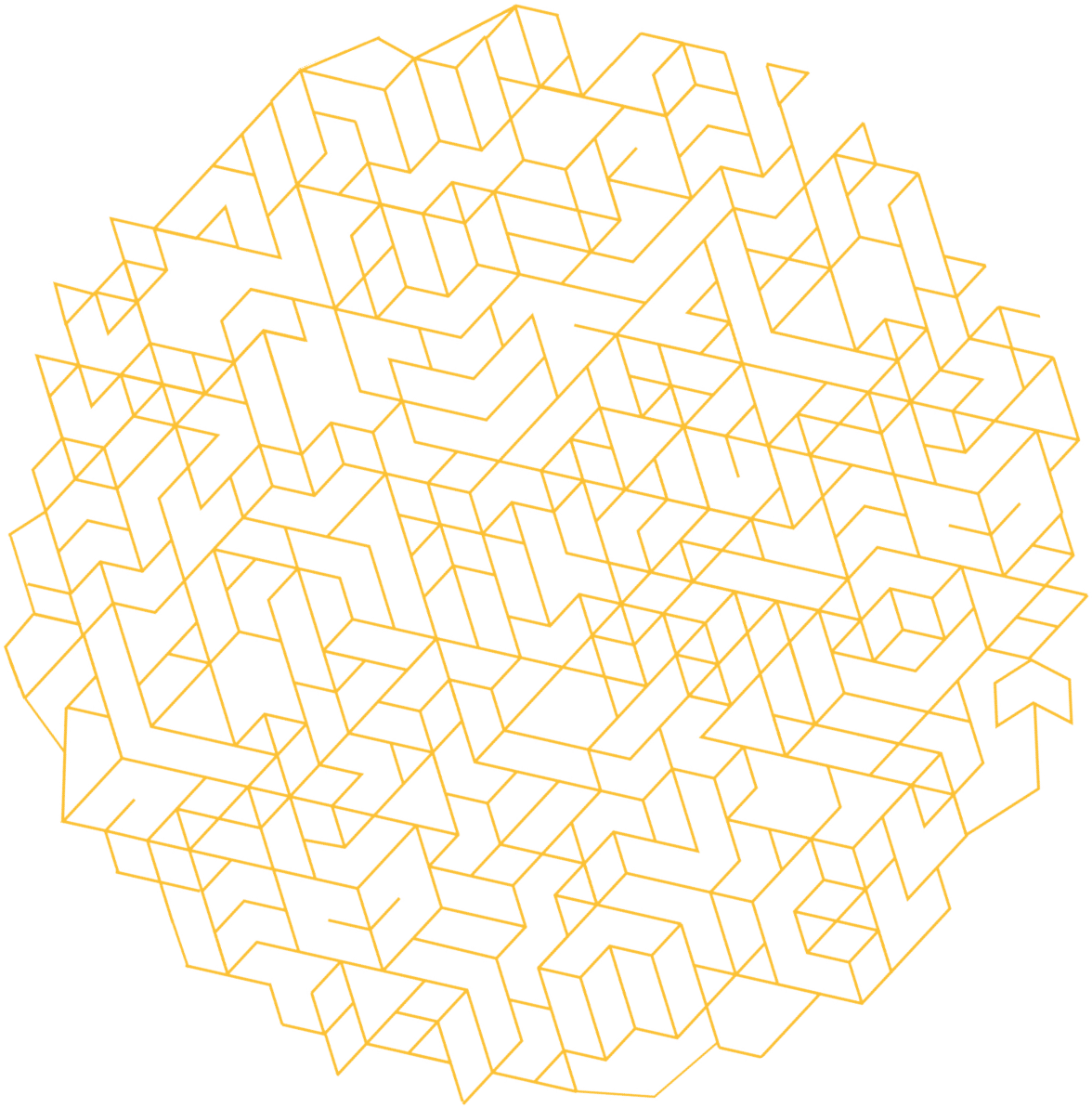
IMPACT
OF NETWORKS



A resource reader from the
Connecting Networks Learning Lab
November 2020 | Virtual

