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Voices of the Suburbs¹

– The paradox of social entrepreneurial initiatives addressing vulnerable groups

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Current findings, challenges and opportunities

The young men and women of foreign background living in the suburbs of major cities are at the focus of attention of a vast array of social and economic initiatives. From state-driven development programs aiming at bridging the digital divide (Barinaga, 2010) and private-led schools working with the youth, to civil society organizations addressing domestic violence or drug-abuse as well as other forms of voluntary associations such as women groups or ethnic minority associations. These initiatives are all committed to attaining change concerning the living conditions of particular communities.

Diverse as these initiatives are, they share a common challenge, that of interpellating their target group. Often referred to as “vulnerable”, “disenfranchised” or “marginalized”, the initiatives’ beneficiaries become interesting because of being, distinctly, vulnerable, marginalized and disenfranchised. The term used to refer to these individuals groups them under a broad category that reifies the same power differences initiatives aim to transform. Interpellating their vulnerability identifies the group and the individuals encompassed in it according to a particular, limited, trait. This moment of interpellation overlooks other aspects of their identities, denying their agency and subjectivity and thus failing to acknowledge them as actors and agents of the social change initiatives so readily want to see. Accordingly, while working towards social change, these initiatives are nonetheless reproducing that which is to be changed. That is, in order for a group to be deemed deserving social investment, it needs to be qualified as vulnerable, thus performing and reproducing its political disadvantage.

How can the problem of interpellation be overcome in praxis? The article follows the first steps of an initiative attempting to transcend the interpellation problem. How does the initiative deal with the co-construction of vulnerability? Empirical material comes from the author’s practice of engaged scholarship, a practice that stresses the critical and transformational importance of co-constructed research involving both academics and practitioners (see Ganesh, Zoller, & Cheney, 2005; Parker, Ocegüera, & Sánchez, 2011). The paper follows the efforts of me and my colleagues in the suburbs to start up Voices of the Suburbs, a social entrepreneurial initiative aiming at introducing mural art as a tool to work with the socio-economically burdened residents of Stockholm’s suburbs, the youth in particular. In its efforts to engage socially with these communities, the initiative seeks a way to move beyond the labels that produce and homogenize those groups.

¹ This is a free translation of the Swedish name, Förorten i Centrum.

Naming – Is symbolic resistance possible?

Can we escape the performative effect of each act of naming? Is it possible to name without enacting the subject which is being so named? How can the “incompletion of interpellation” (Butler, 2000) be mobilized in practice for re-articulating the hegemonic discourse? How can we resist the productive relation between the symbolic realm of labels and categories and the material realm of objects and groups? How can we oppose the homogenizing effect of the act of naming a varied collection of individuals? How can a signifier closing down a social group be re-articulated into one celebrating the heterogeneity of that group? Isn't the very use of the signifier to re-signify reproducing the signification that was to be transformed? How do we escape the violence of a performative hegemonic language? How big is the space of re-signification and how is that space to be stretched, translated and re-attached to differing meanings and images? How can the process of re-articulating the subject and the signifier interpellating her be understood/studied? How can we study the process of resisting symbolic hegemony?

More specifically, let's take the signifier of the “immigrant”, the “ethnic other”, the – in the Swedish context – “svartskalle,” the “invandrare.” Naming someone as “immigrant” constitutes the immigrant subject. The act of qualifying an area as “immigrant” constitutes that area as an “immigrant ghetto.” Designating the subject and the area as “immigrant” gives that subject and that area qualities that unify them with other subjects and areas that may be very different in nature. The “immigrant” tag conceals the invented nature of the immigrant. It unifies a group heterogeneous along many dimensions – Iranian and South American, women and men, expatriates, professional experts and those who migrated for other political or economic reasons (Sassen, 1999). And in the Scandinavian context, those that immigrated as adults and those that were born in Scandinavia of foreign born parents. Naming, that is, does more than designate or qualify. It is a performative act that retroactively constitutes its reference (Žižek, 2000), dashing difference across those that are so interpellated. The act of naming a broad group of varied people as “immigrant” constitutes the fact that a diversity of people have a minimum common quality. It constitutes the group. The symbolic order – the label, the tag, the category together with the images attached to it – is instrumental for the constitution of reality.

The argument thus far may seem a sort of intellectual gymnastics done for the sake of an introvert, somewhat narcissistic, academic audience. And yet, this is at the core of very real efforts to achieve social change. This is, indeed, at the center of political action because any effort aimed at addressing the injustices brought by a society organized along the ethnic boundary needs first to address the violence of a language that performs that very boundary. Understanding the productive relation between the symbolic order and the social space allows us to uncover the inherent paradox in such efforts, a paradox that questions the very possibility of any effort of re-signification.

