the hegemony of dominant social spaces so that they can think and act in new and provocative ways. [Tamboukou \(2004\)](#) described how the first women’s colleges constituted heterotopias that women created for

themselves so as to venture outside of what was the accepted woman's place, to avoid socialization in the traditional roles, and prepare themselves for the public spheres of life and the world of work. Also building on Foucault, Steyaert (2010, p. 51) used the terms transitional space and "queering space" to describe heterotopias as "disorganizing spaces that question the usual forms of ordering and acting by the prevailing script or standard."

Transitional spaces play a role in enabling individuals to free themselves from the dominant field, to care for themselves, and to form new identities. However, they go beyond simply providing a refuge for individuals:

the personal, the artistic and the political are simultaneously played out in practices of care of the self and self formation. The practice of the care of the self is not an isolated process of personal self-transformation but happens by radically questioning and upsetting the historically dominant practices and discourses of sexual identity. (Steyaert, 2010, p. 48)

Transitional spaces open up possibilities for the experience and exploration of previously repressed dialectics between individuals and the fields in which they live, including the organizations in which they participate. Once these dialectics are brought to awareness in a transitional space, individuals and groups can become empowered to free themselves, at least to some extent, from the dictates of these fields, and to act in new ways to generate previously unthinkable realities.

In order to understand more deeply how field theory and the construct of social space provides a metaphor for dialogic OD, we will present data from an action research project in Israel out of which a transitional space emerged. The study was conducted as the pilot stage of "Pathways to the Community,"¹ a program aimed at developing an innovative service delivery approach for adults with extreme disabilities who had not utilized existing rehabilitation and/or employment services before. The program was intended for small cities and rural areas in which there are not enough people with disabilities to justify the creation of specialized centers to meet their needs. The guiding principle of the program was maximizing existing services and resources and tailoring them to the needs of each program member through personalized treatment plans. For example, one idea was to conduct program activities in day centers for the elderly, which are both accessible and under-utilized. The pilot was carried out in an Arab city in northern Israel, chosen among various candidates because of the enthusiastic support of the municipal welfare bureau. It was decided, however, to keep the program design open at the pilot stage and to involve all

the stakeholders as co-designers, with a special emphasis on the participation of people with disabilities.

RESEARCH METHOD: ACTION EVALUATION

In order to facilitate participation of all stakeholders, the program initiators chose action research as a method for building and evaluating the program during the pilot stage. The action research was facilitated by a team from the Action Research Center for Social Justice at the Yezreel Valley (Lapidot-Lefler et al., 2015). They chose Action Evaluation (AE), a stakeholder-based action research method, for defining, promoting, and assessing program success (Rothman, 2012). The method is based on the assumption that different stakeholders often hold different definitions of success for their joint action. It aims at collaboratively defining program goals and an action plan for implementation through a process of dialogue and consensus in which the voices of all stakeholders are heard and equalized as much as possible.² In the case of the Pathways to the Community program, the intention was to place special emphasis on the voices and desires of the people with disabilities who were to be the recipients of the new service.

The Action Evaluation was carried out in three cycles over the first two years of the pilot. The first cycle focused on participatory goal setting and action planning involving all the stakeholder groups: people with disabilities, the funders (JDC-Israel), the local welfare bureau, the local center for the elderly, and the Ministry of Welfare. The program facilitators hypothesized that the people with disabilities who would be participating in the process might not be familiar or comfortable with participatory processes (Arieli, Friedman, & Agbaria, 2009). Therefore, they held workshops for potential participants aimed at clarifying the meaning of participation and why their participation was so important. Family members accompanied many of the people with disabilities who participated in these workshops and it immediately became clear that the families should be regarded as distinct stakeholder group who had to be included in the process. Therefore, parallel workshops were offered to family members as well.

After the workshops, all the stakeholders from all the groups were asked to respond individually to a questionnaire consisting of four open questions: (a) *What* is your definition of success for the program? (b) *Why* are these goals personally important to you? (c) *How* can these goals be

achieved in practice, and (d) What are your *dreams* for this program? The respondents included 12 people with disabilities, 10 family members, 4 people of JDC-Israel, 2 representatives from the Ministry of Social Welfare (national), 2 members of the municipal welfare bureau, and 4 members of the NGO that was administering the project.

These data were analyzed at the level of each stakeholder group so as to identify program goals as perceived by each group. The 34 respondents then met in two separate groups, each of which included members of all the stakeholder groups, to talk together about *why* their definitions of success for this program were personally important to them (Friedman, Rothman, & Withers, 2006). This dialogue enabled the stakeholders to hear and understand each other's deepest aspirations and the personal realities in which they are rooted. Its purpose was to generate resonance among the stakeholders and strengthen their joint commitment to program success.

Next, each stakeholder group met separately to reach consensus on its goals for the program. This step was intended to ensure that each stakeholder group, and especially the people with disabilities and their families, would have its voice heard and taken into account. Finally, representatives of all the stakeholder groups met to reach consensus on common program goals and develop an action plan for achieving them. The first cycle culminated with a one-day conference at which an initial program action plan was presented and participants from all the stakeholder groups reflected on the participative process.

