

NDN dialogue papers

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NDN dialogue papers

dialogue: more than
a tool, less than a
magic fix

september 2011

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with the collaboration of NDN Offices and focal points in the field.

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INTRODUCTION

What is dialogue? Is it “The Solution” to conflicts? Is it “The Key” to peacebuilding?

Or is it, as many in the international community claim, a useless and weak tool that is leading nowhere?

For the Nansen Dialogue Network, dialogue is much more than a tool, but also less than a magic fix. For us, it is essential that dialogue and reconciliation become strategic and central elements of peacebuilding.

Dialogue and reconciliation should be recognized by the international community, as necessary parts of any peacebuilding process. Dialogue is not an alternative to mediation or negotiation, but both could benefit from a stronger dialogue component.

The aim of this publication is to share our ideas, concept and approach to dialogue as a tool for conflict prevention, reconciliation and peacebuilding.

We sincerely hope dialogue workers – and especially those working at local level, with the community – will find this publication interesting and useful.

Nansen Dialogue Network
September 2011

A CONVERSATION ON DIALOGUE WITH....

STEINAR BRYN,

founder of the Nansen
Dialogue Network



Born in Oslo, Norway in 1954, Steinar is not only an academic and a practitioner of dialogue: as a good Leo he is a complex, fascinating, generous and warm human being.

His connection to what we can call the “Nansen Spirit” started very early, in 1973 when he was student at the Nansen Academy in Lillehammer.

In fact, after his 1973 experience as a student he said to himself: “Steinar, this is it”. And since then he has worked at the Academy as teacher, director and researcher.

He went to the USA to obtain his Ph.D. in American Studies (Euro-American relations) from the University of Minnesota. His dissertation was on «The Americanization of Norway».

1995 was a milestone in his career and life: he developed the idea of the Nansen Dialogue Network (NDN) and that has been his life since.

Since the early years of NDN, he has facilitated more than 300 dialogue seminars and workshops, mainly with participants from the Western Balkans, but also from the Middle East, Caucasus and Somalia.

He is a father of four (and already a young grandfather). He still continuously wonders if his opposition to a standardized way of life made it easier or more difficult for his own children to survive in a very instrumentalist world.

He loves long distance driving, listening to Elvis Presley and to play chess for money in Washington Square Park, NYC. A very American combination, don't you think.

Steinar is a very sociable person and a wonderful host: his home in Lillehammer, and mainly his veranda, is experienced as one of the most peaceful and cosy places in the world by thousands of people from former Yugoslavia and from all over the world.

Q.- Steinar, you are known as a great story teller. I am sure that this conversation on dialogue will be connected to the many stories you can tell after so many years involved in dialogue processes. Am I right?

SB.- Of course. In fact during this conversation I will tell somehow a story which begins in 1995 when Nansen Dialogue Network started working in the Balkans. The expertise and know-how on dialogue I will share during our talk are based on the many hours of dialogue meetings where, people, real people, told their stories, their painful memories, their fears and hopes.

Q.- Let's start with the dialogue meetings and seminars. How did you approach those meetings in the early days of NDN, when the conflict was still so close to people?

SB.- We started in 1995 and until 1997, all dialogue meetings took place in Lillehammer.

extremely important to start the dialogue process in a safe and neutral place, in our case Lillehammer. These dialogue meetings focused mainly on understanding what happened and why. This was the point of departure. And in 2000 and 2001, when the conflict spread to other areas of the Western Balkans (South Serbia and Macedonia) we kept using the same approach even if we expanded operations.

Q.- If I understood correctly, Lillehammer and the Nansen Academy became a kind of “safe house”, a protected environment to start the dialogue process, somehow an essential part of your methodology.

SB.- Indeed, the use of Lillehammer and the Academy was, and in some occasions still is, an important part of our approach: making all parties in conflict feel more secure and free to share their stories. If you want to promote and support a process of real dialogue you need to find “your Lillehammer”, a place

which can help people to speak freely and which contributes to increase the feeling of equality and respect among participants.

Q.- Equality and respect. And what about relationships?

SB.- You are right. The dialogue meetings in Lillehammer were and still are an effort to build stronger and long-lasting relationships amongst participants. And also the dialogue meetings aim to generate an understanding of the fact that, political difference, can and must coexist within a democratic society.

Q.- Dialogue as a tool for better understanding?

SB.- Definitely. Dialogue is a tool which can increase understanding and respect between different ethnic groups and cultures. To understand ethnic and cultural tolerance is a precondition for the democratic development of a societies or states marked by ethnic (or mono-cultural) politics and/or social discrimination. But it is not only about pure dialogue work...

Q.- What do you mean?

SB.- Our experience show us that to “stay” in pure dialogue work was not enough. We soon incorporated dialogues around concrete issues in order to start generating small but concrete successes: experiences of integrated and bilingual education, interethnic cooperation in divided municipalities, repatriation to ethnically mixed villages, etc. Talking and doing things together is our approach to a dialogue process. This is the way we work even today in every country where NDN is operating.

Dialogue, Lillehammer and Norway

Q.- Let's go back to Lillehammer and Norway. What did (and what do) participants in NDN dialogue activities learn from Norway?

SB.- Very early we realized that the important issue was not what participants in our dialogue activities could “learn” from Norway, but the fact that Norway and the Nansen Academy provided a space where they could come together and compare and share experiences, notes, simply to talk and listen. Norway was also a neutral space where the participants could analyse what happened

and why, far away from the conflict area and from pressures of family, friends or colleagues.

Q.- Being away, in Norway, helped them in changing perceptions?

SB.- Yes, it is true. In Lillehammer they allow themselves to interact with participants from other ethnic identities in multiple ways. The fact of being in Norway contributed to the transformation of the perception of the Other. The Other became much more than just the representative of another ethnic group. In addition, through staying together in a neutral environment for relatively long periods of time, relationships and friendships started emerging and developing across ethnic or cultural divides.

Q.- It seems to me that to change the perception of the Other is one of the important outcomes of a dialogue process. And that only through changing the perception of the other you can start a process of reconciliation and building a shared future, am I correct?