The paradox: Aiming at changing the meanings and images attached to the immigrant body/subject and the immigrant neighborhood presupposes the existence of the unified body and the unified neighborhood. Such efforts need first to identify the immigrant neighborhood and the immigrant subject, thus reproducing the very category that they aim at subverting. Whether reintroducing heterogeneity into the “immigrant” marker or addressing the material conditions of possibility at the root of the label, the starting point is the identification – and thus, constitution – of a group that is qualified as “immigrant.”

In other words, efforts aiming at changing the vulnerability of a social group need first to name the group which is to be addressed. In that doing, they retroactively instantiate unity, re-creating vulnerability and re-producing the distinction that begets inequality in everyday social relations. That is, the definition of the target group to be addressed perpetuates the very issue that is to be addressed, reinforcing the target group's attachments that the social entrepreneurial initiative will later work at detaching.

Given the paradox originating in the performative relation between the symbolic and the social orders, how is resistance to proceed? How can the symbolic order be addressed in a way that it detaches itself from the social reality it enacts and that redoes those categories? How do efforts aiming at igniting social change relate to this productive symbolic order? More particular to the

case at hand, how to contest the signifiers associated to the ethnic boundary – in the Swedish context, those of “immigrant” (invandrare) and “suburb” (förorten)?

Studying symbolic resistance

One way to study processes of re-signification is to follow the everyday practices of social entrepreneurial efforts aiming to change the attachments done to stigmatized bodies, stigmatized neighborhoods and stigmatizing categories. Callon’s notion of the “qualification of goods” can be helpful to this endeavor. With it, Callon refers to the *process* through which qualities are attached to a good. He deploys the sequence of transformations of a product; he follows the organized strategies deployed by actors to qualify goods. It is, in a sense, the process through which a set of qualities are articulated into a good, thus signifying that good. Callon regards the qualification of goods as one of the central mechanisms in the dynamic organization of markets (Callon et al., 2002).

Callon’s “process of qualification” reminds us of two key methodological aspects for the study of social initiatives aiming at symbolic change:

1. Symbolic structures are not only grounded on symbolic/communicative dimensions, but also on material, non-human aspects. Thus, when studying symbolic change, also materiality needs to be considered.
2. Social structures are not an independent sort of macro actor. Rather, social structures can be seen as the sum of a myriad of heterogeneous micro-actors. It is the articulation of that myriad of actors that needs to be studied. This amounts to emphasizing the centrality of relations in the study of social change, even if this change is symbolic in nature.

Applying these ideas to the understanding of social entrepreneurial initiatives aiming at igniting symbolic change implies regarding the process through which such efforts re-qualify the social injustice they aim at changing. Following the process of qualification of the signified (the immigrant body and the immigrant neighborhood in our case) and re-articulation of the signifier (the “immigrant”) allows us to see the chain of actors mobilized, the new images attached to the body and the category, the logics of argumentation exercised in the re-structuration of the terrain of public debate, the shaping of a new constellation of interests, the articulation of a new set of social relations.

In what follows, the paper deploys the chain of actors – material and non-material – mobilized by a social entrepreneurial initiative aiming at changing the perception of the immigrant other in Sweden. More particularly, it follows the first year of the initiative, as it tries to define its target group, build alliances in the local community and wider society and get initial seed capital. Voices of the Suburbs aims at re-signifying the “immigrant” by introducing heterogeneity into the category and by taking space in the public space. For that doing, it uses the production of community-based mural art as a tool to work with the images attached to the young residents of the socio-economic burdened suburbs of Stockholm, also known as “the million program suburbs.”

Background to VoS: A linguistic awakening

Husby, a neighborhood of the Kista Borough, is a so-called “million program suburb.” At the end of the 40s and beginning of the 50s, a rising housing shortage burdened major cities in Sweden. As a coordinated response to the general housing shortage, the Swedish parliament decided in 1964 that one million dwellings should be built in the coming 10 years. These were to be built in the outskirts, taking advantage of the increased accessibility made possible by the new transport technologies such as the car and the commuter train. Swedish municipalities were granted favorable financial conditions for large-scale construction work, particularly if these were larger than 1000 dwellings. As a consequence, these areas came to be characterized by a functionalist aesthetic determined by economic effectiveness. 25% of all dwellings in Sweden today were built between 1965 and 1975 and 10% of Stockholm’s population live in one of its seven “million suburbs”. At the time regarded as an example of modern

and rational building, the first dwellers were pleased with the high standard and big living spaces. Today, however, “the areas of the million program”, as they are popularly called, have become a symbol for failed housing policy, the result of excessive state intervention in city planning. Many of these areas have been demolished or wait empty for demolition. Notwithstanding, in the major cities such as Stockholm, Göteborg, and Malmö these suburbs are overcrowded, mainly with people under great social and economic pressure, very often with roots in a foreign country. Indeed, “the million program areas” or “the suburbs” have become synonymous with “immigrant ghetto” in the media and the popular mind.