The second cycle of Action Evaluation was carried out at the end of the first year of the pilot. It involved a formative evaluation of the program as it emerged. The program offered a wide range of services (health, informational, educational, cultural, religious, social) on a group basis two days a week at a local senior citizens center, as well as individually at home and other sites in the community. In the second cycle, the facilitation team interviewed nine program members (including one who had dropped out), six family members, two program administrators, two representatives of the local welfare bureau, and one member of the JDC-Israel. Respondents were asked to identify changes, for better or for worse, that occurred in their lives as a result of the program and to offer their explanations for these changes. Each stakeholder group was then presented with an initial analysis of its data and engaged in a dialogue aimed at confirming, disconfirming, and/or reinterpreting the findings. Finally, a composite report was prepared for the program steering committee, which consisted of members of all the stakeholder groups. The third cycle of formative action evaluation was similar to the second, but it focused on (a) program services,

(b) the individual plans, (c) the integration of people with cognitive disabilities into the program, and (d) developing a participatory instrument for assessing inclusion.

FINDINGS: THE EMERGENCE OF A TRANSITIONAL SPACE

The findings of the Action Evaluation showed significant positive changes in the lives of the members and their families, including the person who dropped out. The following quotations from three of the members illustrate the kinds of changes the members experienced:

Walid³ who contracted ALS (chronic degenerative disease) as an adult: At first I was terribly ashamed to go around in this wheelchair. I didn't go out of the house, I was ashamed, and didn't meet friends. It was so hard for me ... I was a healthy person who did everything — work, travel, everything ... When I became ill, it was very difficult for me to accept my disability at my age. I was still young ... Then the Program Coordinator came to my house and I got excited about the idea. I wanted to get out of the house ... and I came here. I felt as if I returned to myself. I am working and I even started learning English here ... I would come home with the feeling that I am doing something, new things, and I'd tell my wife what I am doing here. My world expanded ... After I became ill, I was either at home or in the hospital. I never went out — and did nothing. Today I go out to coffee shops, shopping and do things that I wouldn't have dared do before. Today I have a lot more courage.

Mahmoud (who also had a chronic degenerative disease): I stopped being so bad-tempered. I was bad-tempered because I was feeling so constrained. It was very difficult for me being in a wheelchair and I was ashamed to go out of the house at all. I didn't want people looking at me and feeling sorry for me. Today I see the wheelchair as a tool that helps me help myself ... And I'm a different person at home with the family.

Interviewer: And outside the family, has anything changed?

Mahmoud: I've started visiting friends ... I overcame the isolation ... All of the time sitting at home alone. I wouldn't go out of the house. I didn't go visit friends because I was on a wheelchair and there was no accessibility. Today I do visit friends despite the wheelchair and despite the lack of accessibility ... I simply ask my friends to come downstairs and to sit with me there. We sit in the garden or the courtyard. I don't have to go upstairs.

Jasmine (a young woman with CP): I learned to depend on myself. I dress myself. I put on my shirt without my mother helping me ... I also comb my hair by myself. I don't want my mother to comb my hair because I can do it ... She says to me "What happened to you that you've changed so much?" and I tell her that it's the program, from the day I joined it, I changed ... In the past I refused to go out of the house. Then I

said that I want to destroy that barrier and I want to go out ... Two months ago I went to my cousin's wedding and everyone at the wedding was looking at me. But I told myself that it doesn't bother me. My sisters also noticed that I changed. They told me that I have become stronger, not like I was before.

Although program members changed in different ways and to different degrees, these three quotations reflect a similar, underlying pattern. The members experienced their internal worlds (themselves) in a more positive way and the external world as less threatening and more accessible. Walid had the "courage" to reenter realms of activity that had seemed inaccessible and, as a result, his "world expanded." Mahmoud overcame the shame of being seen in public, and visited friends despite the lack of accessibility. Jasmine became more independent and stronger, destroying the psychological barrier that kept her confined to home. The fact that people looked at her because of her disability no longer bothered her. In each case, changes that began within the program context rippled out into the lives of the participants and their relationships with family and friends.

The dramatic changes that the members experienced presented a puzzle. The program sponsors and the action researchers obviously anticipated improvements in the lives of the members and their families, but the rapid and dramatic nature of the changes were surprising. These changes were attributed to a combination of receiving new services and resources, the participatory process, and the process of developing individual improvement plans. However, there was something more to the program that was evident in both the interview data and in observations of the twice weekly meetings of the members. In order to capture this "something more," we suggested that a "transitional space" emerged as a result of the participatory process and the services that were provided. Examining this transitional space not only helps explain these outcomes but also can inform action to create similar spaces for change.

Before looking at the characteristics of this transitional space, it is important to understand the spatial dynamics previously governing the lives of group participants – "adults with extreme disabilities in small cities and rural areas who had not utilized rehabilitation and/or employment services." Participants in the process, as a result of their disability, commonly experienced dependence, shame, and powerlessness in their relationships with their families, communities, and society. Their lack of worth was reflected to them in interactions with others in their immediate environments, and they both accepted and internalized this reflection. This painful repeated interaction process had resulted in their withdrawal from social

spaces they might have otherwise occupied, thereby leading to a contraction of participants' life space. At the same time, these spaces had developed without consideration of their needs and differences, making them inaccessible. Each thus lived in near total isolation, rarely leaving home, dependent upon close family members.

In the "transitional space" that emerged through the program, participants were enabled to recognize their own roles in the ongoing recreation of their constricted realities, and to proactively reclaim their rightful places in their families and communities. Their families and communities, in turn, began to perceive them differently and to better accommodate their needs, differences, and aspirations — leading to their better integration in social spaces from which they had been excluded/excluded themselves.

