

Arts as a vehicle for community building and post-disaster development

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Use of the arts in international aid is common in an ad hoc form, but it has not been systematically theorised or evaluated. The arts have the potential to be a culturally contextualised and sustainable intervention for adults and children in the aftermath of war or disaster. On the micro level, the arts are a method to enable the retrieval and reprocessing of traumatic memories that are often encoded in images rather than in words. On a macro level, they can help to reconstruct a group narrative of a disaster as well as mobilise people back into control of their lives. This paper researches a long-term project using arts in Sri Lanka following the civil war and tsunami. A central finding is the need to understand arts within their cultural context, and their usefulness in strengthening the voices and problem-solving capacities of the victims of the disaster.

Keywords: arts in disaster intervention, arts-based research, culturally sensitive disaster intervention

Introduction

A compelling conclusion from studies of war and major disasters is that both children and adults attempt to express themselves and to enhance their resilience through play, work and creative arts, even under the most bizarre and brutal conditions. Adults also use arts, broadly defined as symbolic interaction and self-expression, including when seeking relief from emotional stress. Arts that adults use include, among others, sports, crafts, cultural symbols and rituals (Baggerly and Exum, 2007; Hass-Cohen and Carr, 2008; Huss, 2012b and 2012c; Frost, 2005; Pynoos et al., 1993). The arts enable the retrieval and reprocessing of traumatic memories that are often encoded in images rather than in words. They are a natural way of creating resilience in that they recreate a connection between cognition, emotion and the senses that enables new perspectives and effective problem solving.

On a community level, traumatic experiences gain coherence and meaning when described or reflected back through symbolic productions that enable the reconstruction of a culturally contextualised narrative of the disaster. In other words, the arts reignite the integrated system of learned patterns of behaviour, ideas and products characteristic of a society (Gow and Paton, 2009; Holmes and Mathews, 2010; Kaye and Bleep, 1997; La Greca et al., 1996; Mahon 2000; Masten, 2001; Huss, 2010 and 2012b; Saldaña, 2001). The arts, in addition to dealing with the past and reconstructing the present, enable concrete envisioning of a better future, as used in guided imagery in cognitive behavioural therapy (Rosal, 2001; Huss and Sarid, 2011).

However, arts have not been studied in terms of typology, breadth and the effectiveness of the phenomena in social practice in war and disaster situations. Such a study could strengthen social theory concerning how communities improve resilience through the arts, and contribute to knowledge of how most effectively to use arts interventions to improve resilience. Thus, theory and field developments would enhance each other.

When studying the arts, it is important to remember that they are always, as Mahon (2000) states, inseparable from ‘broader social contexts [. . .] and struggle over cultural meanings’ (p. 470). They are never neutral or universal. From this perspective, art practices within international aid can be understood as an additional type of Western imposition, based on Western understandings of art and of therapy, such as the concepts of art as self-expression or therapy (Cohen, 2003; Hogan, 2003; Huss and Sarid, 2011). As Highwater (1995) claims:

The dominant society is rarely given the opportunity to know the world as others know it, therefore they come to believe there is only one world, one reality, one truth, the one they personally know (Highwater, 1995, p. 205).

The arts are, of course, part of this power structure. Rose (1988) uses the concept of ‘visualisations’ to describe how people with different cultural conditioning see different things, creating different ‘effects of truth’ for different groups. She suggests analysing art products in terms of discourses and power structures, rather than ‘penetrating’ to a single meaning (Mahon, 2000).

An example of art use being distorted from a rehabilitating aim to a political aim is the psychosocial art used by former child soldiers in Uganda (Edmonson, 2005). Similarly, Argenti-Pillen (2003) described the ‘trauma industry’ of Sri Lanka.

To avoid Western assumptions, this study used arts-based research to examine how the Sri Lankan villagers and their community workers conceptualise the role of art within disaster aid. The paper is limited to the role of art, and is not an in-depth study of Sri Lankan needs.

This attempt on our part to allow the Sri Lankan villagers and their community workers to conceptualise the role of art is an effort to ‘learn to listen’ as defined by Spivak (1990). This may be possible in spite of our Western training, since arts-based methods of research are theorised as decentralising the dominant hegemonic discourse because images are less power-infused than words in Western culture. This allows a more flexible space for meaning (Eisner, 1997; Thomson et al., 2009). As Spivak says:

It seems to me that [. . .] actually entering into a responsibility structure with the sub-altern, with responses flowing in both ways [. . .] learning to listen without this quick fix frenzy of doing good with an implicit assumption of cultural supremacy which is legitimized by unexamined romanticism, that’s the hard part (Spivak, 1990, p. 292).