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Contact:
iac Berlin
Linienstr. 65a, 10119 Berlin, Germany
darius.polok@iac-berlin.org | +49 (0) 30 288 8580 10
www.iac-berlin.org

The Impact of Networks
A Connecting Networks Learning Lab

Connecting Networks is a community of peers organized by iac Berlin with more than 50 network-builders from 30 organizations across Europe. Its members are shaping their shared journey, contributing questions, expertise, practices, and support to create a program and tools to help us all make a greater impact. In November 2020, iac Berlin and the Porticus Community Arts Lab brought together the Connecting Networks community for a virtual Learning Lab on the impact of networks.

Networks strive to achieve impact in many ways—whether it's a collaborative effort to reach shared goals or strengthening individual endeavors for greater collective change. Regardless of the size or stage of a network, network-builders are perpetually challenged to reassess their approach and ask themselves such questions as:

- How should we define impact?
- What is our theory of change?
- How can we best measure impact?
- How can we reintegrate lessons learned?

The lab featured speakers with diverse backgrounds, who were able to contribute a wide range of perspectives on the topic of network impact. Gerald Wirth, president and artistic director of the Vienna Boys Choir, opened the lab with warm-up exercises that built human connections through song. Peter Vandor, a senior researcher and manager of the Nonprofit Organization & Social Entrepreneurship Competence Center at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, provided insights on network impact from recent academic research. Margaret Wheatley, co-founder and president of the Berkana Institute, contributed her unique experience as a consultant for leadership, culture change and organizational forms based on living systems. Werner Binnenstein-Bachstein, director of the Porticus Community Arts Lab, shared practical experiences from the development and work of the Community Arts Network. And finally, Vinzenz Himmighofen, a coordinator of the Bosch Alumni Network at iac Berlin, was joined by Peter Vandor to discuss the structure and culture of the network, and how they evaluated its impact based on a non-linear understanding of impact measurement.

The lab was an invaluable opportunity to go deep into a topic that is challenging for many network-builders, whether it's reporting to boards or funders, communicating impact to the public or even explaining the work to colleagues. This reader will provide you with summaries of the resources used during the lab as well as links to additional materials shared by the Connecting Networks community.

If you have feedback or additional resources that you would like to share, please feel free to contact Darius Polok: **darius.polok@iac-berlin.org / +49 (0) 30 288 8580 10**

Addressing Grand Challenges Collectively: An Introduction to Impact-Oriented Networks

Peter Vandor, Lukas Leitner, Reinhard Millner & Hinnerk Hansen

Network fundamentals **Research on networks**

"(Networks) are often understood as a tool for addressing complex global problems, such as poverty and the climate crisis, in a collective and more effective manner."
(Vandor et al 4)

In cooperation with iac Berlin, Peter Vandor and his team from the Vienna University of Economics and Business conducted a study on impact-oriented networks. Their work is an introduction to networks in the field of social impact and philanthropy, providing an exploration of existing scientific literature as well as an overview of basic concepts and the value networks can have in creating social impact.

Based on an extensive literature review of 80+ sources—ranging from peer-reviewed journal articles to bestselling books, from practitioner reports to theoretical treatises—the team made a number of key insights on impact-oriented networks regarding structure, culture, benefits, governance and success factors. For example, they found that impact-oriented networks usually form around a shared impact goal or cause, a shared experience, or a shared space. Also, based on the level of centralization and the strength of ties between actors, the structure of an impact-oriented network can take on one of four basic forms: a civic membership organization, a multihub network, a tightly knit network, or a network of networks.