As constituents of the transitional space, the members of the Pathways to the Community program were enabled to disengage from the social stigma imposed upon them and to see themselves in different, more positive ways. This change was the product not only of services or treatment plans offered by the dominant space, but of an ongoing dialogue facilitated in the transitional space, where people with disabilities were related to as valuable and whole human beings with limitations but, more importantly, with strengths.

The following discussion, taken from the field diary of one of the facilitators, illustrates this process in action. It took place during the debriefing of an exercise in which the participants were to create something with limited materials and tools at hand:

Facilitator: You're saying something very important. Let's think about this together, about our daily lives and what we have that enables us to get along despite all of the difficulties. What abilities do you have? Let's look at what we've got, because often we look at what is lacking and we miss what we have — and that's a lot. So if you didn't have a scissors or pencil, did that stop you from looking for another way, for another alternative that you do have and you can use? You are sitting in a wheelchair and do not have the ability to walk, but you are still living. For example, you came to this meeting today. You are participating, talking, saying wonderful things and aspiring to do things. What helps you? What abilities strengthen you?

Nur: That's right. I'm sitting on a wheelchair and cannot walk, but I want to go out of the house. And I am industrious, I want to do things.

Facilitator: That's wonderful. Do you have the ability to think about things? To say things? To decide what is right for you, or not? Can you say what you want?

Nur: Yes

Walid: I have abilities, but many times I am hurt by comments that people make about my being disabled — a cripple. For example, there was a young man who wanted to

marry my daughter. But when he found out that her father was a cripple, he backed out and said that he did not want to marry her because her father was a cripple.

Mahmoud: Don't pay attention to what he said. These comments are a part of our lives. They are what God gave us and thank God for everything. He lost out, not you.

Jasmine: My nephews are always asking me why I am sitting in a chair and cannot walk. I always respond to these comments by saying that's what God gave me and I am content with what he gave me. It's difficult and hurtful, but that's what God gave me. And my mother always defends me and supports me.

Facilitator: Ibrahim and everyone, do you understand the amazing abilities that you have when you hear things like that and it doesn't break you? Do you understand that you face a very special situation — you cannot walk but you don't give up and keep living despite the difficulty? It's so special that not many people have that ability, including people who are not in wheelchairs like you. We came here to strengthen you, but mostly to learn from you. How can we possibly know what you are experiencing if you yourselves don't help us? It's important for us and we want to bring your attention to your wonderful uniqueness. You have a lot of things that we don't have — patience, the ability to live with difficulty, optimism — like Walid, the determination and ability to function at home and to be there for your children — like Mahmoud, the desire to overcome the difficulties and to go out and do things — like Nur and Imaan, a strong belief like yours — Ahmed, and the responsibility that you are willing to take onto yourself despite your situation and your determination to function independently and refuse help from you mother — like Jasmine.

Through processes like this, participants were able to free themselves from thinking patterns that limited what they imagined possible, and to enter areas of life that had seemed inaccessible. The social space that had formed reflected back to them an alternative image of who they were and who they could become — an image unthinkable in the dominant space. Once exposed to this alternative yet credible reflection, members succeeded not only in improving their subjective experience, but they also began to change, in small but significant ways, relationships with family and friends (i.e., the larger field). The transitional space thus enabled these people “to see their prison walls,” and to begin to see, feel, think, and act in ways that expanded their life space and life possibilities.

FEATURES OF TRANSITIONAL SPACE

As can be seen in the above example, transitional spaces are particularly important for people or groups who are socially excluded, occupy disadvantageous positions within a field, and/or experience the dominant field as constraining or blocking their potential. We call them “transitional”

because these spaces enable people to temporarily step out of a field, change disadvantageous mindsets, and then reenter the field with a new mindset that enables them to change their position, challenge the field, and open pathways for self-actualization and growth. They constitute a protected space that enables learning and development that would be difficult, if not impossible, within the larger field. These spaces themselves are not necessarily temporary (they may, or may not, exist for a long time alongside the dominant field), but they are transitional in the sense that they enable people to transition from a stance of accommodation to proactive navigation of the social spaces in which they live.

We will take the case of the Pathways to the Community program as an exemplar, and use it to propose the essential, defining features of transitional spaces in terms of the four distinguishing components of a field: actors, relationships, shared meanings, and rules of behavior (see [Fig. 1](#)).

Actors

Transitional spaces form through interaction between people who share a similar position in the field but have not been connected before. Prior to the program, many of the people with disabilities, as described above, experienced extreme isolation and did not really know each other, even if some might have been aware of the others' existence. Interestingly, the creation of a peer or support group was not one of the explicit goals or features of program design. Rather the space self-organized through the participatory process and the twice a week meetings in which they received services. The space formed through the facilitated peer group of people with disabilities. However, it also included connections with families, service providers, administrators, the researchers, and students who volunteered in the program.

Aside from the pleasure in meeting socially, members stressed the importance of connecting with other people with the same challenges and life experience:

(Before I joined the program) I didn't meet people and I thought that only I suffered and only I had problems. Here it helped me to see that there are others just like me ... I feel a strong identification with the group, almost everyone is in the same situation ... Before the program I was at home and closed inside myself and I hated society for all of the prejudices against people with disabilities. I feared that they would not accept me ... Here I gained strength from the other, despite the fact that both he and I have some disability or physical defect, and we strengthen each other because we understand each other's pain.