International aid intervention is complicated to research and evaluate because its reverberations are long term and the settings are improvised rather than controlled.

Samples are often small, and research participants from developing countries are often underrepresented (Baruch, 2009; Norris, 2006). The abundant examples of arts in international aid practice have not been systematically documented and evaluated to understand their role in the overall aims of rehabilitation as understood by local and international aid personnel (Orr, 2007) nor by the affected community (Bhatt, 2011).

The aim of this research is to analyse a long-term case study by tracking the development of an international aid arts-based rehabilitation programme over three years. An international aid arts project was initiated, including conceptualisation meetings with local residents and local professionals, workshops, training initiatives, and liaison with local community artists and universities. Thus, multiple perspectives could be examined in the field: those of the villagers, the local and district community workers, and the representatives of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and arts experts. By examining multiple perspectives, we hope to include different understandings of how arts can enhance community development.

Literature review

The arts may seem far removed from the basic needs of those struggling with the dire physical circumstances created by war or natural disaster, but interventions involving arts have been found to be especially useful in enhancing community resilience. On an individual level, images are known as a deep and universal psycho-neurological construct through which people process disturbing experiences even prior to the images being elaborated verbally (Conway, 2009; Holmes and Mathews, 2010; Huss, 2012a). Images are thus a means for reprocessing disturbing memories and experience. The multisensory and broad revelatory character of images enables their constant reinterpretation. The individual can therefore evolve the sense of self in the context of traumatic experience and ongoing stress, and form a more positive interpretation of the experience. This interpretation, in turn, helps the individual remain oriented in a changing world and to pursue goals effectively in light of stressful experiences (Hass-Cohen and Carr, 2008; Nelson and Fivush, 2004). The arts enable the restructuring of a coherent mental map of a world that was shattered in war or natural disaster; and this map becomes a guide for future behaviour and decision making (Huss, 2010 and 2012c). The ability to create this map is particularly relevant in the more long-term and complex phases of community rehabilitation in the aftermath of disasters and war (Huss, 2012b, 2012c and 2013).

On the social level of rehabilitation, the arts have the potential to be a self-initiated, culturally contextualised method of mobilising people into positive action and problem solving by restoring symbols of meaning that help reorganise community solidarity and resilience. Creativity as a socially and culturally mediated practice is a natural way to reignite communication, team work, problem solving, cultural understanding and decision making.

Traditionally, the arts have always been a medium for transmitting information between generations. In our own post-modern, media-infused society, images are the most persuasive and pervasive tools for influencing people and changing behaviour skills (Baggerly and Exum, 2007; Bresler, 2007; Iwai, 2002; Rosal, 2001; Rubin, 2001). The cultural image explosion has influenced action research methods and the practice of the social sciences, as seen in the rise in arts-based research, education, visual culture, visual anthropology and arts therapies (Eisner, 1997; Huss, 2012a; Levine and Levine, 2011; Lund and Brun, 2010).

One of the challenges of international aid is to become culturally relevant and to create sustainable local ownership of long-term community rehabilitation processes. The arts are a culturally contextualised medium. Therefore, they can be the basis of a model of problem solving that is participatory and localised, rather than focused on the global knowledge of external actors (Ben-Ezer, 2002; Dokter, 1998; Huss, 2012c; Gow and Payton, 2009; Levine and Levine, 2011). It is clear that educators, religious leaders, artists and others from within a specific society are the most expert on how to use the arts in community contexts within their localised culture (Dominelli, 2006; Huss, 2012d; Norris, 2006; Saldaña, 2001; Sue et al., 1996).

This literature survey focuses on visual arts, because the aim was to build a visual arts project and to learn how the villages and community workers understood the contribution of visual arts to community rehabilitation. However, the principles described above are relevant for all arts media. The plastic arts are not only culturally or individually contextualised, but also have universal components on the level of compositional elements such as colour, line and composition. These elements bridge language, enabling intercultural interventions and a universal level of connection (Huss and Sarid, 2011; Lahad, 2008; Liebmann, 2008; Shank, 2005; Silver, 2001; Zelizer, 2003). This universality allows a place for external experts and knowledge bases.