SB.- One of the consequences of a violent conflict, of a brutal breakdown as in the case of Yugoslavia, is the equivalent breakdown in terms of communication. Suddenly you stop communicating with the Other. In addition, many times the only news and information



that you have from the Other or about the Other is the one you received filtered by the nationalistic propaganda. In an environment like the one in Lillehammer there is really nowhere to hide. It is a beautiful, rather small and boring town with most of the local people staying in their homes: it is the ideal place to take it easy and start listening to each other.

And when you listen to the Other and the Other listens to you, it becomes obvious how one's own nationalistic media had given a one-sided version. Participants in the dialogue sessions discover that they have not been informed about the atrocities committed by their own people against the Others.

Discovering the complexity of facts together

Q.- I suspect that discovery of these facts made the temperature of the room raise...

Yes, indeed. In this type of dialogue sessions there are moments with very intense debates amongst the participants. It is normal and the dialogue process facilitator needs to keep calm and be able to manage those moments of debate and tension. Even if it can be painful, the participants start realizing that in order to get the full picture one had to listen to other stories and other explanations.

Q.- Does this mean that through the dialogue process participants rediscover the complexity of facts?

SB.-The participants expand their horizons. It just means that a complete analysis of a conflict -the preparation of the ground for a further reconciliation- must include different perspectives and historical narratives. This was so evident to us that, at one point, we started to name the seminars in Lillehammer "Expanding Horizons".

Q.- Do participants in a dialogue process change their political views?

SB.- Over the years we have realized that perhaps we have not had a direct impact in changing fundamental political beliefs or political goals. But I can say without hesitation that we have observed that an outcome of dialogue is a vision of the world that is, simply, more inclusive. A new way of thinking emerges, the one that also includes understanding the other side.

Q.- Dialogue and negotiation... do you draw a line during your dialogue seminars?

SB.- Absolutely. Many times we even stress that in our invitations: a dialogue seminar is not a negotiation. Neither is a trial.

Q.- A trial?

SB.- Yes, do not be surprised. Quite often, the participants would like the dialogue facilitator to be a judge who confirms their own perceptions of reality.

Q.- So, Steinar, dialogue is about talking and listening... and much more

SB.- It is not only about the physical act of talking and listening, it is about minds opening up. And it takes time for the mind to warm up, to get ready and receptive toward other "competing truths". To invite opposing parties into a dialogue room is different from inviting them to a negotiation table.

Dialogue and peacebuilding

Q.- The dialogue facilitator (I know that you prefer the expression, dialogue worker) is then not the mediator in a negotiation process?

SB.- No the dialogue facilitator or worker must be able to make both sides feel safe enough to start telling their stories. If the participants start to feel that the facilitator clearly supports certain truths, or to push for a kind of negotiation or bargain, that will interfere with the dialogue process itself and can cause one of the sides to withdraw. Sharing "competing truths" in a dialogue space might not be that different from discussing the same issues...

Q.- And in a negotiation?

SB.- In a negotiation people position themselves; they become more defensive; and it is harder to see any movement in the positions. In a negotiation it is much more difficult, almost impossible to open and change your mind.

Q.- Between 1996 and 2001, as far as I remember, you were running dialogue seminars together with your colleague and friend Dan Smith (nowadays Secretary General of International Alert). Together you developed some methodological elements which I think it can be useful to share with less experienced dialogue facilitators.

SB.- With pleasure. Something I consider especially useful is what Dan said about the focus of the facilitation: not to focus on who is right or wrong but to concentrate on "how we

got there and how we can get out of here”. This approach is helping a lot in analyzing root causes, triggers, catalysts and, most important, in moving forward towards a better and shared future.

Q.- Dialogue and peacebuilding. Is dialogue a “magic fix” which can solve quickly key political problems in the post-conflict situation?

SB.- No, dialogue is not a quick fix to solve problems like constitutional status, repatriation, economic development, etc. Dialogue is a tool to increase understanding between parties after a conflict or before a conflict, as dialogue is also a tool that can help us to reduce the risk of violent conflict. My argument is that dialogue and reconciliation must not become a neglected element of peacebuilding. It must be recognized by the international community that dialogue and reconciliation are a necessary part of the peacebuilding process. Dialogue is not an alternative to mediations or negotiations, but both could benefit from a stronger dialogue component. Furthermore, a solid process of dialogue will help enormously, for instance, to create a common ground that will allow economic cooperation and sustainable development to flourish.

Lessons learnt

Q.- Looking at NDN dialogue activities in the field it seems to me that your approach is very much community-based, connected to the local level.

SB.- Yes, in fact it is. In some articles I wrote in the past I even said that our work on dialogue and reconciliation is community-based peacebuilding. We are mainly working locally, at municipal and community level, with the local actors and local population.

Q.- I am sure many dialogue workers and peacebuilders will read this interview, so allow me to ask you about the lessons you have learnt on dialogue and reconciliation. Can you share with the readers the lessons learnt during so many years?

SB.- First of all, I learnt the need to be neutral in facilitating dialogue. I learnt about the importance of creating a space where the

participants feel open and free to share their experiences, reflections, thoughts and feelings.

Q.- That’s not an easy task. I suppose that sometimes participants will put you under pressure.

SB.- Indeed. They put pressure: they wish me to be the judge. And, of course I have my personal opinion, but in “the dialogue room” I cannot allow myself to become a judge. A tip in relation to this: if I need to I often say “Yes, if I were you – I would have thought the same”. This sentence has a certain logical consistency, and can be very comforting to a person in a direct conflict.

Q.- In other words the pressure on the facilitator is to push him to say in public, in the dialogue room, who are the good guys and who are the bad guys....