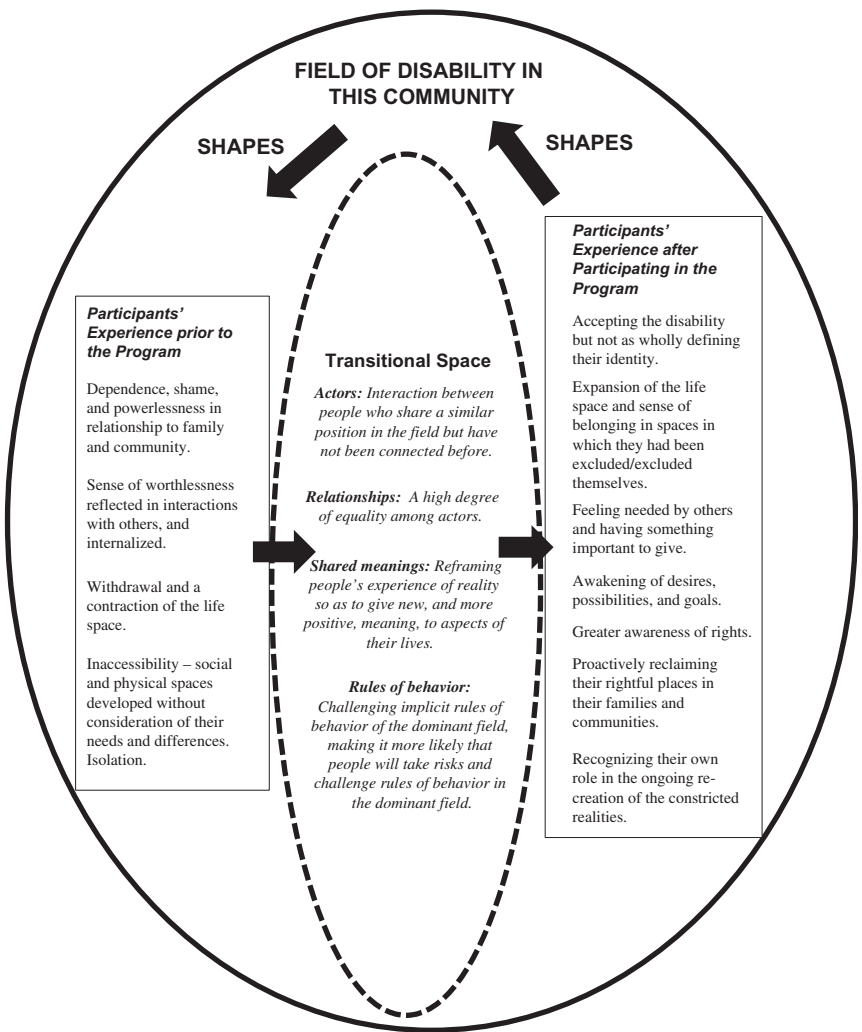


Fig. 1. A Transitional Space and Its Effects.

Meeting their peers enabled them to see that they were not alone and were not freaks. Being seen, heard, and accepted by others who understood their experience had a liberating effect, enabling many of the members to accept themselves and become less sensitive to the negative messages they received from the dominant field.

These connections also led the members to feel connected to something larger than them as illustrated by the following quotation from the mother of one of the program members:

I feel that she has opened up. Before she spent all of her time watching television. She knows a lot about the world — what is happening in the world, but nothing about what is happening here in the city ... Now she comes home and tells me what's happening in the city ... What they talked about in the Center. She hears from other people about what is happening in the city. She feels that she belongs ... She knows about the city's problems, criticism that people express, and things that she did not know before.

New connections with different actors created a space that opened up the immediate environment to people with disabilities. Their life spaces expanded and they felt a greater sense of belonging.

Relationships

Transitional spaces are characterized by a high degree of equality among actors in the sense that every constituent in the space is considered of equal worth and that the view of no one is privileged due to position in the dominant field. Services for disadvantaged populations commonly recreate the hierarchical relations prevalent in the larger social field, as professionals with social status and expertise “deliver” societal resources in the form of services to “target populations” (Rosenfeld & Sykes, 1998). It is similarly not uncommon for societal hierarchies to recreate themselves in the sub-fields comprised of members of the disadvantaged group. The present program deliberately sought to shift the relational field by involving all the stakeholders as co-designers, including four 2-hour meetings with people with disabilities (and in parallel with their family members) aimed at clarifying the meaning of participation and why their participation was so important.

The transitional space provided a context in which the people with disabilities and their families could change their relationships with service providers and administrators. During the participatory process, they interacted on a relatively equal footing with a wide variety of other actors (service providers, administrators, officials, researchers) with higher social status and the power to affect their lives through their decisions. People with disabilities and their families were regarded as full contributors with equal status in the discussion, while at the same time the other stakeholders took an interest in them and heard their voices without mediation.

As described above, facilitators in the program went beyond relating to participants as equal partners, regarding to them genuinely as people from whom they have much to learn. In an additional break from the traditional “professional-client” relationship, in the following quote from her field diary, the facilitator, in dialogue with a participant, goes on to share that she too struggles with her own illness and difference:

Ibrahim: Yesterday I was at a wedding and everyone got up to leave and I was left behind. I was too ashamed to ask for help, it wasn't pleasant. I have abilities but I don't have the courage to ask for help.