Deep poverty is frequently an after-effect of disasters, wars and extreme cultural transitions that most affect vulnerable populations such as women and the young (Dominelli, 2006; Healy, 2008). In intervention with these vulnerable populations, one example of the use of arts is to enhance positive social activities in disengaged youth. The arts are used to model sublimation of drives and social skills of symbolic communication. This approach fosters abstract thinking, perseverance, handling experiences with failure and success, and self-regulated communication skills. The improvement in overall resilience can lead youth back into formal education (Baggerly and Exum, 2007; Huss, 2012b; Jones, 2005).

The arts are also used in social activism to encourage self-definition and as a medium for advocating the needs of vulnerable groups to power holders on a local and international level (Ayalon, 2003; Butler, 2001; Eisner, 1997; Levine and Levine, 2011; Shank, 2005; UNICEF, 2005). Arts activism is characterised by the ability to use limited resources effectively in creating ad hoc, evolving solutions that focus the attention of power holders and engage media attention (Butler, 2001; Shank, 2005). This is also applicable to post-disaster situations. The arts are also used as a distanced, and thus reconciliatory, tactic with groups in conflict (Zelizer, 2003).

In addition to the psychosocial, empowerment and social action directions described above, the arts are also cited as useful in areas of conflict, such as Sri Lanka. Conflicts are always based on different cultural and power bases that make communication difficult (Avruch, 1998).

Because visual symbols are broader than words and thus more open to multiple interpretations, shifting communication to a visual paradigm accesses a broader, common base of communication. The complex stories within images help to break down the binary understandings of strong/weak or victim/aggressor that tend to freeze people in a rigid stance (Betinsky, 1995; Cohen, 2005; Huss, 2012a; Pink and Kurti, 2004; Thomson et al., 2009). Cohen (2003) states that symbolic rituals enable groups in conflict with each other to meet and to find each other's humanity and to address traumas.

This article focuses on different definitions of arts interventions, using Sri Lanka as an example rather than as an ethnographic case study. Other art projects that exemplify the above-described uses of arts in community resilience exist in the Batticaloa area of Sri Lanka where this study took place. One such project is the Batticaloa butterfly project that aims to provide psychosocial help based on arts therapy to children who underwent violent war-related experiences (Chase et al., 1999). In relation to the Sri Lankan conflict specifically, Chace et al. (1999) discuss its psychosocial effects, while Lawrence (2000) discusses its complexities.

Another project in Sri Lanka sponsors local theatre and arts groups that use traditional arts to provide positive community messages, including learning to deal with land mines and confronting violence and alcohol abuse.² The local university also runs a community oriented theatre group that addresses social issues such as war and conflict.³ The Centre for Performing Arts in Batticaloa (Dole, 2009) is also active in these issues. These examples point to the relevance of arts for the community.

In summary, we see that use of the arts addresses trauma, enables positive action, envisages the future and fosters personal and social reorganisation in culturally contextualised ways. When the arts are culturally relevant for the participants, they are cited as able to promote resilience on both individual and community levels. Thus, the arts are especially relevant to treating the short- and long-term effects of war and natural disaster. The interventions described above encourage sustained and long-term rehabilitation, and enhance self-mobilising techniques and community solidarity. This helps to reduce the risk of placing external experts in the role of power holders, rather than drawing on the inherent strengths and resilience of those who face the trauma situation (Folkman, 1997; Huss, 2012a; Lund and Brun, 2010; Norris, 2006; Svistova and Pyles, 2012).

Research design

Field site. This case study took place in eastern Sri Lanka. More than 500,000 inhabitants of this region were displaced from their homes by tsunami floods and heavy

rains and had to flee to 315 provisional refugee camps or to the homes of relatives (Ingram, 2005; Mahoney et al., 2006). The conflict since 1983 between the dominant Buddhist Sinhalese and the Hindu Tamil guerilla groups also brought about massive and deadly destruction to the population of Sri Lanka. The intervention described in this paper took place in Batticaloa, an area affected by war, tsunami and flooding in eastern Sri Lanka.

Participants were solicited through the mediation of the villagers' affiliation with the Sarvodaya civic movement described below. The community workers explained to the villagers that the project was research oriented. In exchange for participating in the research, the villagers would receive a free arts-based research workshop and evaluation. The workshop provided enrichment and gave them a chance to participate in the building of an arts project, and to define for themselves whether and how arts projects could be helpful to their community. As discussed in the ethical issues section below, all signed their consent accordingly.