SB.- Yes, to say who are the “angels” and “devils”. Another lesson learnt: the ability to commit acts of violence, atrocities and crimes is more equally distributed than we first like to think. Let me tell you a short story: as a child I learned that “bad Germans attacked good Norwegians”. Later I learned that reality was more complex: many bad Norwegians helped the bad Germans. As I grew older I learned that some Germans were rather good, believing they came to Norway to help us get



Steinar Bryn and Noam Chomsky during a conversation panel (Oslo, September 2011)

a better life. They helped us with food and in some cases even fell in love. And later in my life I fully understood the brutal bombing of German cities and the massive punishment and killing of German citizens...

Q.- In other words, you have learnt that a dialogue facilitator must help people to see

and understand the complexity of the conflict...

SB.- Yes the facilitator needs to help participants in a dialogue session to listen to each other, to become aware of crimes and atrocities perpetrated by their own people. And here there is a tricky element: people in deep conflict do not wish for win-win solutions. They want the other side to pay. They can even sacrifice themselves a bit if the others are punished hard.

Q.- *You mean that they want the Other (and the others) to be punished and to taste their own medicine?*

SB.- Yes, something like that. The lesson is that through dialogue both sides learn that the other side maybe have already “tasted too much of their own medicine”. And that it is now even time to change the whole “medication”. As a facilitator I deliberately try to motivate participants to find win-win solutions.

Q.- *Can a dialogue process help people to know what really happened and to move from there?*

SB.- I am not arguing that the following is true, but my experience after so many years facilitating dialogue seminars is that people do not know everything that happened. The one-sided propaganda on all sides stresses the victim mythology, and does not inform properly about the repression or crimes committed by one’s own people. The perception of the other as perpetrator is often rooted in actual events; it is the perception of one’s own deeds that is distorted. Even when an actual event can be known on both sides, long term consequences of the same event are not shared. And dialogue helps to change the perception of things as you listen to the stories of the others.



NDN approach to dialogue

Q.- *I would like to finalize the interview by asking you to briefly summarize what you think it is the NDN concept of dialogue and what is the strength of NDN approach to dialogue processes.*

SB.- For us, dialogue is a way of communicating where human beings listen to each other and, through listening, may change perceptions of the stories they hear. For us a real dialogue does not include giving up your own identity. It is a tool to increase the understanding between the different ethnic and cultural groups and parties in conflict. In the case of ethnically divided countries, such an understanding will be the support to democratic political, social and economic development.

I honestly think that the strength of our approach is that it moves participants in our dialogue activities away from looking at each other as the main problem. Our approach leads them to seeing how structural factors, such as the very segregation itself, represent the problem. It helps the parties reduce the strong blaming of the Other, creates new spaces to build or re-build relationship and to create healthy human interaction in post-conflict societies.



Steinar Bryn was interviewed by **Angel L. Vidal-Alonso**, former official of the United Nations System, external adviser to the Nansen Dialogue Network and adviser to the Danish communication group Eye-for-Image.

A FEW BASIC CONCEPTS, TIPS AND TRICKS ON DIALOGUE

This section of the publication aims to provide a few basic and clear concepts on dialogue as well as some tips and tricks on the facilitation of dialogue processes that have been learned from experience.

It is simply a modest contribution that may help present and future dialogue workers to understand the basics of dialogue from a practitioner point of view.

On the meaning of dialogue

- Conversations for the purpose of uncovering the shared meaning of problems and situations and improving the understanding of the Other
- A process where individuals, groups and organizations engage in listening and exchanging ideas and experiences with the aim of:
 - ➔ Understanding better the roots of problems and conflicts
 - ➔ Finding common needs
 - ➔ Finding common interest
 - ➔ Discovering common values and
 - ➔ Building a common vision for the future

In a dialogue process the intention is...

- To INQUIRE (and not to advocate)
- To EXPLORE (and not to argue)
- To DISCOVER (and not to convince)
- To FIND COMMON GROUND (and not to negotiate)



Dialogue is a powerful tool to be used in handling tensions and social unrest before, during and after conflict and violence outbreaks

When an external and neutral person and/or institution is helping the parties to go through a process of dialogue, we usually say that the process is a “facilitated dialogue”

You must always remember that the facilitator of a dialogue process IS NOT...

- The mediator of a debate
- A negotiator
- The referee in an arbitration process
- The judge of a judgement process

A dialogue facilitator is a listener, a very good listener. But what kind of listener?

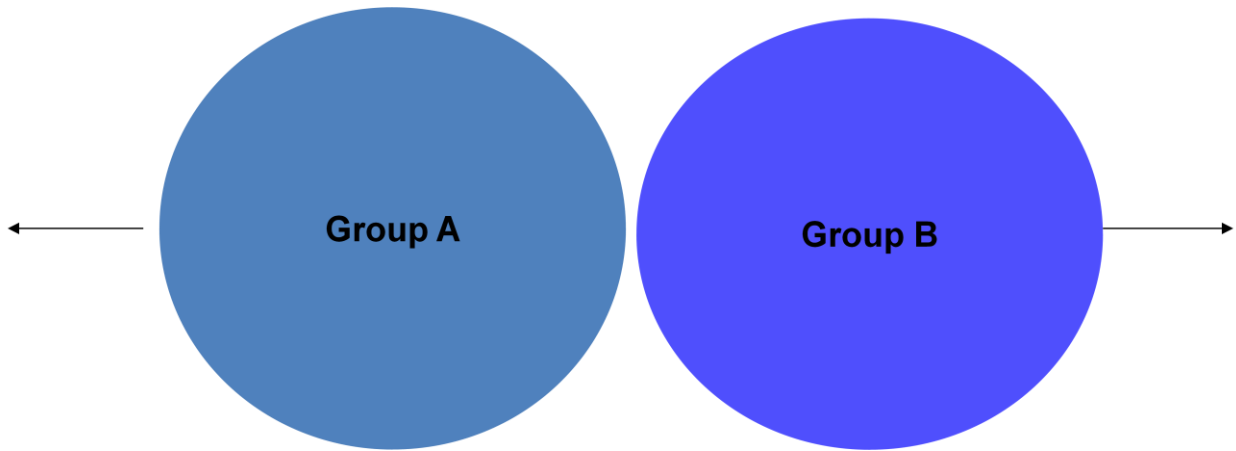
A listener with “four ears”:

- The ear for **FACTS**: what are the objective facts behind a message?
- The ear for **RELATIONSHIPS**: what’s the message telling of the way relationships are working?
- The ear for **SELF REVELATION**: what does the message reveal about the person speaking?
- The ear for **APPEAL**: what does the speaker wants to see happening? What is his/her plea?



