

The role of shared workspaces as an anchor of community resilience for low-income urban populations

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In the last decade shared workspaces are widely spread world-wide with thousands of public and private sector shared work-spaces. This study investigates the role of shared workspaces as an anchor of community resilience for low-income urban populations. To date, studies explored the role of shared workspaces from the employee and regional innovation perspective, while the effect on the community empowerment remains unraveled.

This study focuses on a new municipality owned multi-functional shared workspace serving the variety of uses and is geared towards empowering the local residents and promoting low-income young adults. Besides providing a workspace, the following activities are initiated by the management staff (all local residents) in order to answer community needs: ii) lectures and community events, iii) university exam preparation courses, women empowerment, entrepreneurship events and networking opportunities; iv) a hub for learning support.

Interviews were conducted with the management staff (ten employees) and with a sample of thirty 18-21 years-old attending the workspace. We identified processes leading to behavioral change among the young adults attending the workspace. We looked at the change processes via the lens of the Trans-Theoretical model positing five stages of behavioral change: observation, preparation, change action, maintenance and assimilation, including successes and backsliding. Additionally, via the existence-relatedness-growth model we identified the layers of human need that this venue meets.

The changes undergone by attendees who spend time and engage in activities at the facility foster personal and community resilience in Jaffa. According to the management staff, 60% of the young adults assisted by the facility enroll to universities, compared to 20% enrollment rate in the surrounding neighborhood. The venue creates anchors for young people and is a major springboard in areas of crucial importance: education and employment. The facility activities are aimed at all the five stages of behavioral change. Need awareness is promoted through school visits and collaboration, through word-of-mouth by creating a neighborhood "buzz", and through community activities and lectures by community and industrial leaders. Preparation is facilitated by courses and information. Action change is supported with personal help in scholarship submissions, networking and internship programs. Maintenance and long term assimilation is supported by the staff involvement over time. The workspace contributes to the young adults in three main areas. Firstly, the facility alleviates functional barriers by providing university preparation courses, language and academic writing courses, and information about university, enrollment, scholarships, student aid programs. Obstacles are addressed by the helpful, attentive, and closely-involved staff, who create a sense of personal connection. Secondly, the facility promotes social inclusion by providing a meeting-place and giving its users a homelike, familial atmosphere and sense of belonging. Thirdly, the facility plays a substantial role in strengthening the confidence and self-image of young Jaffa residents by offering them an experience of success helping them leave their comfort zone. All of these things help the venue's young clients achieve success in self-management.