

Developing a theory of social art therapy: insights from the context of crisis

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The COVID-19 crisis has exerted far-reaching impacts on both community and global levels, necessitating novel social development strategies. In Europe, issues like loneliness and social breakdown have exacerbated post-pandemic. Within this context, art therapists have emerged as vital contributors to community well-being. Utilising innovative techniques and settings, they have expanded the scope of art therapy practices and adapted to the exigencies of the crisis. Professional associations have further supported these practitioners through webinars and supervision groups, facilitating considerable development in community art therapy.

The focus of this paper is to present social developments following our recent publication, as well as an overview of social art therapy theory, an emerging field that synthesises community evaluation, systemic approaches, and social strengths into a coherent epistemology. As the acute phase of the pandemic subsides, the art therapy community faces a crucial moment to develop and codify this practice-based knowledge. This endeavour entails a thorough integration of various components, including setting, the role of art and therapists, ethical considerations, and evaluation methods. Such integration provides a comprehensive framework that equips art therapists to tackle community crises effectively, in collaboration with other professions like nursing and psychology.

Models from social work describe frameworks responding to community crises requiring a collective, transformative orientation instead of individualistic interventions. This aligns with broader social paradigms like post-structural, critical feminist and radical post-humanist theories, which are not yet dominant in art therapy but are essential for extensive social engagement. Thus, the paper aims to articulate and ground these developments within a theoretical framework influenced by social theories of community and art therapy.

See also: Huss, E., Havsteen-Franklin, D. (2023). Developing a theory of social art therapy: Insights from the context of crisis. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 85, 102066.

Biography

Prof. Dominik Havsteen-Franklin is a British clinical academic and art therapist. A Professor at Brunel University, he specialises in developing innovative arts-based healthcare interventions. His international research and leadership roles, including as Vice President of the European Federation of Art Therapy, extend his impact globally.

Prof. Ephrat Huss chairs an MA in Art Therapy for Social workers at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel. She has published over 80 articles and 6 books on art therapy and arts-based research within social contexts. She is on the board of EFAT, the European social workers association, and runs a SIG on social arts in the European social work association. Her most recently published books are: *Arts Based participatory research in social work* (Policy Press) and *Using arts to transform society* (Routledge).

Recent publications and conference presentations

Huss, E., Havsteen-Franklin, D. (2023). **Developing a theory of social art therapy: insights from the context of crisis.** *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 85, 102066.

Havsteen-Franklin, D., de Knoop, J., Agtarap, T., Hackett, S., & Haeyen, S. (2023).

Evaluation of an arts therapies approach to team development for non-acute healthcare teams in low control and high-pressure environments. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 83, 102003.

Huss, E. (2012). **What we see and what we say: combining visual and verbal information within social work research.** *British Journal of Social Work*, 42(8), 1440-1459.

Huss, E. (2015). **A theory-based approach to art therapy: implications for teaching, research and practice.** Routledge.

Hafford-Letchfield, T., & Huss, E. (2018). **Putting you in the picture: the use of visual imagery in social work supervision.** *European Journal of Social Work*, 21(3), 441-453.