The case study also includes an external professional community artist, an art therapist trainer, a social and community worker from Israel, as well as international aid and development experts. The study and project were mediated by Sri Lanka's civic NGO, Sarvodaya.⁴ Sarvodaya is Sri Lanka's largest civic organisation and has been active, alongside other NGOs, in relief, development and reconciliation activities in Sri Lanka's war-torn northern and eastern regions (Sarvodaya, 2009). Sarvodaya's historical place in Sri Lankan society and during the war is discussed elsewhere (Bond, 2003; Orjuela, 2003).

Israeli international aid and arts experts were brought to Sri Lanka by Tag International Development, a UK-based international NGO that specialises in post-disaster relief and community resilience and development projects.⁵

As stated earlier, this paper explores how both local people and external professionals conceptualise and evaluate the use of arts as part of community building. The aim is to develop, together with Tag and Sarvodaya, an effective arts-based intervention for enhancing community resilience. The Batticaloa location was the pilot site for this research project.

This study uses visual art, including collage and drawing. The use of artwork as a trigger for eliciting explanatory narratives is discussed in the literature (Eisner, 1997; Huss, 2012c; Pink and Kurti, 2004). The villagers were asked to create collages that depict how they think arts could help their community. The villagers worked with natural materials that were gathered beforehand. The community workers were asked the same question but worked with oil pastels rather than collage, because of their perceived familiarity with drawing.

Drawing is cited as suitable for eliciting explanatory narratives to understand the self-defined needs of participants (Eisner, 1997; Huss, 2012b; Pink and Kurti, 2004). Because the villagers were not familiar with drawing as self-expression, we used collage materials that they were familiar with. The participants' drawings were analysed through the participants' own explanations of what they had drawn. This phenomenological approach was adopted to gain insight into how the community itself defined

arts, and how it conceptualised the usefulness of arts for community development. Since arts may be understood differently, not only in different cultures, but also in different classes or sections of the same culture, the arts-based research workshop was repeated with the different sectors of villagers, community workers and community organisers.

The research is still in progress. This paper presents preliminary findings. Data sources include:

- two arts-based workshops with village children and adults in affected areas;
- two arts-based workshops and needs assessments with local and regional community workers;
- six meetings with Sarvodaya staff;
- protocols of ongoing team meetings of Tag representatives and arts experts;
- ten semi-structured interviews with each person on the international team and with selected Sarvodaya organisers, at the end of the visit;
- twenty images and their explanations by their creators. The images were photographed, recorded and transcribed (see the ethical issues section below).

Analytical strategy: The aim of the analysis was phenomenological and ethnographic—to examine different local and international perspectives of the use of arts in community rehabilitation (Hubberman and Miles, 2002; Mason, 2002a). To achieve this, the multiple types of data listed above were treated as a single case study (Yin, 1993) and analysed thematically through a phenomenological grounded research perspective (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Reliability and validity: Reliability and validity were achieved through extensive peer review of the thematic analyses, through the long-term and repeated nature of the research, and through the creation of multiple perspectives and multiple forms of data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Mason, 2002b). Two of the authors were participant observers. This has the advantage of creating a dual insider and outsider perspective, which is important in a new area of research. However, it also reduces objectivity (Hubberman and Miles, 2002). Another methodological challenge is the interdependence of the local community movement, the NGOs and the researchers, which may inhibit full disclosure of negative feelings. Because the subject of the research is not personal and does impinge on deeper aspects of any invested ideology, possible inhibition is not seen as a serious problem.

Ethical issues: As stated, case studies of organisations are complex due to interdependence. Anonymity was preserved in the thematic analyses, as were personal details of villagers, community workers and international staff. All participants were made aware that the free workshop training and needs evaluation they received were subjects of research; and all signed their consent. The research aspect of the project was not a drawback to the village residents. They can be seen as gaining from the

research, as the inclusion of researchers and evaluators in projects is cited as effective in helping to monitor and adjust international aid initiatives in real time, thus enhancing the outcome (Lund and Brun, 2010).

Presentation of the data: The data rendered the following list of themes in relation to use of the arts in international aid. The themes are presented and discussed in relation to the different populations participating: the village residents, local community workers and international aid personnel.