The “million program suburb” “provides a common ‘container’ for free-floating, inconsistent fears” (Zizek, 2000, p.149), socio-economic in nature such as the crisis of the welfare state, the intrusions of government in major housing developments, immigration, and unemployment. This container, the dwelling of the immigrant other, just as her body, symbolizes this intractable set of social meanings and obstructs any further inquiry into the social relations that are at its root (Butler, 2000, p. 26).

As a researcher located in the Kista campus of the Royal Institute of Technology, I had studied those social relations in the Kista region for a longer time. For over one and a half years I had followed the efforts to redefine a traditional immigrant suburb, a million program area, into a high-tech region of international standards. Initially interested in the so-called “digital divide,” I had grown increasingly wary of explicit efforts to bridge it.

“[Such efforts] enforce a dualistic world that positions everybody in terms of ‘have’ and ‘have-nots’, of ‘techie’ and ‘non-techie’, of ‘connected’ and ‘disconnected.’ When such efforts are carried out in a region divided along ethnic lines, such as Kista, those dichotomies come to overlap with that of the ‘established’ and the ‘outsider’, the ‘global worker’ and the ‘local (multicultural) resident,’ the ‘Swede’ and the ‘immigrant.’” (Barinaga, 2010)

Not only was I suspicious of current state-driven programs to address socio-economic inequalities in ethnically defined areas, I was also concerned about my own role (along with that of the social sciences) in cementing the ethnic divide.

“By merely focusing on the immigration process, the agonies of the “immigrant” or the ethnic “other”, we maintain their interest by being, precisely, immigrants and ethnic others; we contribute to stigmatizing the condition of being an immigrant; we legitimize the boundaries that polarize us. Stuck in a dichotomist language, we reproduce the very power relations we aim to unveil.”

In other words, I had become aware of the founding violence of an episteme – the “immigrant” –, which re-formulation I had meant to study. State-driven top-down efforts to re-define the immigrant suburb into a high-tech region had fallen into the linguistic trap of re-producing old dichotomies with new ones. The “Sweden” and the “immigrant” had become the “techie” and the “non-techie”, changing the signifier without addressing the social relations that grounded it. I, too, had become a cog in the machinery of linguistic re-production as, by studying it, I enacted the group which very existence I so readily denounced.

If top-down state-driven initiatives of re-symbolization were bound to instantiate unity and re-produce the dichotomy enacting the group to be addressed, I wondered, can bottom-up initiatives introduce the heterogeneity that would make justice to the social situation addressed? How do bottom-up efforts aiming at social change work in this respect? How do they perform re-signification (if at all)?

An invitation to visit Stanford University and a research grant allowed me to spend over one and half years in the Bay Area. Frustrated by the realization of my own role in perpetuating the ethnic stigma I was so fervently condemning, I started to consider strategies, instruments, methods, and concepts to work towards social change concerning ethnicity. It was in San Francisco then that I one day found myself standing in front of a mural done by Precita Eyes Mural Arts Center.

Precita Eyes was a community-based mural arts association deeply committed to the communities it worked with, educating them about the process and history of public community mural art and bringing art into the daily lives of its people.² Apart from the community-building process set in motion by their mural work, I saw in their murals a way to take space in the public sphere and thus give room to the many voices of the suburbs. This, I thought, could nuance the often limited and biased view generally held of the suburbs and its residents. It could re-articulate the symbolic dichotomy that constituted them.

Could those ideas be implemented in Husby, in the Kista Borough? Through my research, I had been working with residents and several neighborhood organizations there. How would those ideas translate in the Swedish context?

Did community-based art produced in the public space have the potential to re-signify the “immigrant”? Could the meanings and images of the “suburb” be expanded thus dislocating the distinction between “us” and “them”, between “Swedes” and “non-Swedes”? That is, could the production of public art by the residents in the suburbs introduce heterogeneity to an otherwise foreclosed category and, by that doing, facilitate the dissolution of the immigrant condition? How does a process with the potential to expose the arbitrariness of the name look?

Attaching actors, displacing the subject, qualifying the suburb

In June 2008, three weeks after coming back from the Bay Area, I started to discuss those ideas with a variety of actors. These had each their own stakes in what, one and a half years later, would become Voices of the Suburbs.

In that process, a series of actors were successively enrolled, enlarging the network until it reached robustness enough. The actors enrolled were heterogeneous in nature: a professional social researcher (me), a nonprofit organization manager, an artist, foundations, educational institutions both nationally recognized and with a strong local presence, walls and texts. (See appendix for the enrollment diagram or string of associations up to the application for funding the pilot project.)