Facilitator: What could enable you, Ibrahim, to get up the courage and to say what you want without feeling ashamed?

Ibrahim: To acknowledge my illness. It's hard for me. From my perspective, I am not ill. But I am ill. I am afraid to acknowledge it and I don't want people to relate to me as someone who is ill.

Facilitator: Ibrahim, for 13 years I have had diabetes. At first it broke me completely. I couldn't believe it. I denied it. I went to three different doctors in the hope that one of them would tell me that it's not true, that I am healthy. But no one did. I didn't take insulin. I stubbornly refused to be hospitalized and my situation was not good. I began treatment and realized that it was going to be part of my life. And, indeed, today it is part of my life. But between us, it's not pleasant for me and I don't want to see myself as someone who is sick. So I don't say that I am sick with diabetes. I say that I have diabetes. What counts is how you feel with things. Maybe I am mistaken, but that's how I deal with it. I do and say things that I feel comfortable with. That's what's most important.

As a result of the egalitarian mode of relating that emphasized the shared humanity of all participants and stakeholders, all the program members stressed the strong feelings of equality and acceptance among themselves. As the program grew and new members joined, they easily integrated into the existing group. For example, there was concern among the program organizers that veteran members, whose disabilities were mainly physical, might resist the addition of new people with cognitive-developmental disabilities. In actual fact, the people with cognitive-developmental disabilities who joined emphasized the feeling of acceptance that they felt from the group. Also the veteran members emphasized that everyone was accepted into the group, describing the relationships among themselves as “brothers and sisters.”

The transitional space was characterized by a lasting change in relationship between those who gave and received services. Prior to the program, these relationships were often characterized by negative, judgmental feelings such as suspicion, resistance, and mutual criticism. After the participatory

program design process, many of them assumed the position of partners who felt mutual responsibility for the program:

Family member: I feel like a partner, for sure. First of all, we — the families — need this space to express ourselves. It gives a place and space. It is extremely meaningful when people with disabilities, who feel like they are worth nothing, suddenly are given a place and the feeling that they have capabilities. It's a wonderful feeling.

Authority: At the beginning it was different when we had to bring the families into the picture, to connect them, to involve them as much as we could — and we achieved that goal ... Now, in this situation, we don't have to show them that they are involved, because they already feel themselves that they are partners. They did not come from that place at first and we had to do a lot to bring them to there.

Establishing relationships of greater equality, based on partnership and mutuality rather than paternalism and power, brought about a change in the self-perception of the participants with disabilities. They and their families realized that the authorities needed *them* and their cooperation in order for the program to exist. This insight was an important turning point, creating a relationship of interdependency. The relationships between the people with disabilities, their families, and the authorities became reciprocal relationships characterized by joint responsibility, empathy, support, and mutual respect.

Shared Meanings

Transitional spaces involve the reframing of people's experience of reality so as to give new, and more positive, meaning to aspects of their lives that were previously ignored or perceived as negative or worthless. For most of the participants, prior to the program, the disability had defined and severely constrained their sense of self. Within the transitional space, and as a result of alternative meanings provided there, they were able to become aware of aspects of themselves of which they had been unaware, or that had been overshadowed by the disability. The above quote by the facilitator illustrates how she encouraged the participants to see important strengths in parts of themselves that had previously been ignored or devalued. This change led to a different, and more positive, perception of self, and to an awakening in their consciousness of desires and goals as well as the courage to strive for them.

For Mahmoud, who was quoted earlier, the wheelchair symbolized his worthlessness and pitifulness as a disabled person. He was so ashamed of

being seen in a wheelchair (“I didn’t want people looking at me and feeling sorry for me.”) that he preferred to stay home even though it deepened his emotional distress and created tension with the family. Part of overcoming the shame was reframing the meaning of the wheelchair. “Today I see the wheelchair as a tool that helps me help myself,” he said.

The invitation to participate in designing the program communicated to group members, often for the first time, that they were being seen not just as their disability, but as people with something important to contribute, whose thoughts and opinions had value:

When they ask you (what you want) it brings up a lot of things. It was not a quick process and it raised many thoughts, desires, goals. It caused me to think what I want. I found some interesting things and I felt that I found myself here ... I felt that I am important, that I can help others, that I am worthwhile. I felt that I got to something.

Asking participants what they wanted – a very uncommon interaction in their experience – stimulated a kind of mental chain reaction: thinking, awakening desires, finding oneself, feeling important/worthwhile, and achievement. This process led to a significantly improved and more complex sense of self and a new orientation toward the spaces in which they lived. Similarly, courses and workshops in the transitional space provided them with new knowledge and with greater awareness of their rights, opening up new possibilities and creating a more positive perspective on the future.

Rules of Behavior

In a transitional space, implicit rules of behavior are challenged, making it more likely that people will take risks and challenge rules of behavior in the dominant field. The transitional space in the Pathways to the Community case was characterized by a change in the societal rules regarding what people with disabilities can do, how they should behave, and what they can demand from their families and the community. For example, in the quotation above, the act of asking them what *they* wanted was a departure from the rules of the dominant field – and it had a significant effect in stimulating change.