The workshops with the villagers: The group of village residents met in the Sarvodaya training center. The residents were asked to form groups of four, which they organised by gender. The groups were each asked to present an image of their most important needs. The villagers worked with natural leaves, twigs and other objects that they collected and turned into collage works. (This was improvised as many more residents than anticipated arrived at the workshop and there were not enough formal arts materials.) Each group then explained and presented their image to the other groups. The presentations were translated for the international aid and arts experts. The different groups repeated images of temples, sports grounds and weddings.

Temples: The men's groups explained that they had created an image of a temple (see Figure 1, image 1: a temple and a small shrine made of Styrofoam). They explained that they needed materials to rebuild their village temples, which were ruined in the war and floods, and to paint the various gods back into the temple.

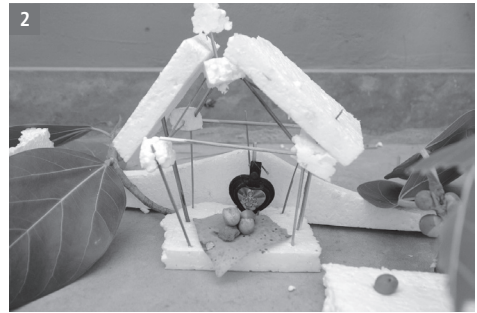
Sports grounds and equipment: The men's groups also asked to rebuild the cricket grounds and to have clothes and sports equipment for the team so that the youth could compete with teams from other villages.

Wedding dowries and temples in which to create wedding ceremonies: The women's groups created wedding ceremonies, and asked for help in putting together a dowry to enable marriage (see Figure 1, image 3: flowers for a wedding to decorate the temple; and Figure 1, image 4: a couple getting married, made of leaves). They also created temples in which to pray and hold wedding ceremonies (not shown).

The goddess Kali: The women created the goddess Kali, a symbol of destruction, so as to create new strength. The image of the head of the goddess Kali was made of leaves and twigs, surrounded by a ladybird and butterfly made of twigs. The women explained that they had to learn to depend on themselves and not on the men, and so they needed the goddess.

The arts, for the participating villagers, include temples, ceremonies, artifacts and sports. Help with the arts was identified as the most important type of help—mentioned even before basic physical aid. This may be because the participating villagers were not old, sick or disabled, but rather represented the strongest group of young adults. Though not, perhaps, representative of the village as a whole, this group had

Figure 1. Collages of needs by villagers



Notes: (1) image of a temple; (2) image of a temple; (3) flowers for a wedding; (4) couple getting married.
Photos: Eitan Shuker (2011).

the strongest potential for rebuilding the community. Therefore, it is important to understand their reasons for choosing what to present as important.

The participating villagers saw the arts as vital because they are used to creating the structures that provide protection, community festivities, rituals and group pride in achievements and skills, such as in sports and crafts for dowries. These are vital for their overall protection, spiritual strength, resilience, pride and community organisation. While the villagers did not use abstract concepts, such as community ‘resilience’ or ‘rehabilitation’, the concrete things requested are associated with ways to strengthen their village—through pride in a sports team, and through reigniting community life organised around a spiritual and community centre and a set of rituals.

Arts as a communicative bridge: This theme was derived from observing the workshop with the villagers. During the discussion, the villagers were very quiet and did not answer the question on what they needed most. However, when asked to represent this need visually, there was a clear shift from passive listening to active, animated self-representation that triggered much internal discussion and a long and detailed verbal explanation.

Arts as improvisation: Another theme concerning the village residents' workshops was the ability of the arts to become a flexible medium for situations that cannot be planned in advance. As described, the villagers gathered natural materials out of which they could create something. This flexibility or creativity is especially useful in international aid where most interventions do not have settings or resources, and needs are constantly shifting (Dokter, 1998; Lund and Brun, 2010; Norris, 2006). This theme points to a correlation between the improvisational and creative character of art and the improvisational and creative character of international aid contexts.

The children had a separate workshop in their village. In the children's workshop, an immediate rise in levels of animation was observed when creating art. This had also been observed at the adults' workshop. In fact, this increase in animation was a consistent observation throughout the different summaries, meetings and interviews. One local community worker said, 'When the children started drawing, all those quiet sad faces suddenly started smiling, and the adults, from here and from abroad, started laughing [. . .] This was clear to see.'

Local and regional community workers

Two meetings with local and regional community workers were held to see how the workers defined their major challenges in community development, and how they thought they could be met. The data from the first meeting are reported here.