The Swedish Red Cross – Stockholm region

Together with a colleague from the Stockholm division, Åsa Beckius had worked on an internal report for the Swedish Red Cross for over half a year. With a focus on social exclusion in present-day Sweden, the report built its argument on the realization that the Red Cross was weakest in the areas and with the groups that needed it most.

“Social exclusion in the bigger cities runs, to a large extent, along ethnic lines and particularly vulnerable groups live in the so-called ‘areas of the million program’. Another group is the youth, they are left outside political decision-making processes and their resources are often disregarded. The Red Cross fails to engage precisely those groups. Such a failure is due, among other reasons, to the fact that the Red Cross is not open to all inhabitants and to the rigidity of its organizational structure.” (Beckius and Hormazabal, 2007 – own translation)

The report, that is, implied a rather strong criticism concerning the presence (or lack of it) of the Red Cross in socio-economic burdened areas of the bigger cities, as well as concerning the conservative culture of the organization.

Further, it recommended launching a “Big City project” that focused on the youth living in the most socio-economically burdened suburbs of the major cities. Two suburbs were suggested in the Swedish capital: Skärholmen and the Kista Borough, Husby in particular. Tight collaborations with local actors

² For the curious, I suggest visiting their website: www.precitaeyes.org.

and local residents were proposed in an attempt “to avoid divisions between ‘us and them,’ and to find common interests.”

Even though the report was strongly supported by the Stockholm division of the Swedish Red Cross, central management as well as other colleagues viewed it with apprehensive eyes. Sure, the Red Cross needed to address an increasingly diversified population as well as an increasingly divided society. Yet, why should social exclusion along ethnic lines be made into a priority? Why should the focus be set on the socio-economically burdened suburbs of the major cities – that happened to have a high-proportion of residents with an immigrant background? And, why should a particular project (and money) be assigned to these?

However, an increasing number of voices within and outside the Red Cross were being heard. There was much talk about the need to introduce changes in the organization’s perspective, its way of working, and the groups it addressed. In a sense, the report was a formalization of these criticisms, presented by two insiders. So Åsa was given a great deal of freedom to shape the Red Cross’ Big City project for the City of Stockholm in Husby and to collaborate with local partners. She was, however, given no budget.

Åsa and I met for the first time in June 2008. I had just arrived from the US and Åsa had just been made responsible for starting up the Red Cross’ Big City project in Husby. Knowing of our interest in Kista, a common acquaintance had put us in contact. Åsa was looking for innovative ideas, local partners, and community-based methods to work with in the suburbs; that is, she looked for accomplices and strategies that could help her redefine the Swedish Red Cross’ work at home – both in the sense of how it worked and who it addressed. I, in turn, was looking for an organization from which to test the newly brought ideas; an organization from which to highlight the heterogeneity of the suburbs and from which to start the work of re-signifying the “immigrant”.

In other words, to my linguistic awakening, the Red Cross’ strive for organizational change was added to the set of social meanings building up around VoS and its eventual target group. The enrollment of the Red Cross’ Big City project together with the ideas from Precita Eyes, was more than a mere collaboration between two actors. The attachment was the beginning of a process of articulating the initiative’s target group as well as the social change to be achieved. To be sure, whereas Precita was open to neighbors of all ages, the one requirement of the Red Cross’ Big City initiative was that it focused on the youth, and thus, VoS came to articulate its target group as the “young resident of the socio-economic vulnerable city suburbs.” In that doing, VoS juxtaposed two adjectives – “young” and “vulnerable” – in a combination that identified the vulnerability to address – “socio-economic” – without ever mentioning its ethnic quality. The choice of terms to describe our focus was a first step into re-signifying the suburbs and, by extension, we thought, into reformulating integration debate. Subsequently, actors had to be enlisted, and funding had to be gained.

The Royal Institute of Art

The next step was to establish a working collaboration with an artist. While writing the Red Cross report, Åsa had established contact with a start-up science theater in Kista, which had a young female artist connected to it. Johanna had been educated at the Royal Institute of Art and still kept a strong relationship with Filippa, a former student fellow now a young faculty at the Institute.

Åsa arranged a first meeting between the four women, who met for the first time at the Royal Institute of Art. At that meeting, Filippa told of her personal interest in developing mural art in Sweden. In particular, she looked for forms for “taking place in the urban space as a way to shape contemporary stories.” A fifth woman joined the meeting, Tite, professor in mural painting. She lamented the neglect that had befallen such an “ancient technique” resulting, she argued, in the Institute of Art recently ceasing the only mural workshop that existed in Sweden. She, too, had a personal and professional interest in reviving mural art. The “million program suburbs” had used a standardized modular building technique requiring an even terrain, for which numerous concrete walls had been erected. These, the women discussed, were excellent public spaces where to develop mural art.