There were, of course, no explicit rules about what people with disabilities could want, or about when and how they could appear in public. However, the lack of accessibility, the comments, and the looks people with disabilities received when they went out in public reflected an implicit set of rules or “theory-in-use” (Argyris & Schon, 1974, 1978) that

guided actual behavior. For many of the program members, the act of leaving their homes was a challenge to those implicit rules. Mahmoud's experience was particularly relevant. He had refrained from visiting friends because they lived on upper floors that were inaccessible to him. The implicit rule was that he could not ask people to accommodate themselves to his needs. His participation in the transitional space enabled him to challenge this rule and "simply ask my friends to come downstairs and to sit with me." Jasmine, also quoted earlier, wanted to "destroy that barrier" that had previously prevented her from functioning in the world. When she did appear in public (at a family celebration), people still stared at her. However, she stopped fearing the reactions of others to her disability, no longer giving them the power to control her behavior. These examples illustrate how the rules in the dominant field are recreated and reinforced each time a person complies with them. Mahmoud and Jasmine discovered that, at least to a certain extent, the ability to change the rules lay in their own hands. As Fig. 1 illustrates, the process is a circular one. The transitional space led to an experience of reality that fed back onto the dominant field, if only a little, weakening its power to shape the experience of people with disabilities in negative ways.

DISCUSSION: DIALOGIC OD AS CREATING SPACES FOR CHANGE

The action research described in the foregoing case reflects the "dialogic mindset" of organization development as set forth by [Bushe and Marshak \(2014\)](#). The process was focused on recognizing and engaging the voices of multiple stakeholders, with an emphasis on people with disabilities and their families whose voices had not previously been heard. Stakeholders with differing views of reality were engaged in a process of conversation that involved reflection, dialogue, and decision-making. For most of the stakeholders, the process and content of these conversations were new, even revolutionary, in that they minimized status differences and took everyone's knowledge seriously. No particular view of reality was privileged. There was no attempt to force agreement on a particular perception of reality. Rather, stakeholders listened to each other and deliberated on the actions they needed to take in order to jointly construct new relationships and a transformed experience of reality.

An understanding of the process alone, however, was insufficient for capturing the experience of the stakeholders and making sense of the dramatic changes that occurred. We, the action researchers, felt that there was something more that continued to exert influence on the participants even after the processes ended and have proposed the concept of “transitional space” to capture this phenomenon. The transitional space was a field and its force could be experienced by anyone (e.g., the researchers, new program members) who entered into it. It emerged through a self-organizing process that drew on both the action research and components of the formal program.

Drawing the example of transitional space, we wish to argue that social space provides a generative image that can more fully (a) capture the experience of dialogic OD and (b) guide thinking and action for dialogic OD practice. Generative images are compelling words or phrases that enable people to see familiar situations in novel ways that stimulate new ways of thinking and open opportunities for different ways of acting (Bushe & Storch, 2015). They “provide a different conceptual and metaphoric landscape and thereby change our current ways of speaking, our implicit assumptions, and our ideas of what is possible and desirable” (Bushe & Storch, 2015).

In proposing social space as a generative image, we argue that field theory can provide dialogic OD with a metaphoric power that is similar to what open systems theory provides diagnostic OD. The diagnostic organization development mindset was shaped largely by the generative image of biological open systems theory, which draws its power from a combination of simplicity, comprehensiveness, and coherence. It suggests a social reality composed of distinct organisms (e.g., people, groups, organizations, communities, societies) that turn inputs to outputs through internal transformation processes and constant interchange with the environment (containing resources as well as other organizations). The key implication of this image is that organizations strive to maintain equilibrium and must continually adapt in order to fit their environments. The importance of adaptation and fit as superordinate goals or values has been strengthened by the influence of evolutionary theory. Open systems imagery offers diagnostic OD practitioners a compelling and useful set of conceptual tools for facilitating organizational change, even if they do not engage the complexities of general systems theory.

Social space and field theory offer dialogic organization development a comparable – but fundamentally different – generative image that is simple, comprehensive, and coherent. It suggests viewing social reality as

a web of spaces continually constructed and reconstructed by people, at ever increasing layers of complexity (e.g., people, groups, organizations, communities, institutions, societies, and even cultures). These spaces form through interactions that link people and collectives into differentiated, unique configurations of relationship, meaning, and behavior. Rather than placing a focus on adaptation, field theory focuses on the process of *mutual* shaping. The key implication of this imagery is that in order to ensure growth and well-being people must collectively reflect on and experiment with the spaces they inhabit and recreate. Another implication of field theory is that most people in modern society are constituents of multiple spaces. Indeed, a person's distinct identity can be thought of as the meeting point or intersection of all the spaces they inhabit and that exert influence over their thinking, feeling, and behavior. Existing fields may limit people and generate suffering, but the fact that people are continuously creating and recreating them implies that there are almost always opportunities for expanding what is possible for individuals and collectives.