In view of the success of the workshops with the villagers, it was decided that the first meeting would be an arts-based workshop, using crayons and sheets of paper. The artwork was used as the basis for discussion of the challenges. The central challenges that the community workers described included:

- how to integrate back into school the non-literate children who missed formal education due to the war and having to work for their families;
- how to engage disabled people, who are often marginalised and stigmatised;
- how to reduce drinking and violence among unemployed men;
- how to teach birth control and nutrition to young mothers suffering from malnutrition.

The community workers suggested educating the village residents to change behaviours and to impart knowledge. Their solutions were focused on teaching better behaviours: not drinking, nutrition, birth control and landmine safety.

The community workers focused on the more vulnerable groups that 'go under' in the long term in the wake of war and disaster: the elderly, young mothers, unemployed

Figure 2. Example of drawings by community workers illustrating problems



Notes: the image shows a man injured by a landmine.

Photo: Eitan Shuker (2011).

men, disabled people and children who have to work. They dealt with the long-term repercussions of disaster, including violence and drinking, multiple childbirths at an early age and poor nutrition. The community workers' discourse was in line with the literature on the long-term effects of war and disaster (de Jong et al., 2002; Hernandez, 2002).

The focus on the long-term repercussions for the more vulnerable groups was shared by the local community artists we met. They engage village residents in street theatre and in wall drawings conveying positive social messages. This follows the traditional role of images in imparting information between generations 'longitudinally and laterally', to change attitudes in the community as a whole (Hiscox and Calisch, 1998; Iwai, 2002; Simmons and Hicks, 2006; Spindler, 1997).

At the conclusion of the art workshop, a short lecture was provided on uses of the arts in Israel (along the lines of the above literature survey), and the community workers were asked their opinions. They stated a desire to receive training in these methods of using arts, and suggested the following arts-related interventions:

- amelioration of the loneliness of the elderly and disabled by enlisting them to teach traditional arts and crafts and games to children who are not in school;

- creating venues for positive activities, such as a sports and arts centre, a travelling library to teach children to read, a place to show films with positive messages, and a gallery that could attract tourists to buy crafts;
- creating a peace museum that would encourage joint activities for the conflicted Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim groups (Huss, 2012b).

The community workers were also encouraged to voice their concerns over using the arts. They pointed out that due to high levels of stigma in the society, if disabled people and illiterate children are encouraged in the arts, the stronger populations would not want to engage in them.

Themes from the international aid group

In their interviews, the participating international aid and community development experts from Israel talked about their experience of the arts as a useful tool in community intervention. As the international aid expert stated, 'From what I saw, the arts become a concrete tool to channel and to mobilise the energy of the community—this creates good results.'

Similar to the Sri Lankan community workers, the social worker from Israel had not previously been exposed to arts in community work. She stated that while she was impressed with how the arts clearly stimulated people, she wondered if it was not a luxury activity in the face of such dire poverty:

The level of poverty is so striking, on the one hand, the arts seem like a luxury activity. But on the other, I saw that it is effective—the simple arts activities we did made the children's sad eyes happy. It works! We also learnt a lot about the village residents.

The two additional members of the international team connected to the arts, the Israeli art therapist trainer and the community artist, brought up the need to adjust their understandings of the concept of art. Though they were both familiar with the activating element of art, the themes emerging from interviews and meetings caused shifts in their understandings of art within the cultural context. The community artist stated that art as research method, or as psychological or educational intervention, was not enough if it did not activate actual social change and destabilise existing policy. This is the commonly perceived use of art among art activists in Western countries (Butler, 2001; Shank, 2005; Shohat, 1995; Smith, 1999).

However, use of art to actuate social change was not seen as relevant by either the villagers or the community workers, who preferred to use the arts to teach better behaviours. Similarly, the art therapist trainer had to shift her understanding of art from belonging in a therapy room as part of a psychological intervention (Betinsky, 1995; Hass-Cohen and Carr, 2008; Huss, 2010; Silver, 2001) towards the use of art as embedded within spiritual and community life, thus broadening her concept of art from 'fine' art alone to include arts within the community such as sports, crafts and religion.

Discussion and summary

On the process level, the response of the participants to the arts-based research intervention was unanimously positive and enthusiastic. A socially contextualised explanation for this surprising unanimity towards the art workshop could be a culture of compliance to those in authority, and dependence on those, such as Sarvodaya, that initiated the intervention.