Beyond personal and professional interests, Filippa explained, the Royal Institute of Art had been approving of the idea. The Institute had the explicitly mandate to broaden its student body, which today consisted overwhelmingly of children to “middle-class Swedish families”. When Filippa had presented the ideas to her superiors, she told us, they had reacted positively as they saw in it a potential to attract a more diversified student body.

Given the various personal, professional and institutional stakes in VoS, Filippa agreed to collaborate bringing in the group of students she coordinated at the Royal Institute of Art.

The many grey walls populating the suburbs, their visual dominance in the public space, and their potential to be a platform to develop mural art in Sweden were articulated as yet another quality to the suburbs, as relevant as its multicultural youth. These meanings encouraged reputable, established artists and a recognized art institute to enroll in the social entrepreneurial initiative contributing, in turn, to mold the process of re-signification of the suburb.

The wall

Eva, Åsa and Johanna continued to meet and discuss the nature and form of the project in Husby. Åsa offered a wall in the Red Cross’ premises in Husby – a wall in a big theater room that was used by many local associations and residents for a variety of activities, from associational meetings, dance classes and concerts, to baptisms, weddings and funerals. The Red Cross wanted to start a youth center on their premises, and starting it up with organizing a group of youngsters from the area and engaging them in a mural painting seemed an ideal start. Although the wall was indoors, and so less public and less visible than the ones I had been inspired by in San Francisco, it was a rather open space and thus accessible to anyone. Further, the fact of the wall being indoors sidestepped the rather long, arduous, and uncertain process of getting the permit for “change of facade” that the City of Stockholm required when painting on the front of buildings. The state-owned property owner Svenska Bostäder possessed the premises that the Red Cross rented. And although Svenska Bostäder didn’t see the painting by youngsters of a wall in one of their premises with positive eyes, they trusted the Red Cross.

It is at this point that Åsa and I became aware of an additional attachment to the “immigrant youth” category, one that we would have to work at dettaching. More accurately, a meaning associated to the combination “immigrant youth” plus “painting in the public space.” A social meaning which we would have to work at changing if VoS was at all to exist. Namely, graffiti. Or rather, “wall scribbles.”³

Svenska Bostäder, as well as other wall owners and social actors that I had been talking with, tightly connected “immigrant youth” plus “painting in the public space” to “wall scribbles” and “damage of the public space.” Public paintings, it seemed, had a variety of social meanings attached to them. Some had worked in favor of the social venture: mural art in the urban space had interested the Royal Institute of Art and acted as a force for its enrollment. Others were working in its detriment: graffiti was radically adjured by state property owners.

The foundations

I set out to find possible funding institutions, meet with them, and prepare the application for funding. A research friend put me in contact with Yvonne Rock, a central person in several cultural institutions in Sweden. Having worked at several projects that sought to involve local communities, Yvonne liked the idea right from the start and soon involved the Foundation for the Culture of the Future.

The Foundation had a particular focus on fostering ideas, converting them into strong initiatives, and developing civil society start-ups into well-established social actors. In Voices of the Suburbs the Foundation saw the innovativeness and long-term cultural commitment it encouraged. Yet, the mission

³ Two words exist in Swedish to refer to paintings done with spray in public walls: “klotter” and “graffiti”. Although some recognize the artistic qualities of graffiti, most condemn the damage done by indiscriminate scribbling in public walls. To underline the differing meanings, I have freely translated “klotter” with “wall scribbles” while maintaining “graffiti” for its most positive sense. Similarly, I use “damage of the public space” to refer to “skadegörelse.”

of the Foundation prescribed that it was to dissolve within the coming year. As a consequence, it had ceased to fund initiatives and all funding was during that last year merely symbolic. The pilot project was granted 40,000 Swedish crowns, which was enough to pay for the painting material and for renting an artist's studio. But it couldn't possibly cover the community artist's wages nor other expenses around the initiative.

However, the Foundation for the Culture of the Future worked with what it called "idea workshops." It organized one-day long seminars around the idea or organization that was to be developed. Few key actors were invited at those workshops, actors that were relevant for strengthening the idea or civil society organization: from representatives for local actors, to civil servants and politicians that could open the right doors. The workshops were, as it were, a way to further embed the particular initiative into its local context; as it did this, the initiatives were articulated into existence. On March 2009 one such workshop was held for Voices of the Suburbs.