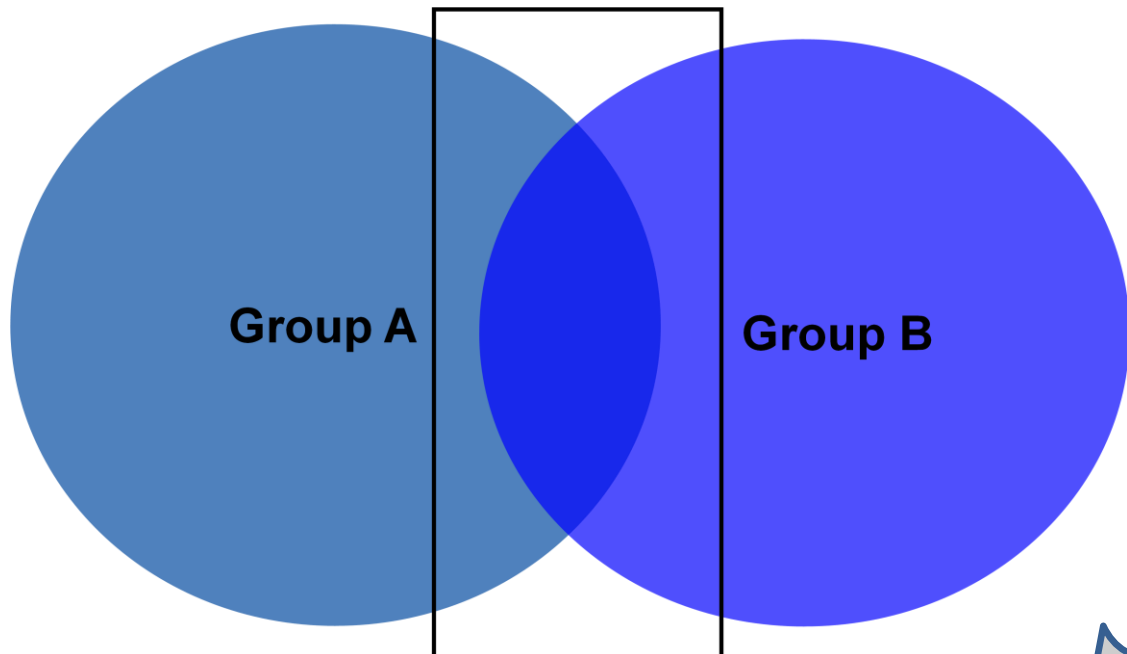
The goal of a dialogue facilitator is to transform the group dynamics

from
conflict situation

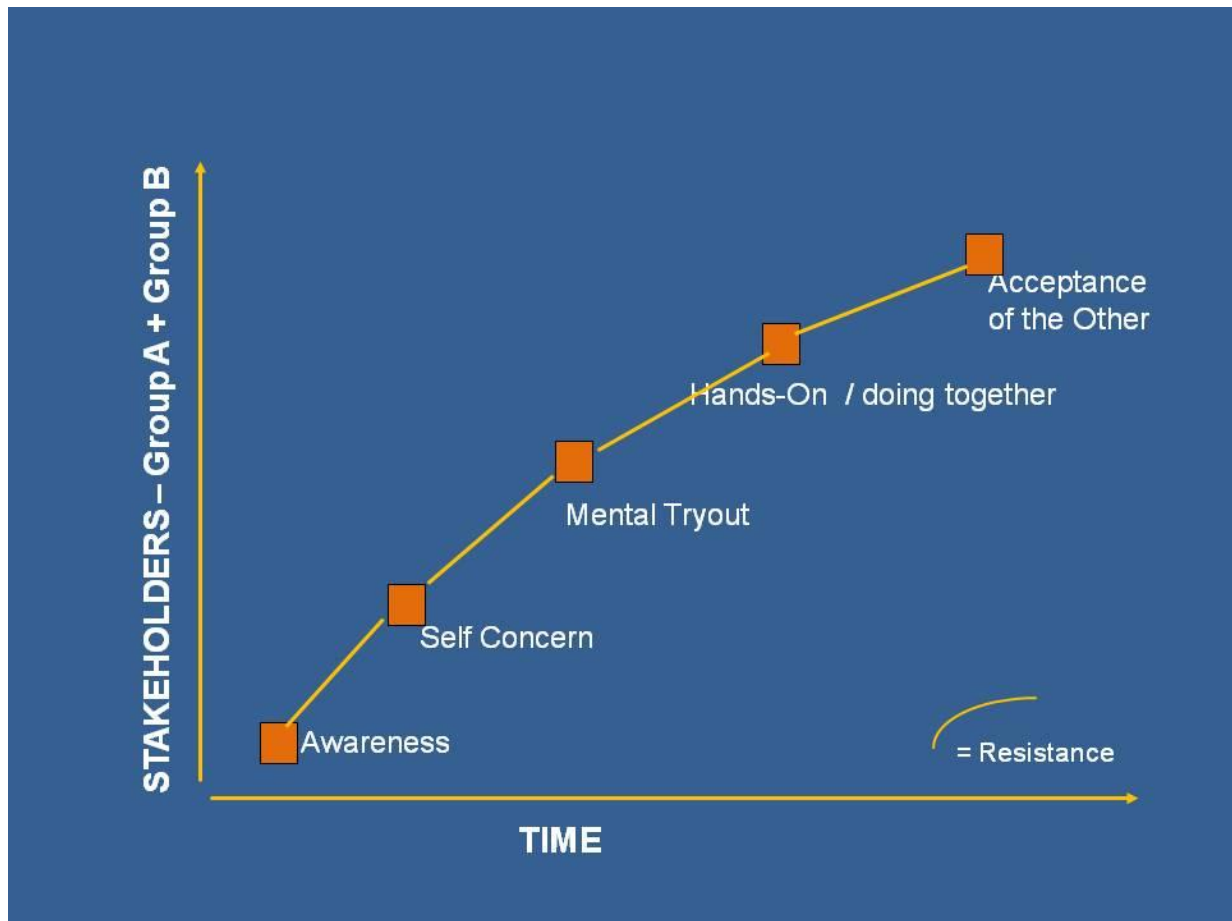


to
dialogue situation

- Deeper and more objective knowledge of facts
 - Wider perspective
 - Better understanding of the other
 - Increased willingness for cooperation