The team also found that impact-oriented networks can generate many benefits for society and the individual. Individuals can benefit from increased access to resources, higher perceived legitimacy, social and emotional support, and more opportunities to scale. On the societal level, network benefits can include:

- providing collective answers to complex social problems;
- creating fertile ground for innovation to emerge and be implemented;
- building trust, social capital, a sense of belonging, and norms of reciprocity;
- strengthening resilience in a community.

Successful impact-oriented networks also tend to share certain principles, including a focus on long-term impact, trust-building, humility, alignment of network structure with network purpose, and a dynamic perspective on network composition.

Read the study in its entirety here:
www.iac-berlin.org/resources/addressing-grand-challenges-collectively-an-introduction-to-impact-oriented-networks

Human Relationships in Times of Uncertainty

Margaret Wheatley

Relationships | **Clarity of purpose** | **Community**

"Whatever the problem, community is the answer."
(Wheatley)

"How do people feel when they volunteer for war, and how do they feel while in the midst of war?" This is the question that Margaret Wheatley posed in her thought-provoking discussion on the need for human relationships in uncertain times. When people enlist in a war, they're often driven by passion, enthusiasm and optimism. But what happens when these soldiers are in the midst of the fighting? Passion is no longer the fuel that pushes them forward. Instead, they must seek a deeper motivation, such as survival or their sense of conviction. Wheatley believes that hope is similar to passion–too many people base their actions on hope. However, when those actions fall short or fail, then we open ourselves up to the dark feelings that are the other side of hope, including frustration, cynicism and even despair.

Wheatley encourages people to look beyond hope and fear. She purports that having a clear vision of one's work and recognizing what compels us to do that work can be a source of vast energy. This clarity of purpose is much stronger and reliable as an ongoing source of motivation, even when faced with challenges and failure.

Another way of building resilience is our connection with other human beings. Networks are a good start for this. They are useful in bringing people together around a common cause and to fulfill the sense that "I am not alone." However as long as being part of a network is based on self-interest, it will never fulfill its potential. Rather, networks need to be converted into communities of practice, where there are genuine relationships, sharing and support. Humans need each other, particularly in times of uncertainty, and communities bring out our best qualities. This is why "whatever the problem, community is the answer." Wheatley thus challenges leaders and changemakers to strengthen people to do their work, to bring people together and to build relationships in a meaningful way.

Watch excerpts from Margaret Wheatley's talk here:
https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6742721975476596736

Using Emergence to Take Social Innovations to Scale

Margaret Wheatley & Deborah Frieze © 2008

Emergence **Networks** **Communities of practice** **Systems of influence**

"Emergence is the fundamental scientific explanation for how local changes can materialize as global systems of influence."
(Wheatley and Frieze 4)

Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze argue that change does not come about by trying to convince the masses to change. Rather, we should focus on fostering the critical connections that are at the heart of *emergence*. The life cycle of emergence can roughly be explained as such: *Networks* are formed when separate, local activities come together. As networks grow stronger and more dynamic through exchange and mutual support, they become *communities of practice*. From these communities, *systems of influence* can then emerge. These emergent phenomena have qualities and capacities that did not exist before the system emerged, but which taken together lend the system "greater power and influence than is possible through planned, incremental change" (Wheatley and Frieze 1).

Wheatley and Frieze describe the different stages of emergence as follows:

Stage One: Networks. Networks are often a result of self-organization, whereby people seek out and connect with other like-minded individuals or groups. They are often based on self-interest and tend to have fluid membership.

Note: The definition of a "network" in Wheatley and Frieze's work is different from the one used by iac Berlin, which would describe this type of entity as a "transactional network".

Stage Two: Communities of Practice (CofPs). Communities of practice are created when people are engaged in similar work and recognize the benefits of building relationships with each other. These benefits include sharing and co-creating knowledge, mutual support, etc. Ideas, knowledge, and practices can spread and be implemented quickly. Members of these communities commit to supporting each other and to advancing the field of practice by sharing their knowledge and expertise beyond the community.