Other possible explanations are that the intervention was a one-off and novel experience, and that the art methods were adjusted to each group. The villagers worked with natural materials that were familiar to them, while the community workers who had undergone a more Western training worked with drawing.

Most importantly, the villagers and community workers may have been enthusiastic because of the action research component of the activity that aimed to enable villagers and community workers to conceptualise and communicate their own understanding of the advantages and directions of a possible arts project within their community.

On the content level, we see the 'arts' from two perspectives. On the one hand, 'arts' is the research and treatment technique we adopted for this project. On the other hand, 'arts' is the communal expression of healthy life that unfolded from our workshops with the villagers. 'Arts', as expressed by the villagers, included acts such as the creation of temples and images of the goddess and mandalas (circular images).

Arts as the communal expression of healthy life presents a number of different perspectives and implications for war and disaster rehabilitation. We see that the villagers' understanding of how the arts could rehabilitate their village after war and flooding follows the literature on the deep rehabilitative nature of arts—how it provides a source of resilience and community organisation by being rooted in the rehabilitation of basic community structures for prayer, sports and community rituals such as weddings. As others have noted, this use of the arts enables the restructuring of a coherent mental map of a world that has been shattered by war or natural disaster (Nelson and Fivush, 2004; UNICEF, 2005).

However, this process can only occur when the arts are culturally contextualised. According to Gardner (1993), different cultures use different dominant senses in creating meaningful symbols. In the village studied in Sri Lanka, the visual intelligence was dominant, as seen in the level of decoration and colour of houses, cars, people and the visual elements of shrines and temples. Even the poorest of houses drew mandalas in chalk at the entrance to their house.

In other words, the arts are not just an individual matter and they are not limited to what we consider fine art: they are embedded within spiritual and community life as a whole. Thus, as others have noted, both art therapy and art activism as practiced in Western, professional culture are not relevant unless adjusted to this cultural context (Ben-Ezer, 2002; Huss, 2013; Folkman, 1997; Hiscox and Calisch, 1998; Zelizer, 2003).

This has implications for the need to translate both art therapy and arts activism into a culturally appropriate medium. We saw that the community workers did not

suggest demanding more money from the state or changing the system. They focused on using images to educate people to refrain from destructive behaviours such as drinking and violence, and to learn positive behaviours such as correct nutrition and coping with landmines.

The community workers pointed out that using arts in professional psychosocial modes for the more vulnerable groups in society such as children and disabled people could stigmatise arts activity. But if the arts are used within their cultural contexts, the benefits are accepted by all without the stigma of being designated for weaker populations. For example, everyone can come to a wedding and help prepare food, decorations and traditional dances and costumes.

However, the community workers did not stress the arts elements that the villagers themselves highlighted, such as temples, gods, sports, rituals and creating dowries. This could be because community workers, who had been trained along professional lines, were more distanced from the community benefits of culturally contextualised uses of arts than the villagers themselves. Arts were thus not perceived by the community workers as 'professional' solutions. This phenomenon is described by Lahad (2008) in his analysis of his interventions in Sri Lanka. He indicated that although using community drama and arts techniques was evaluated in the local professionals' study as more effective and better received by the local community than verbal therapy, professionals resisted it and did not consider it 'proper' psychology.

After the lecture on uses of the arts in Israel, the local community workers did appreciate the theoretical potential of the arts as a way to address the needs of the most vulnerable populations and requested training in these methods, including art therapy, arts education and, for the disabled, occupational therapy. These uses of the arts are common and well-documented (Baggerly and Exum, 2007; Conway, 2009; Mallay, 2002; Mientka, 2002).

It might be argued that this more Western view of the arts is now appropriate for the villages because the basic village structures have broken down and cannot contain the vulnerable groups, who are now a much larger percentage of the population. Alternatively, it might be that rebuilding the traditional arts-based structures would strengthen the community sufficiently that it would be able to help the disabled, injured, orphaned and sick members of society again. In other words, by strengthening the overall community, a better place can be found for those at the margins, such as disabled people.

In Western countries, there is a growing trend for a reconnection to the arts as part of community life, as seen in the crafts movement and in spiritual movements (Hansen, 2001). International aid personnel can learn about this connection from the local communities with which they work.

This study demonstrates another use of the arts as a concrete rather than abstract form of communication: facilitating villagers' capacity to define their own needs and explain those needs to aid personnel from other cultures. The villagers' self-definition of needs was different from the definitions of their needs by the community workers and the international aid experts. The use of images and their explanations, rather

than direct verbalisation by the villagers, enabled their perspectives to influence the direction of the intervention.