- A dialogue process needs time, patience, persistence.
- Long term commitment is essential.
- Dialogue is not a quick fix: facilitators and their institutions cannot disengage after providing some limited support
- Effective support to dialogue processes may take years



For a successful dialogue process the facilitator should...

- Have a long term and holistic perspective: moving today towards a share future.
- Be able to listen and understand what is said... and what is not said.
- Be pro-active and on time (to intervene in the right moment, not too early, not too late).
- Have capacity to locate and create safe spaces (physical and mental), hands-on spaces, forums, etc. that can facilitate the creation of connections, networks and trust amongst the participants in the dialogue process.
- Be able of working with both, the top (authorities, decision makers) and the bottom (people, citizens, grass-roots organizations).
- Have a good media and social media strategy (society is always watching!)
- Be able of connecting local, national and international dynamics.
- Be independent, neutral, do not take position.
- Have a values-based approach.
- Be pragmatic.



Keep always in mind that...

- Facilitation must be oriented to strengthening the local ownership
- You can use different types of events during the dialogue process:
 - ➔ Informal talks
 - ➔ Forums
 - ➔ Dialogue seminars
 - ➔ Social, cultural and sports events
- Sometimes it is essential to combine joint and separate dialogue frameworks. A separate conversation with Group A and/or B can pave the way to a successful dialogue seminar with Group A and B together.
- In the 21st Century the creation and use of “virtual” dialogue spaces (using social media such Facebook, blogging, wikis, etc.) can make a very positive contribution to dialogue and reconciliation.

The screenshot shows the Facebook page for the Nansen Dialogue Network. The page header includes the Facebook logo and a search bar. The main content area displays the Nansen Dialogue Network profile, including a cover photo, a wall with a post about an event for tomorrow (15.9.2011) organized by OSCE, and another post about expanding education activities in Macedonia. The left sidebar shows the network's name, mission statement, and navigation options like Wall, Info, Photos, and Events. The bottom of the page features logos for the International Crisis Group and the International Peace Bureau.

Practical aspects are also important, so do not underestimate logistics and organization!

- When organizing a dialogue seminar choose the right premises from both the operational and the symbolic point of view
- The set up of the dialogue room/rooms is very important also from the symbolic point of view. For instance, dialogue circles (in different forms) are very useful and, in some cultures, even essential.



- Have all the equipment you need available. Make sure that it is working properly before you start the dialogue session (and have a back up ready just in case something fails).
- If you are the facilitator of the dialogue and you have support staff helping you, brief them about required behaviours, roles and possible “emergency” plans in case the session is not going as smooth as expected.
- Make sure that all staff involved in the facilitation of the dialogue shares a common attitude: to be at the service to all participants and supportive to the whole group.

A final tip for dialogue facilitators

During a dialogue seminar or session.....

- Be present (but not overwhelming)
- Use your:
 - ➔ “Four ears”
 - ➔ Knowledge
 - ➔ Training
 - ➔ Experience
 - ➔ Instinct
- Manage time and timing in a smart way (and do not forget that time have different meanings in different cultures....)
- Be proactive
- Be systematic
- Be flexible
- Do not focus on who is right or wrong: concentrate on “how we got there and how we can get out of here”



NDN AND DIALOGUE: SOME EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

Bujanovac, Serbia “Inter-ethnic governance is possible”

Place



Bujanovac is a town in southern Serbia, neighbouring Kosovo and which is populated by a thin Albanian majority to a Serbian minority and a rather significant Roma community.

Therefore it was suffering the impact of the consequences of the entire Serbian-Albanian relationship which at one point resulted in an armed conflict lasting between the autumn of 2000 and the spring of 2001.

Background After the ceasefire in the spring of 2001, the clashes between Serbian state security and Albanian guerrilla stopped, but the effects of the conflict and the effects of the reasons for the conflict mostly remained.

NDC Serbia found itself before a complicated task to mobilize the deeply divided communities to work together both in removing the negative impacts of the long-time political/ethnic conflict as well as the consequences of the armed conflict and in providing a stable and productive joint effort in the process of further development towards a peaceful and constructive future.

NDC Serbia introduced in 2002 a long-term programme for providing continuous, effective dialogue both with decision makers and with important social institutions.

Dialogue process and milestones The aim: to simultaneously secure an immediate impact at political decision-making levels and a long-term impact through stabilizing key institutions and strategic sectors:

- local self-government,
- political parties,
- educational system,
- media
- economic environment.

By the end of 2002, it was established a secure dialogue space to demonstrate the importance of interethnic work. This space was the NDC Bujanovac office in which local staff of different ethnic background started working together.

The office quickly gained the reputation of a non-partisan, professional dialogue service, highly active in supporting all processes of building critical decisions concerning the social and economic development of Bujanovac.

The main task was to follow and influence main political decisions makers and make them move towards stabilizing a proper and genuinely interethnic government in Bujanovac.

Furthermore, efforts have been placed in securing a better political representation for all communities in Bujanovac.

In the process of securing a proper Roma representation, which lasted from the spring of 2004 to the summer of 2006, we helped the establishment of a Roma political party that operates on the basis of regular political work and which participated in the 2006 elections and won two seats in the local Municipality.

It was the first success of this kind in the West Balkans region when it comes to the Roma political representation.