Stage Three: Systems of Influence. Systems of influence emerge suddenly and unpredictably, and exhibit real power and influence. The pioneering efforts and practices of communities become the accepted standard and the norm. The community's members are seen as experts in the field and can influence discussions on policy and funding.

Read the article in its entirety here:
www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/emergence.html

Community Arts Network

Case study presented by the Porticus Community Arts Lab

Werner Binnenstein-Bachstein, Anis Barnat & Csaba Manyai

Network building **Stakeholder mapping** **Unlikely alliances**

The goal of the Porticus Community Arts Lab is to tap into the full potential of art to make meaningful impact in pursuit of a more just and inclusive society. They see the arts as a unique tool that can be flexibly applied to various social issues and serve as a bridge to overcoming social and personal boundaries. Moving beyond "art for art's sake", art can create transformative opportunities to change how we relate to it and the ways we can integrate it into social impact initiatives through "unlikely alliances".

The idea for the Community Arts Network (CAN) was developed by the Porticus Community Arts Lab together with the Hilti Foundation. They began with an initial mapping exercise that covered a wide range of stakeholders, including artists, NGOs, funders, large arts institutions, and others. Alongside concerns about funding and resources, there was a strong call for more collaboration. It soon became clear that CAN had a mandate to focus on enablement and advocacy for the field.

CAN sees its primary responsibility as enabling collaboration, including building infrastructure and facilitating connections. They began by creating thematic clusters around social causes with the intention of supporting members' existing work by bringing in art as a tool. From there they built a framework of *Arts for* ... partnerships. These partnerships focused on creating unlikely alliances for each cluster, including *Arts for ... Climate, .. Education and Empowerment, ... Rethinking Business, ... Hope and Coming Together, ... Democracy and Civil Engagement,* and *... Well-Being*.

The work around the thematic clusters is supported by three impact networks:

1. **Collaborative Network of Causes:** A decentralized network of different causes and initiatives that facilitates mutual support and synergic collaboration.
2. **Funders Circle:** Funders and enablers that support the collaborative work of the network.
3. **Artful Change Makers:** A wide range of people and organizations who understand and promote the idea that art can make meaningful social impact.

One example of CAN in action is in the Arts for Education cluster. CAN helped connect the Academy for Impact through Music (AIM) with 'social change through music' projects around the world to create a global movement for teacher training and a holistic approach to education. They also connected AIM with non-music based, youth empowerment organizations as a way to promote cross-pollination.

Find out more about the Community Arts Network here:
www.porticus.com/en/our-hubs/community-arts-lab

Somewhere Places: Exploring What We Really Need

Harald Katzmair, FASresearch & the Porticus Community Arts Lab

Theory of change **Collective sense-making** **Community arts**

The Porticus Community Arts Lab (PCAL) partnered up with FASresearch (FAS) to define their theory of change. Using the narrative of the musical West Side Story and lyrics from its hit song "Somewhere", they framed the complex problem of political polarization and social division in the context of human needs: When our basic human needs are met and our well-being is assured, we are more resilient, open, and able to flourish. When these needs are not met, then the potential for rivalry, exclusion, and conflict grows.

The team set forth on their journey guided by the following questions:

- As both a social institution and a cultural practice, can community arts help mitigate the escalating momentum of rivalry in our world?
- Can community arts help us to meet the social, ecological, and spiritual needs basic to a well-lived life, thereby forestalling our mimetic desires[1] and the fractious competitions that emerge from them?
- What do we truly need in a world defined by mimesis-induced overconsumption and threatened by climate disruption? What is the role of arts in the realm of human needs, human desires, and continued human existence?

PCAL and FAS then conducted *Somewhere Labs* with "three groups of very different people—globally engaged persons, locally connected persons, and migrants" (Katzmair 24). Together they explored what vital resources and experiences were necessary to spur attributes such as creativity, self-actualisation, and growth, while noting the commonalities and differences in how the three groups dealt with these subjects. They also examined the interconnectedness and interaction of human needs and identified the role of community arts within this model.