Each group ‘visualised’ (Rose, 1988) the role of art differently, according to their social location and training. The villagers focused on community rituals, spaces and activities; the community workers focused on didactic aims; and the international leaders focused on the communicability of art as a method to engage power holders, and on the cost effectiveness of art’s multiple roles. Interestingly, understanding of the arts was similar among individuals sharing a class or role; and this effect of class and role was stronger than the differences in national origin. Individuals who shared a class or role tended toward the same understandings whether they were local or from outside Sri Lanka, as shown in the above clusters of themes. Indeed, symbolic and metaphoric forms of expression are cited as more common among poor and rural communities, who do not use confessional or abstract narrative styles (Ben-Ezer, 2002; Bowler, 1997; Eisner, 1997; Sclater 2003).

Implied here is the use of art as a decolonising or indigenous research method that shifts away from the abstract terminology of Western culture (Smith, 1999). This enables access to the ways in which victims of wars and disasters can define their own rehabilitation. An arts-based methodology could be a more participatory, collaborative and empowering role for victims of wars and disasters within international aid research—an element that is currently lacking (Baruch, 2009; Dominelli, 2006; Smith, 1999).

The fact that we see the arts from two perspectives in our study leads to several complementary observations. On the level of process, the arts were found to be simultaneously a strengths-based research method and a strengths-based intervention method, in line with the findings of others (Hollifield et al., 2008; Huss, 2012b; Folkman, 1997; Simmons and Hicks, 2006; Warren, 2008). On the level of content, the drawings were shown to provide a different type of data, and fresh perspectives on the problems. The ability simultaneously to activate a community and to reach fresh and tangible research results is a quality of the arts that can be used to influence power holders and stakeholders in the field of arts advocacy (Butler, 2001; Shank, 2005).

As mentioned above, there was a similarity in the understanding of the arts according to class or role, which was parallel in both local and international groups. Both the international social workers and the community workers, who were dealing with the most vulnerable members of the post-disaster society, suspected that the arts were a luxury activity. This is a central theme in arts use in extreme situations.

Relegating arts to the realm of luxury is in line with Maslow’s (1970) pyramid of different types of needs, which he defines as moving from basic physical needs to more complex social, emotional and spiritual needs and topped by an overall sense of self-actualisation. Frankel (1985), however, has shown how spiritual direction enables the creation of positive meaning from even the direst circumstances, while Harris (1996) shows how this intensifies resilience. Thus, the arts, rather than being an aspect of self-actualisation to be experienced only when more basic needs are met, may be one of the means of enabling a society to meet those basic needs.

We have seen that the villagers themselves defined the resurrection of the arts as a symbolic reorganisation and rehabilitation of community structures and as a vital intervention. This finding supports previous research (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; McNiff, 1992; Orr, 2007). Though the arts are clearly secondary to basic physical needs, and are not an answer to physical or social needs such as earning a living or maintaining health, the villagers see the arts as a part of their endeavour to rehabilitate their community.

Both the founder of Sarvodaya and the international aid expert appreciated the use of the arts as effective in stimulating and rehabilitating community strengths, and they appreciated the contribution of the arts to social development. They cited the arts' ability to create community arousal and communication with others, and to produce visible results.

A limitation of this research is its single case-study design. However, the study is preliminary and aims to be phenomenological rather than evaluative in its character, as is appropriate for exploring new social phenomena (Hubberman and Miles, 2002). It would therefore be recommended to develop and evaluate each of the above themes with further research. Even at this preliminary stage, the findings clearly point to the potential advantages of using arts to create immediate positive energy and enable problem solving as well as communication with others, and the need for training for solving the problems of vulnerable groups in a cost-effective way. This is particularly relevant in the stages of long-term rehabilitation, when international funding becomes less available.

The arts at this stage emerge as a culturally contextualised and cost-effective way of rehabilitating communities as defined by the very members of the communities that have survived war and disaster.

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² This is the ThirdEye local knowledge and skill activists group. See <http://thirdeye2005.blogspot.co.il/>.

³ The Eastern University Sri Lanka Art and Culture Faculty. See <http://www.fac.esn.ac.lk/>.

⁴ For further information on the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement see the website: <http://www.sarvodaya.org>.

⁵ See the Tag website: <http://www.tagdevelopment.org>.

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