As part of the interethnic dialogue process NDC Serbia supported the transfer of know-how in relation to modern management of a local government between Lillehammer Municipality and the local government of Bujanovac.

Various projects with Bujanovac youth, media, and women have been developed as a support system to continuous inter-ethnic dialogue

Impact

- 2006 – Roma minority consolidated its participation in the social and political life of Bujanovac through winning 2 seats in the local government.
- The permanent town-twinning agreement between Bujanovac and Lillehammer ensures continuous improvement in the areas of education, management and political administration. All ethnic groups are involved in the development of the specific activities.
- 2010 – The first ever democratic and totally multiethnic local government of Bujanovac took office.

Majdanpek, Serbia “Citizens-municipality dialogue”

Place



Background

After enjoying the status of a county for 237 years and being the administrative centre of Donji Milanovac Municipality for 10 years, in 1966 Donji Milanovac was stripped of the status of municipality.

By the then Law, it was determined that the Municipality of Donji Milanovac was to be cancelled and its territory be added to the Municipality of Majdanpek.

Since 1966 until present, the citizens of Donji Milanovac and the surrounding villages have been striving to return the lost status of municipality.

The Municipality of Majdanpek as a territory is one of the largest municipalities in Serbia.

According to the latest census there are 23 national minorities living in Majdanpek with the Vlach community being the largest among them.

In 2009 the Municipality of Majdanpek launched a "new" initiative for the division of the municipality, but the citizens were not involved in the discussions about this process.

By the end of 2009 and within the “Development Through Dialogue” project, NDC Serbia launched a local campaign for dialogue between the citizens and the Municipality regarding the division of the Municipality.

Dialogue process and milestones

With the help of local partners public discussions have been organised in villages as well as street campaigns and the launching of a website called "Tvoj glas" (Your Voice www.tvojglas.rs) which offers the opportunity to citizens to get the information on the municipality division process, municipal decisions, strategies and plans relevant to this process.

At the same time, these activities have secured a feedback to the local authorities about what citizens think about the municipality division process, what are the attitudes of the national minorities and what rights must be guaranteed if this division happens.

In this way the dialogue between the citizens and the Municipality on this issue has been initiated, and the local government can hear the attitudes of citizens that the local communities' territories cannot be divided, that comprehensive preparations to introduce a second language (Romanian) must be carried out – since the Vlach national minority will make up more than 15% of the population in the new Municipality of Majdanpek, which will constitute legal rights for this language to become official, and also that economic decline of the remaining Majdanpek Municipality must be prevented if this division should take place.

Impact

- 2009 – Facilitation by NDC Serbia of the beginning of the dialogue between the citizens and the municipal government
- 2010 – Creation of the web site “Your Voice” www.tvoiglas.rs
- The citizens belonging to all 23 national minorities are united in their position that one should work towards the sustainable economic development of the whole municipality and thus enable better living conditions for all inhabitants, especially in the villages.
- As a consequence of the dialogue process facilitated by NDC Serbia, the local government has postponed the division process in the Municipality until all elements (new census, new law of territorial organization of Serbia, development issues, etc.) have analyzed and taken into consideration

Jegunovce, Macedonia “Reconciliation and reintegration”

Place



Jegunovce Municipality is a rural and multiethnic municipality, located in the Northwestern part of Macedonia.

It consists of 17 villages and it has about 10.000 inhabitants, 53% Macedonians, 45% Albanians and 2% others.

In 2001, this municipality has been affected by the armed conflict and, as its consequence, it was established the ethnic division of the Central primary school of the village of Semsovo in which about 650 Macedonian and Albanian students studied together.

Background

The majority of inhabitants in Semsovo is Albanian (around 90%) and after the school has been divided, the Macedonian students have abandoned the school and continued their education in the neighboring ethnic Macedonian villages, whereas the school in Semsovo became ethnically clean and only Albanian students studied there.

The conflict and the division of the school have also resulted in division of the municipality on ethnic basis. Interrupted communication and cooperation, high interethnic tensions, mistrust between the Macedonians and Albanians, fear and limited freedom of movement were just part of the consequences from the conflict.

Due to the situation above NDC Skopje decided in 2005 to start its programme for reconciliation in Jegunovce Municipality.

Dialogue process and milestones

The programme core was and still is to facilitate the dialogue and the collaboration between local authorities, Directors of schools, teachers, students from the primary schools (Macedonians and Albanians) and their parents.

The focus of the Programme has been put on education, using the

dialogue and the activities around education as a catalyst for the reconciliation and collaboration of Macedonian and Albanian students.

Numerous dialogue seminars have been organized with local politicians, teachers and parents of the students the goal being trust creation and rebuilding relationships.

In 2006 informal inter-ethnic educational activities started (IT and English language courses).

Since then the courses have been organized regularly in the primary schools in four villages, in mixed ethnic groups, and the lectures have been realized in two languages, Macedonian and Albanian.

In the second half of 2006, NDC Skopje opened two cabinets for learning the Macedonian and Albanian language as the students expressed their interest for learning the second language in a more consistent way, through courses.

In parallel with the extra-curricular activities and informal education, actions for improving the premises and infrastructure of the schools in Jegunovce municipality have been implemented.

In 2007 and as a product of the dialogue process local authorities and parents of the students, supported by NDC Skopje, started to develop the idea of opening of an Integrated Bilingual Primary School.

The preparations lasted for about a year and with the assistance of the Ministry of Education and Science of Macedonia, Jegunovce municipality and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway on 01 September 2008, the first Integrated bilingual primary school "Fridtjof Nansen" in Jegunovce municipality was opened.

The success of this school has contributed to the opening of the first Integrated Bilingual Secondary School in Jegunovce municipality and Macedonia, in September 2010.

- 2006 onwards - Extra-curricular activities: the ethnically mixed groups and the bilingualism in the lectures have been accepted well by the parents and more than 250 students attend every year to the lessons.
- 2007 - As a product of the dialogue process the idea of creating an Integrate Bilingual School starts being developed
- Impact → 2008 – The first Integrated Bilingual Primary School "Fridtjof Nansen" was opened.
- 2010 – The first Integrated Bilingual Secondary School was opened.
- The interest for such model of schools is increasing in other municipalities as well and there is a tendency for opening new integrated and bilingual schools in Macedonia.