Yvonne Rock moderated the discussion. For over 8 hours we discussed the possibilities and potential courses of action of the early initiative. The workshop ignited optimism not only in me, but more importantly in Magnus, the representative for the City of Stockholm, a key actor whenever a wall would require permission to be painted. For instance, when discussing the groups the initiative should focus on, Magnus refused the suggestion of focusing it exclusively on a group – on women, or Somalis, or the young – with the argument that the initiative should "let a thousand flowers bloom". When the workshop ended and the company walked towards the underground station, participants, headed by Magnus, even started to point to those walls along the way that could be turned into murals.

Having the City of Stockholm's endorsement would be a quality that could later be mobilized by VoS to deal with the previous, unexpected, attachment; that of "wall scribbles." Counting with financial, even if symbolic, and institutional support from the Foundation for the Culture of the Future gave the still precarious verbal agreement between the four women the beginning of an existence; the money was granted to the initiative-to-be. With these actors on board and guided by Yvonne, the next step headed towards the Swedish Inheritance Fund. The Fund gets its capital from the properties and other possessions of those who die in Sweden without leaving testament nor family. It then uses it to

"support civil society associations and other non-profit organizations that want to test new ideas to develop activities for children, youngsters and people with disabilities in their own terms. We want to give the organizations the possibility to try out new ideas that can develop activities in various areas. [...] The goal is to develop welfare, quality of life, participation, equality of rights and opportunities as well as contribute to social, ethnic and cultural integration."

Several meetings were held at which I realized that the Inheritance Fund funded only those initiatives directed to the young. Further, it encouraged strong local involvement through collaborations with other actors active in the particular areas where the social entrepreneurial initiative was to work. That is, if the Swedish Inheritance Fund was to be enrolled, which the initiative needed for its economic viability, VoS would have to attend to its interests – involving local communities and developing civil society, as well as attending the youth and working for social, ethnic and cultural integration.

However, the Fund was asking the initiative to relate not only to the youth, but also to ethnic integration, which directly played on the division between Swedes and non-Swedes that the initiative aimed to re-signify through community-based mural art. That is, the initiative would have to frame its target group as segregated along the ethnic line, once more making them interesting for being ethnically apart, politically vulnerable, and for enjoying fewer rights and opportunities than their implicit (Swedish) counterpart. For the initiative to be deemed worth funding, ethnicity would have to be enacted.

The target group

The most central aspect was still to be decided. What group would this first mural address – women, young people, a particular cultural background, one neighborhood? Having the Inheritance Fund in

sight and the Red Cross on board influenced what group the pilot project came to focus on: the youth living in the suburb. How would the initiative engage its target group? Johanna would organize this.

First, Johanna and Filippa refined the nature of the collaboration with the Royal Institute of Art. The idea was to have Filippa's students work alongside the youth of Husby. Most students at the Institute of Art came from middle-class families with 100% Swedish background, whereas the majority of the youth living in Husby came from families dependent on social welfare and with a background in Africa or the Middle East. Most of the Arts' students had never been in the socially burdened city suburbs, while the Husby youngsters did not even know of the Royal Institute of Art. The first dreamt of becoming well-established artists, the second, simply of getting a space in Swedish society. Since I considered building bridges between social groups as a key element in the process of re-signifying the "immigrant", the initial plans were to have both groups collaborating in the production of the mural. The meaning attached to a label such as "immigrant", I argued, was the outcome and the source of underlying social relations structured along the ethnic boundary. To re-symbolize the body of the person of foreign background and the areas where she lived, I meant (and still do), work has to be done on both sides of the line, crisscrossing otherwise separate relations. "We need to generate social capital of the bridging type." Accordingly, while the mural was to be painted in Husby, some art workshops would be held in the Institute of Art.

Second, Johanna contacted the arts and crafts teacher in the Husby School. Reine was a young Swedish man with a passion for working with the youngsters in the suburbs. He immediately liked the idea and introduced the mural as part of the fall term's curriculum for the elder students, those in 9th grade (15-years old). As he later expressed it, he was interested in:

"... an outsider come[ing] into the school environment. [...] That someone from the outside comes into the school. The school is a closed environment. And now, they get to meet the Red Cross, listen about the world outside. That's really interesting!"

In his affirmation of the initiative, the teacher was thus acknowledging the importance of building bridging social capital. He, however, did not focus on trust or reciprocity, which are often the defining characteristics of social capital as well as its most celebrated outcome (Putnam, 1993). Rather, Reine brought yet a new stake into the enrollment of a new actor, opening the school to the outside world and by extension giving the youth the opportunity to look into larger Swedish society.