This approach suggests that methods and processes associated with dialogic OD are largely aimed at creating spaces for change. This suggestion should come of little surprise because the image of social space already pervades the language used to describe dialogic OD. For example, [Bushe and Marshak \(2014, p. 55\)](#) wrote that "in offering the image of Dialogic OD, we intend to create a *space* (our italics) where a conversation can take place about the nature of organizations and organizing, about the nature of change processes and change agency, and about the nature of leadership." According to this view, consultant's role is to "create and maintain a safe and bounded *space* (our italics) for interactions" with explicit attention paid to power issues and political dynamics. The most explicit example of spatial imagery in dialogic OD as creating space is "Open *Space* Technology" (our italics). According to [Bushe and Marshak \(2014\)](#), the inventor of OST described "open space" as "a necessary time and place between what can no longer be and what is still to be." Similarly, in discussing "emergence" as a dialogic OD practice, they quoted Holman (2013, p. 23, as appears in [Bushe & Marshak, 2014, p. 64](#)) stating the importance of creating "*spaces* for differentiation" (our italics) in which individuals discover commonalities through seeking what matters to them as individuals. Finally, they described CMM, another dialogic approach, as "creating a *space* (our italics) for the variety of experiences and meanings to gain voice, without attempts to discern a correct or true point of view."

Spatial imagery in these examples attests to its evocative nature and to the fact that it is already deeply rooted in the thinking of dialogic OD practitioners. Nevertheless, in current usage, the meaning of social space is vague

and its deeper implications are left unrecognized. At most, the term space usually refers to particular ways of doing things that become differentiated and located in the social world. This vague usage, however, leaves considerable ambiguity regarding the important distinction between social and physical space. A more conscious and finely tuned understanding of social spatial imagery opens new ways of thinking and enhances potential for guiding interventions. Indeed, this chapter argues that dialogic OD can be thought of as creating spaces for change. Foregrounding social space as a generative image can enhance dialogic OD by moving it away from systems imagery and language, addressing the ambivalence about self and mind, clarifying the meaning of reality, and reconnecting dialogic OD to its Lewinian roots.

Moving away from Systems Imagery and Language

Social space imagery enables dialogic OD to move completely away from “systems” imagery and language. In doing so it offers theoreticians and practitioners a wholly different language, constructs, goals, and strategies for acting in the world. The argument here is not that all dialogic OD involves creating transitional spaces. Rather, spatial imagery may stimulate the construction, or self-organization, of different kinds of spaces, each of which has its own particular features and exerts different kind of effect on people and the dominant field. Dialogic OD is itself a generative image and its distinction from diagnostic OD has already stimulated considerable new thinking and action (Bushe & Storch, 2015). Social space encompasses, but goes beyond, generative images such as dialogic systems (Boje & Al Arkoubi, 2005) or meaning-making systems (Bushe, 2009), which view social reality as a series of ongoing conversations (Marshak, Grant, & Flor, 2015).

Overcoming Ambivalence about Self and Mind

There is a high degree of ambivalence in the dialogic OD approach to individual self and mind. According to Barrett (2015), dialogic OD is based on a social constructionist approach that rejects the idea of mental models or constructs “that are contained inside a person’s head” because “all knowledge is an interactive, social achievement and not a private accomplishment.” In practice, however, the discourse of dialogic OD frequently refers to self

and mind. A very explicit example is the discussion of “intrapersonal-level discourses” that:

manifest in the form of internalized stories and introjected beliefs that influence how one sees oneself and interprets the world. Studies by cognitive linguists and cognitive psychologists demonstrate how verbal, written, or symbolic forms of discourse may evoke or result from mental processes such as scripts, schemata, and frames that are rooted in cognitively unconscious mental maps of cultural, social, and organizational experiences. (Marshak et al., 2015)

It is hard to see a real difference between internalized discourses (i.e., internalized stories, introjected beliefs, scripts, schemata, frames, and mental maps) and the mental models rejected by Barrett (2015). This ambivalence regarding the existence of self and mind appears to be rooted in social constructionism’s rejection of the representational theory of knowledge, which assumes the existence of an objective world that is separate from a perceiving subject, such that having knowledge means correctly apprehending and objectively representing what has been observed (Barrett, 2015; Gergen, 2009).

Social spatial imagery, as seen in the example of transitional space, helps resolve this ambivalence. The internal world of the people with disabilities strongly shaped their behavior. But this internal world was in dynamic relationship with external reality as they experienced it. Being in the transitional space enabled them as mediators between these worlds that they create, at least in part through thought and action.

Social constructionism views organizations as ongoing conversations through which social reality and knowledge are collectively constructed (Averbuch et al., 2015; Bushe & Marshak, 2009, 2014). Social spatial imagery fully recognizes the centrality of discourse in both creating and challenging social reality:

Heterotopia is a discursive modality that contradicts or contests ordinary experience and how we frame it, by unfolding a non-place within language. It points at the unthinkable “other” of our own familiar discourses and the discursive order of things. (Steyaert, 2010, p. 48)

At the same time social spatial imagery incorporates a notion of the individual self and identity, not as entirely separate entities, but as being in constant relationship with dominant practices and discourses.

Fields have no existence wholly independent of the people and groups that make them up. Their reality is never substantive but always contingent upon the thinking, feeling, and behavior of their constituents – wherein lies the potential for change. In other words, change occurs as people

become aware of the ways in which their thinking, feeling, and action shape social reality and in which social reality shapes their thinking, feeling, and action. It is precisely this self-in-field awareness or reflection-in-action (Friedman & Sykes, 2001; Schon, 1983) that enables people to exercise free and informed choice.

Clarifying the Meaning of Social Reality

Dialogic OD discourse also raises a question about the meaning of social reality. One of the fundamental assumptions underlying dialogic OD is that there is no objective social reality and no truth out there to be discovered (Barrett, 2015; Bushe & Marshak, 2009, 2014). Rather, people create social reality through conversation. This formulation, however, begs the question of what is actually meant by “social reality.” If it is not objective, then in what sense is it reality? If it is subjective, then in what sense is it shared?