Bratunac, Bosnia & Herzegovina “Return through Dialogue: interethnic work in the Elementary School Petar Kočić”

Place



Background

The Elementary School “Petar Kočić” is situated in North-East Bosnia, in Bratunac Municipality.

It consists of two separate buildings: the main one located in a Serb populated village, Kravica, and a field school located at 10 km, in the Bosnian returnees’ village Konjević Polje.

Both villages experienced extreme atrocities and violence during the wartime in B&H. Many people were killed; many were forced to move out, many houses were destroyed.

As a consequence there has been almost no interethnic communication among the population, relations were very tense, always at the edge of conflict, and the school is strictly divided according “ethnic curricula”.

Though taught by the same teachers, in Kravica school premises students have been following the “Serb curricula”, while in Konjević Polje students have been following the “Bosniak Curricula”; it is almost needless to say that the classes in both school has been mono-ethnic in a mono-ethnic environment.

However, there are number of students who have been living in the surrounding villages which are not mono-ethnic. Regardless of the fact that they show the school building from their houses, and that they will be teach by the same teachers, the students from those villages where forced to travel 10 or more km every day to attend the school that offers their “ethnic curricula”.

Dialogue process and milestones

Due to this situation, NDC Sarajevo decided, back to 2006, to initiate and support a process of dialogue within the communities with the aim of encouraging the (re)establishment of interethnic communication among students, parents, and generally among the population.

NDC Sarajevo’s approach was gradual, very cautious and holistic.

The first phase was to work with the school administration and teachers.

They all attended a number of dialogue-related training where they improved their skills in interethnic and non-violent communication, conflict

management, awareness on human, and particularly on children rights.

During this process the school administration and teachers became not only supporter of the NDC's work but an "engine" of improvement if not transformation of interethnic relations in the entire region.

A parallel and similar process was implemented with parents. At the beginning there was resistance, hesitation, even obstructionist behaviour of some of the parents. It took a lot of time and patience, many months of discussions, face to face talks, going back and forth.

Finally, after gaining trust and with a significant help of the school administration, parents begun to support the work.

Moreover, they even initiated and started the joint interethnic work of rebuilding some classrooms and cleaning the schoolyard.

In these rebuild classrooms, on the parents initiative, their children started extracurricular classes – IT and English Language.

Having IT in one village and the English Language in the other, the students travel again: but now to be together, not ethnically separated! And this is probably unprecedented practice in the post-war B&H, all against trends of ethnical homogenization.

This was just a beginning..

- Impact
- 2006 – The dialogue process started.
 - 2007 – Inter-ethnic work to rebuild and improve classrooms.
 - 2007 onwards – Inter-ethnic extracurricular activities begin... and continue even today (IT, English, sports, drama, folklore, etc.)
 - 2008 – Establishment of the inter-ethnic Parents Council.
 - 2008 - For the first time after the war, the population from different ethnic groups came together for the School Day Celebrations and got involved in the support to the new (territorial) multiethnic students' football teams.
 - 2009 onwards – The level of multiethnic participation in the School Day Celebrations increased enormously.
 - Nowadays this positive trend and dynamic continues and the interethnic activities in and around school and in these communities are still going, even without NDC's or any outer support.

Stolac, Bosnia & Herzegovina “Education for all. Bridging the differences in Stolac”

Place



Stolac is municipality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, located in the southern part of Herzegovina. Stolac is situated in the area known as Herzegovina Humina, on the tourist route crossing Herzegovina and linking the Bosnian mountainous hinterland with the coastal regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dubrovnik and Montenegro. Thanks to the town's natural environment - geological composition, contours, climate, hydrographic and vegetation - Stolac and its area have been settled since ancient times

Before the intervention of NDC Mostar in 2008, the situation in Stolac schools as a consequence of the ethnic division was:

Background

- Two curriculum, two shifts
- No joint extracurricular activities for students and low cooperation between two student councils
- No projects nor activities that gather teachers and students from both ethnical groups
- No opportunity for students and parents to participate on capacity building seminars
- No functional parent councils and low level of parents engagement in school activities as such
- Principals are under the influence of politics
- The rare occasions where teachers and students meet or talk are workshops/seminars, NGO initiatives (such as NDC Mostar)
- Distrust and relatively negative perception towards the NGO activism due to the past bad experience (relates mainly to parents and local authorities)
- Lack of communication between teachers

<p>Dialogue process and milestones</p>	<p>In 2008, NDC Mostar defined a clear strategy in relation to Stolac: to contribute to enhance relations between different ethnic groups in the town of Stolac and to develop through a dialogue process an inclusive and integrated educational system in Stolac schools.</p> <p>NDC Mostar started promoting and supporting a dialogue process that involved teachers, students, parents and local authorities</p> <p>NDC Mostar worked with the above-mentioned groups in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebuilding relationship among all actors in the School itself - teachers, principals, students, parents • Promoting and supporting cooperation in developing common activities: dialogue through doing together, through joint work • Institutional and administrative integration inside the schools <p>Within this strategy it was expected to achieved a sustainable rebuilding of relationships across ethnic borders and between all actors in the school.</p> <p>In addition a key goal was to establish/re-establish work and cooperation based on jointly defined needs within the school and the community and not according to ethnic criteria.</p>
<p>Impact</p>	<p>→ 2008 - 2011:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first classroom for joint activities (Nansen classroom) was renovated and opened as a result of joint and voluntary work of the teachers, students and school management. • As a result of months of joint work of teachers and NDC Mostar team, a relevant number of joint activities and projects were planned and implemented within the period. • A News Club was created and is fully operational (the first inter-ethnic student body created through process of empowering and cooperation of amongst student councils). • Parents inter-ethnic working established and working. • Local authorities & leading political parties that were not very keen to cooperate across ethnic borders are now involved in activities within the school (through parents and teachers' groups). • Local politicians have started to generate joint projects & initiatives in relation to the schools and, in general, in relation to the community.