At this point, poor health forced Filippa to withdraw from the project. And with her, the collaboration with the Royal Institute of Art suddenly vanished. Yet, both the teacher and the students at the Husby School were excited about the day-trip to the Institute of Art and the possibility to use its workroom. Johanna contacted Lisa, a student at the Institute of Art with whom she had worked previously. Being a student at the Institute of Art gave Lisa the freedom to use its workrooms for whatever project she had going on. So Johanna and Lisa agreed on borrowing the Institute of Art's workroom for the Husby students through Lisa. In this way, the former collaboration with one of the classes at the Institute of Art and its faculty transformed into a study visit to the Royal Institute of Art which included using its facilities. This still maintained the meaning granted to the initiative by Reine, namely, opening a window in the closed world of the school towards wider society. Further, the collaboration of the Royal Institute of Art, even if minimal, also helped detach the "wall scribble" meaning to the "youth + painting" equation. It granted an artistic quality to the initiative's endeavors. Yet, the reduced collaboration came short of developing the social capital I had hoped for and saw necessary to re-signify the "million program suburb."

The application for funding

Thus far, the social initiative was a bundle of stated collaborations, frustrations over the Swedish integration debate, desires to change conservative organizational cultures, and dreams to develop mural art in Sweden. It encountered fears of vandalism in public walls, concerns for reproducing power relations structured along ethnicity, poor health conditions and lack of funding. The suburbs became host to an attractive multicultural non-middle-class youth, to inviting grey concrete walls, to potential

local communities. This set of meanings and actants, however, amounted to very little without economic capital that could give those agreements, dreams and fears a more material existence.

For that doing, I wrote an application for seed funding to the Swedish Inheritance Fund in late spring 2009. It sought funding for a first pilot project through which to “investigat[e] the interest among the youth, develop work methods and engage partners.” The arguments deployed in that text referred to the actors already engaged as well as to the variety of arguments that had been developed throughout the process thus far.

Concerning the actors, the application emphasized both Johanna’s close connection to the Royal Institute of Art and the involvement of one of its students. The involvement of one class at the Husby School was also central to the proposal given the Inheritance Fund focus on youth involvement. Formally, Voices of the Suburbs’ pilot project was to be conducted as a Red Cross project. Thus, the organizations formally involved in the pilot project would be the Red Cross, the Royal Institute of Art, and the Husby School. Further, the application mentioned the support already given by the Foundation for the Culture of the Future as well as stressed my affiliation the Copenhagen Business School and close collaboration with the Stockholm School of Economics. The list of actors not only showed the broad scope of the initiative. Building on those actors’ reputation, the text translated their symbolic capital into a sign of the initiative-to-be’s seriousness and quality.

As to what the arguments put forward concern, they were mobilize to, already in that text, start re-articulating the meaning attached to the suburbs and its residents. Accordingly, the “walls of the suburbs” were transformed into “a platform where the youth can express their cultural identities, their everyday concerns and their dreams for the future”; “the young residents of the suburbs” became active “actors in decisions concerning the public space in the suburbs” and were to be appreciated for “bringing new ideas into Swedish art and city life.”

Another attempt to start re-signifying the suburbs already in the application was the explicit avoidance of the term “immigrant” throughout the text. In the seven pages long application, the term “immigrant” (“invandrare”) appears once, and even then, it is part of a quote from a young resident of the suburbs, under the “Background” section. The quote is used to exemplify residents’ feelings of outsidership, resignation, and lack of self-respect connected to a narrow definition of Swedishness. That is, it is used to illustrate one of the negative consequences of the symbolic violence I had become aware of, and thus the need to re-address the social meanings attached to the term “immigrant” and its perceived opposite “Swede.” Instead, the terms used to describe the target group and the geographical area focused were “youth living in socio-economic vulnerable areas,” “cultural diversity”, “the suburbs”, or “the youth of the suburbs.”

In other words, the application was the textual materialization of the network of heterogeneous actors that had been enrolled throughout the social entrepreneurial process. Further, it was, too, testimony to the wide set of arguments and social meanings articulated throughout the process thus far and to consider in the struggle for re-signifying the “immigrant” signifier.

The text finally sent to The Swedish Inheritance Fund put together the varied set of social meanings that had been uncovered (or, enrolled?) throughout the social entrepreneurial process of starting-up a non-profit organization working with the production of community-based public art. In a sense, the process of starting up VoS was one of finding arguments that would turn the vulnerability of the group addressed into an attractive quality to be sought by other actors; to mobilize interests and stakes that could restructure the terrain of debate on the vulnerable suburbs; to enroll actors that could contribute with their reputation and recognition (symbolic capital) to the reformulation of the immigrant youth.

Discussion: Enrolling actors to re-articulate the symbolic

The same questions that opened up this paper also guided the social entrepreneurial initiative studied. These questions had to do with the possibility of social change in the realm of the symbolic. How to re-symbolize the meaning of a stigmatizing category such as the “immigrant”? What resources can be used in efforts to re-articulate the discourse on the immigrant? What are the logics of argumentation

and persuasion pursued by social entrepreneurial actors in their efforts to achieve social change in the symbolic realm? How do such initiatives work in their aim at structuring the terrain of public reasoning and debate? Given the research background of the initiative's leader (me), what usually are second order concepts became first order concepts in the initiative's praxis and self-reflection.