Using the *FASresearch Situation Room*™—"a methodology (that) helps teams and multi-stakeholder networks develop collective sense-making and situation analysis capacities, increasing organizational energy, and facilitating smarter and more efficient resource allocation" (Katzmair 25)—and the *FASresearch Impact Map* tool, they were able to create a systematic understanding of human needs and ways in which community arts can contribute to their fulfillment and a sense of well-being.

Read the study in its entirety here:
https://www.iac-berlin.org/resources/using-art-to-create-social-impact

1 Social theorist René Girard argued that, "humans are fundamentally 'mimetic' with respect to one another: We tend to want what others (with whom we identify) want, effectively mimicking their object-desires, thereby creating a downward cycle of competitive demand for increasingly scarce and exclusive resources" (Katzmair 10).

The Bosch Alumni Network

Case study presented by iac Berlin

Peter Vandor & Vinzenz Himmighofen

Impact assessment **Evaluation methodology** **Impact model**

The Bosch Alumni Network (BAN) was established by iac Berlin in 2017. After three years, the iac conducted an impact evaluation together with the Vienna University of Economics and Business to assess the benefits for individual members as well as the overall impact of the network. They created a plan for the study, whereby they identified the key assumptions—largely regarding the network's structure and culture—that had driven the development of the network as well as the solutions designed to achieve them.

The evaluation was grounded in a set of guiding questions:

- What direct benefits do members derive from being in the Bosch Alumni Network?
- How do these benefits, in particular collaboration, impact members' performance and social impact?
- What factors (e.g. interventions, norms) contribute to making the network effective?

They gathered data through interviews, participatory observation, an online survey, and a literature review. Based on this research, they created an impact model for the Bosch Alumni Network that looked at: the key actors, network structure, and interactions; the direct benefits for members as well as the wider social impact; and how each component enabled and drove the others.

The collected data also helped them to produce results that allowed iac Berlin to put both colorful stories and concrete numbers behind their impact reporting. The rich qualitative feedback provided specific and varied examples of the network's impact, while the quantitative results measured more abstract factors such as amount of interaction, knowledge exchange, peer-to-peer support, and innovation. Here are just a few examples of the impact BAN made:

- Altogether, alumni voluntarily invest 5,920 hours per month in network activities. This is the equivalent of around 37 full-time positions.
- 65% of participants stated that their membership has assisted them or their organization to build credibility with others.
- Almost half of the interviewed employees of the Robert Bosch Stiftung reported that they had received support from the network in building a new project, venture, or idea.

Read the evaluation in its entirety here:
www.iac-berlin.org/resources/how-to-measure-the-success-of-impact-oriented-networks

Additional Resources

Contributions from the Connecting Networks Community

Emergent Learning: A Framework for Whole-System Strategy, Learning, and Adaptation (*The Foundation Review*)
Marilyn Darling, Heidi Guber, Jillaine Smith & James Stiles

The field of philanthropy is exploring what it takes to achieve impact in complex environments. The terms *adaptive* and *emergent* are beginning to be used, often interchangeably, to describe strategies with which funders can tackle this complexity. This article proposes a distinction between the two and explores more deeply how the research into complexity can inform philanthropic practice.

Network Evaluation: Cultivating Healthy Networks for Social Change
Eli Malinsky & Chad Lubelsky

Network evaluation is underdeveloped in both theory and practice. Typical evaluation methods often fail to provide data that can truly enhance our understanding of networks and lead to their improved health and impact. In June 2007, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation and the Centre for Social Innovation convened a diverse group of social change practitioners to provoke new ways of thinking about our challenges, address some common concerns, and propose a framework for moving forward. Their goal was to develop a series of tools and strategies for network evaluation that were better aligned with network theory and practice.