Social space, as a generative metaphor, is grounded in a relational view of reality that rejects the existence of an objective social world that is separate from a perceiving subject (Cassirer, 1961). The reality of social space, however, is manifest not by its substance or contents but rather by its effects. Social spaces are real because they move people in very significant ways, similar to the way that the reality of gravity and magnetic fields is manifest through their ability to move objects. In the above case, the dominant field and the transitional space fields were both products of ongoing construction rather than objective entities. However, they exercised real and powerful influences on the constituents of the field. Essentially the transitional space which the people with disabilities jointly constructed with the other stakeholders provided a counterforce that weakened the effect of the dominant field, so that the actors could free their thinking, feeling, and action. Thus, field theory and social space imagery add a notion of causality that is missing in a purely dialogic notion of social construction (Friedman & Rogers, 2008).

Reconnecting to Lewin as a Source of Dialogic OD

Bushe and Marshak (2009, 2014) portrayed dialogic OD as a divergence from the diagnostic approach to organization development inspired by Lewin’s (1947) change model, which consisted of unfreezing a current social

equilibrium, changing so as to achieve a new equilibrium, and refreezing so as to sustain it. This model implies the need for a diagnosis aimed at discovering and addressing the factors and forces maintaining the status quo. As Cummings, Bridgman, and Brown (2016) have shown, there is no primary source of Lewin's that sets forth such a model. Rather, it was most likely formulated by those who claimed to carry on his work and then attributed to Lewin.

Lewin's field theory and its implications for practice were abandoned shortly after his death and many of the concepts and methods that he pioneered were distorted to fit a more traditional social science approach and/or demands of the market (Burnes & Cooke, 2013; Cummings et al., 2016). The real divergence was the embrace of open systems theory by many of the people who claimed to carry on his work. However, as this chapter has tried to illustrate, Lewin's field theory is quite consistent with a dialogic approach.

When Lewin (1936, p. 12), for example, referred to "fact finding," he was not referring to elements in an objective, outside environment, but rather to a person's life space — that is, all those *perceived* elements, some of which have objective content, that have an influence on a person at any given moment. It was not objective reality that counted but the meanings that people attributed to their perceptions. This construct was expressed symbolically in his well-known formula that behavior is a function of person and environment, which was meant to encompass all the dimensions of reality of which that person is aware: self/environment, individual/group, physical/psychological, fantasy/reality, and past—present—future time.

In a remarkable paper entitled "The Solution of a Chronic Conflict in Industry," Lewin (1997) described in great detail an actual organizational intervention that was carried out by Alex Bavelas under Lewin's supervision. The intervention was presented as a four-act play, each of which consisted of a series of conversations between the consultant (Bavelas) and the employees or among the employees themselves. The consultant did not go about collecting and analyzing data which he then presented to the employees as a gap between an objective reality and desired state. Rather, as Lewin (1997) put it:

The attempt to change perception by an "action interview"... is one of the basic elements of treatment. By reorienting (the employees) perception from the field of personal emotional relationship to the same field of "objective" (quotation marks in the original) facts, the life-spaces which guide the action of these persons have become more similar although the persons themselves are not yet aware of this similarity (p. 97)... Fact-finding in this method is consciously used as a first step of action. The psychologist's or expert's knowing the facts does not have any influence unless the data are "accepted as facts" by the group member. Here lies a particular advantage of making the fact-finding

a group endeavor. Coming together to discuss the facts and set up a plan is already an endeavor in co-operative action. (p. 104)

While this consulting process was not exactly appreciative inquiry or open space technology, it clearly reflects a dialogic mindset (Bushe & Marshak, 2014). It was not an objective reality that counted but rather the meanings that the participants attributed to them. It was not analysis that stimulated change but skillfully facilitated discussion in which participants were exposed to different views of reality. The intervention, in fact, represented a kind of dialogic diagnosis that combined discussion with analysis in a way that led to a reconfiguration of the situation.

CONCLUSION

Social spaces, as understood through field theory, are usually experienced by their constituents as “reality,” but, in fact, they are only particular orders that people impose on a set of elements that then exert influence on their constituents, guiding perception, thinking, feeling, and behavior. Although spaces have a tendency to reproduce and reinforce themselves, there is always a potential for change in which the same elements can be reconfigured to create a different reality. Social space is rooted in human perception, consciousness, and/or imagination. Alternatives are always imminent in the incumbent field and they may be triggered by awareness of a gap, limit, or anomaly in the dominant configuration, or simply by a way of seeing, or envisioning, a different configuration of the same elements. As a generative image, social space allows for the potential production of anything that can be imagined. It offers dialogic organization development a generative image for changing current ways of speaking, implicit assumptions, and ideas of what is possible and desirable in organizational life.

NOTES

1. Pathways to the Community was established and funded by Israel Unlimited, a strategic partnership between Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) – Israel, the government of Israel, and the Ruderman Family Foundation, for development of services to promote independent living and integration of adults with disabilities into the community.

2. Thus, it can be seen that while the study was not originally conceptualized as “dialogic OD,” the “Action Evaluation” methodology is generic to dialogic OD as set out by Bushe and Marshak (2009).

3. All names are pseudonyms.

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