The paper uses Callon's notion of the qualification of goods to deploy the efforts of the social entrepreneurial initiative to re-signify the "immigrant" by qualifying its target group as well as its methods. Accordingly, the process of engaging partners, searching funds, and refining the initial idea becomes one of defining the target group to be addressed, formulating the social change to be pursued, and rehearsing the arguments to be deployed in the effort to re-articulate dominant discourse. That is, what is at stake in negotiations between funding institutions, potential partners and the entrepreneurial initiative is the qualification of the vulnerable group whose situation is to be changed and the services to be offered to that aim. In that qualification process, aspects other than those coming from the group itself are instrumental. More particularly, the actors own stakes in a larger scale.

Thus, the "immigrant youth" became a way toward the necessary renewal of an sclerotic organization (Red Cross stake in the initiative), of failed outreach processes (the Royal Institute of Art). Similarly, the "immigrant suburb" was transformed into a canvas on which to visualize the heterogeneity of voices and stories coming from the suburb and develop mural art in Sweden (the Royal Institute of Art). The re-signification of the "immigrant" was thus clothed as youth participation and local democracy (the Swedish Inheritance Fund), and pursued through bridging together marginalized and established youth (the socio-material basis for a changed symbolic realm).

By that doing, a large network of actors, each composed in turn of a variety of (social, symbolic and material) elements, were successively mobilized. Åsa's, Johanna's and my social and symbolic capital together with non-human components such as the wall or the money from the Foundation for the Culture of the Future, were bundled together into a text that was then submitted to the Swedish Inheritance Fund. The text effectively transformed social and symbolic capital into economic capital when the Inheritance Fund granted the money.

The social entrepreneurial process can thus be considered an assembling process: The process of enrolling a heterogeneity of elements (both human and non-human), ordering them (through the arguments and epistemes used to describe the growing network), and (at least temporarily) stabilizing them.

In other words, the social entrepreneurial process of an initiative aiming at change in the symbolic realm was that of finding arguments that would turn the vulnerability of the group addressed into an attractive quality for well-established, recognized actors and organizing those actors into a network that worked complementarily towards the intended change.

Finally, as Judith Butler reminds us, "social transformation occurs not merely by rallying mass numbers in favor of a cause, but precisely through the ways in which daily social relations are re-articulated, and new conceptual horizons opened up by anomalous or subversive practices." (Butler, 2000, p.14). The subversive practices in which *Voices of the Suburbs* engages implies re-articulating the social relations reinforced by the terms it aims at subverting. Thus, along the way it establishes relations between groups that otherwise would never meet, such as the student of the Royal Institute of Art and those of the Husby School. Symbolic change, the initiative seems to propose, goes both through reformulating the categories we use to perceive the world and through dislocating the relations at the origin of those categories. The first effort struggles to avoid the unifying effects of the name/category. The second strives to re-structure the relations perpetuating the categories.

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Appendix: Enrollment diagram or string of associations for pilot project

T i m e L i n e	For pilot project	
	Ester	
	Ester + Åsa/Red Cross	
	Ester + Åsa/Red Cross + Johanna/Royal Institute of Art	
	Ester + Åsa/Red Cross + Johanna/Royal Institute of Art + wall	
	Ester + Åsa/Red Cross/wall + Johanna/Royal Institute of Art + Foundation for the Culture of the Future -> Wall is firmly associated to Åsa.	
	Ester + Åsa/Red Cross/wall + Johanna/Royal Institute of Art + Foundation for the Culture of the Future + Royal Institute of Art (klass)	
	Ester + Åsa/Red Cross/wall + Johanna/Royal Institute of Art + Foundation for the Culture of the Future + Royal Institute of Art (klass) + Husby School -> Initially, Husby School is associated to Johanna.	
	Ester + Åsa/Red Cross/wall + Johanna/Royal Institute of Art + Foundation for the Culture of the Future + Royal Institute of Art (elev) + Husby School (Personal reasons oblige Royal Institute of Art faculty to withdraw from the pilot project. A student instead. This incidence opens up the actor Johanna, revealing the fragility of her associations.)	1st substitution
	Ester + Åsa/Red Cross/wall + Johanna/Royal Institute of Art + Foundation for the Culture of the Future + Royal Institute of Art (elev) + Husby Skolan + proposal (text) + Swedish Inheritance Fund	
Ester + Åsa/Red Cross/wall + Johanna/Royal Institute of Art + Foundation for the Culture of the Future + Royal Institute of Art (elev) + Husby Skolan + proposal + Swedish Inheritance Fund = Pilot project		