Using Story to Change Systems (*Stanford Social Innovation Review*)
Ella Saltmarshe

Humans have always used stories to make sense out of our chaotic world. Story has many different qualities that make it useful for the work of system change. It's emotional, coheres communities, engenders empathy, lights up paths of change, and can alter the narratives we use to define our lives and communities. When it comes to changing the values, mindsets, rules, and goals of a system, story is foundational.

Trust Issues
Rachel Botman

What do we do when trust breaks down? How can we make better decisions about who to trust? Rachel Botsman is a writer and public speaker who focuses on trust. In her podcast, "Trust Issues", she delves into the lives and stories of extraordinary guests whose experiences give a fresh and powerful lens through which to explore our own relationship with trust.

Connecting Networks

Connecting Networks is more than just a program—it's a community of peers. Together we are more than 50 people from 30 organizations across Europe, all coming with a wide variety of experience and networks at various stages of development. We are shaping our journey together, contributing our questions, expertise, practices, and support to create a program design and tools to move us all forward. Connecting Networks is facilitated, hosted, and supported by a diverse team of leading thinkers and doers from across Europe and the world, who offer members eye-opening insights and invite them to be active learners and share their expertise among their peers.

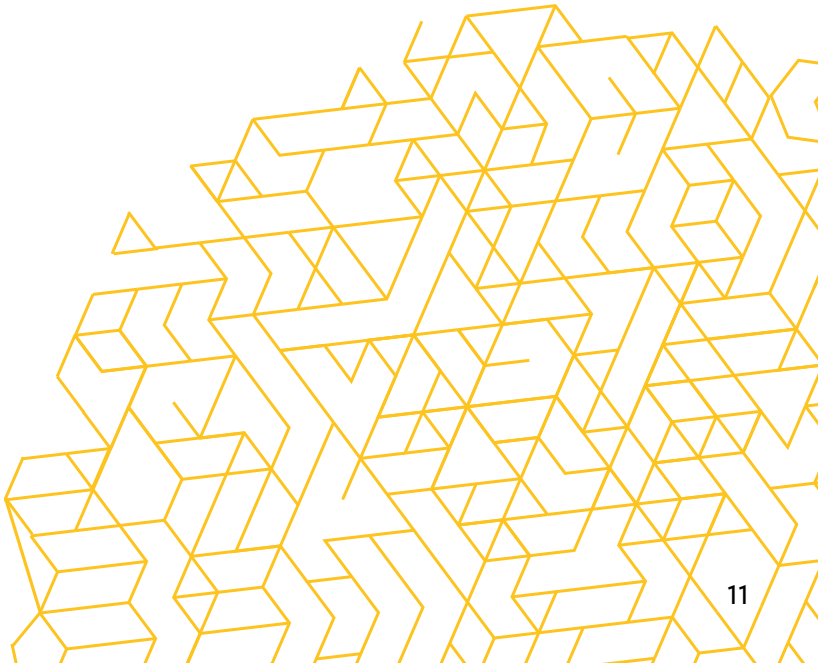
iac Berlin

iac Berlin was founded by the Robert Bosch Stiftung to support the development of networks with social impact. It advises foundations and other non-profit organizations on their alumni work, helps with practical solutions in the design of impact-oriented networks, and initiates new forms of collaboration. The iac Berlin also coordinates the Bosch Alumni Network, which brings together former and current fellows, grantees, and staff members of the Robert Bosch Stiftung and its partners. The iac Berlin maintains a curated collection of articles, reports, tools, and other materials on how to analyze and build stronger networks and organizations in its online resource center.

If you are interested in joining the Connecting Networks Community or have resources that you would like to share with it, please contact: darius.polok@iac-berlin.org.

If you want to learn more about building and analyzing stronger networks, organizations, and communities, you can find a variety of resources on these topics at: www.iac-berlin.org.

Follow us on LinkedIn to stay up-to-date on recent developments, insights, and upcoming events: www.linkedin.com/company/iacberlin.



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