

Resources and Empowerment

Worksheet

By Karen Johne (translated by Susan Hoppert-Flämig)

The word *resource* may remind us of raw materials, money, and other material things. In our context, it relates more to the English prefix *re-* (back) and the word *source* (back to our sources) and to the Latin origin *resurgere* (to rise, to stand up). Achieving our aims and taking the necessary steps towards the aims, we can find us in situations which bring us to our – individually very differently perceived – limits. In these situations, we either tend towards overload, for example, when we cannot feel ourselves, we narrow our perception, we are at a loss. Or we can access our resources in order to buffer what we consider to be straining, stressful and exhausting, so that we do not feel powerless but we can rest and then continue.

Activist work, as I experienced it in the majority of cases, has established very few rituals or structures to support activists in rising or standing up again. My experience in the collectives and groups I work with (and as a part of these groups) is that there is always one final effort needed for the good cause, then there will be time to rest. But then, something unforeseen occurs and the breaks for regaining energy and resources are cancelled. Added to this, activists often facing increasing hostilities from the outside, e.g. shit storms, personal attacks and threats, delegitimization, smear campaigns etc.

In addition, in the activist field, we often find a culture of limitlessness, which means limits become a taboo. Activists who feel limits often do not articulate them fearing that they will be considered weak or not really convinced by the cause or that they will be excluded. Often, we find narratives in groups about former group members who violated the taboo and thus became traitors. Through such narratives, an implicit, normative conformity regarding the taboo is created which links the articulation of limits to exclusion, guilt and shame. People go beyond their limits, become ill, make heavy mistakes, hurt themselves and others, and then often withdraw abruptly and completely from the activist spectrum, so that groups fall apart and important political work remains discontinued.

Similar to our dealing with nature's resources, we do not seem to have a resource friendly way with ourselves and with the groups we are a part of, which means often we do not care for the sources of our power and energy. We are more likely to perceive what we miss, where we (apparently) fail and where we doubt ourselves and our capabilities, or even despair. Allowing for our doubts to be present is important because they can help us to feel our limits while approaching our aims. At the same time, we know from trauma research that emotional peak experiences like stress, excessive overload, trauma and even happiness and great joy are difficult for us to withstand because they require a lot of energy in our nervous system.

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But to some extent, we can train the ability to not ignore joy, happiness, satisfaction and gratefulness but to access and keep them as re-sources, for example by becoming aware of them, by feeling them. By doing so can help us remain regulated on our way to the aim.

Here are a few examples for resources I would like to share:

- Experiences we gained in similar situations and successive insights and abilities as well as the efficacy we developed through the experiences
- Feeling our needs for meaning (to ourselves and others)
- Imaginations about how it could be (a vision) and how it would feel; imaginations that suggest it is worth facing the demands
- Our faith (in ourselves, in others), religious systems of values, spirituality
- People that are close, relationships, supporters (present ones as well as voices from the past that encourage or comfort us), role models
- Knowing that we are loved and liked, unconditionally and even when we fail
- Feelings and physical sensations
- Places that let us regain energy
- Access to material means etc.

I have created two audios for the next session that refer to our physical sensations as a resource. Check them out on the website and try them!

Your first task until the next session: work in couples about resources

- Set up a meeting with your partner for no longer than 30 minutes. During this time, you are an interviewer and an interviewee each for 10 minutes. As an interviewee, it is your task, within 10 minutes, to name as many resources as possible that will help you to realise your steps of change from the last task. Resources are all the things mentioned above and everything that gives you power and energy. The role of the interviewer is to listen lovingly (this is less about understanding but about being in touch with the essence of what is told), to stimulate the flow of resources by asking questions and to make short notes about the resources given. After 10 minutes, the interviewer reads out loud the resources that were mentioned. You may want to talk about how you felt during the interview. Then you swap roles, and do the interview for 10 minutes with the other person, a short recap by the interviewer and a short exchange.

There is also an individual task for the next session which you find on the worksheet *“My action plan”*.