Vukovar, Croatia “Integrated and intercultural education”

Place



One of the consequences of the war and the peaceful reintegration that followed is the division of some areas of Eastern Croatia along ethnic lines.

The most direct consequence for the future of this area is, as pointed out by various researchers, the segregation of the children through the educational system, beginning at kindergartens and ending at the high schools. Children of different ethnic groups are attending classes in separate classrooms, shifts, and even buildings.

Especially the segregation is very severe between Serbian and Croatian children even if in the Baranja region there are 24 different nationalities, and before the war 27 different ethnic groups lived only in Vukovar).

Background

Divided education plays a key role in segregation of children, discouraging development of understanding among various national groups and encouraging discrimination.

Another challenge is the non-existence of intercultural learning. In the present education system in Croatia, majority learns mostly about itself (history, culture), while minorities (in scope of minority education) will learn about majority and almost autistically about one's own minority. There is no learning about each other, and local specificities are omitted.

Within that framework, already in 2003, NDC Osijek started a slow process of dialogue with teachers, parents and students to improve the situation and to start reverting the segregation

<p>Dialogue process and milestones</p>	<p>From 2003 to 2006 parents and teachers went through a number of dialogue seminars and workshops, lectures and study visits to create trust and start finding alternatives to the problems generated by the segregation.</p> <p>In 2006 teachers, parents and a group of experts developed curriculum for the intercultural subject “Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of the Region (CSHR)”. CSHR It is enabling children of different nationalities in a multicultural community to learn about the cultural heritage of all ethnic groups that live in the region, so that they get to know each other, understand and respect their differences. CSHR openly promotes integration and tolerance and provides pupils with intercultural competences.</p> <p>After a positive evaluation by the Education and Teacher Training Agency of Croatia (May 2007) and after a recommendation for the introduction into regular schools, the subject CSHR was been offered to schools in the region and three schools implemented a three-year pilot project, supported by the Ministry of Education and Osijek-Baranja County.</p> <p>Programme activities, conducted in the three years, were within a set of thematic units, common to all of the three schools (religious symbols and folk customs, crafts and specific domestic products, architecture development, significant people of the region, native languages and scripts, migration, regional history and mythology , regional arts) - through project and field work, in the form of creative workshops, visits to museums, institutions, and the networking of schools – join meetings of students and teachers.</p> <p>Since school year 2007/08 CSHR started its implementation in region. For three years it was implemented in three primary schools, as a pilot project,</p> <p>Since the school year 2010/11 CSHR is implemented in eight primary schools in the region. Feedback from children has been extremely positive, with a higher interest of new children to apply every year, with high attendance and no drop-outs, which is a very important indicator of the quality of the programme (it is an elective programme, so selecting CSHR at the begging of the school year is completely voluntary).</p>
<p>Impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ 2009 – an independent external evaluation concluded “...the implementation of CSHR among pupils had a positive impact on their attitude towards others, which is extremely important for the further development of relations within their group, between groups, but also in future in their relations as individuals”. ➔ At the present, the most important impact of the CSHR is that it helps bring children together in divided schools and also the development of intercultural competences among children and teachers essential not only to overcome the consequences of war and encouraged the process of establishing trust between members of different ethnic groups, but also as a preparation for future life in a united, multicultural Europe.

Mitrovica, Kosovo

“A dialogue that must continue”

Place



Background

The situation in Kosovo has been complex and with constant conflicts since the start of conflict in ex Yugoslavia, situation which culminated with the war in 1998 – 1999.

Unfortunately not everything ended with the end of the war: disputes continued well beyond that and continue to the present day with various levels of intensity.

Main clashing point in Kosovo remains divided city of Mitrovica. Kosovan Nansen Dialogue focused its work in Mitrovica in one of very few ethnically mixed areas where Serbs and Albanians live together: Kodra e Minatoreve/Mikronaselje

The interaction between Serb and Albanian communities in Kodra e Minatoreve/Mikronaselje lacked in institutionalized level and private level as well, and it was even deepened after 17th of February 2008 when Kosovo declared Independence.

The interaction of the two communities happened in rare cases, as Albanians use Kosovo institutions while Serbs use Serbian ones (schools, hospitals, transport etc.)

Dialogue process and milestones

Kosovan Nansen Dialogue (KND) began work in Kodra e Minatoreve-Mikronaselje part of Mitrovica in late 2007, with the aim of establishing regular contacts between representatives of KND and Serbian and Albanian community members

The idea was to start a slow process of dialogue in order to tackle issues of common concern for the community -ranging from education to health-, improve interethnic relations, ease tensions and equip inhabitants with skills to deal with a volatile situation which can change very rapidly in Mitrovica.

Kosovan Nansen Dialogue started its work with area leaders, by linking them in formal dialogue meetings in Mitrovica, and establishing these

meetings on regular bases.

At the same time Kosovan Nansen Dialogue worked with area youth, who as opposed to their parents did not speak any common language and did not have any interaction whatsoever in the years following the war of '99.

During all this time, even nowadays, KND organized numerous interethnic dialogue meetings, workshops, seminars and excursions for all age groups of Kodra e Minatoreve/Mikronaselje

During these meetings and events KND dialogue facilitators assessed the needs of the community and with their support, in 2009 established a Community Centre in the area which is used by both Serbs and Albanians.

The Community Center is used for a wide range of activities: ethnically mixed English and ICT classes, conflict resolution workshops, meetings of the community leaders.

In 2010 also within the Community Center Kosovan Nansen Dialogue established multiethnic library "Fridtjof Nansen" with over 1.300 books in Albanian, Serbian and English language which is used by all inhabitants of Kodra e Minatoreve/Mikronaselje.

Impact

- During all these years Kosovan Nansen Dialogue had to deal with many obstacles, like prejudices and enemy images that were formed over the years of conflict between the communities but also with the frequent incidents which are happening in Mitrovica between Serbs and Albanians and which reflect negatively in Kodra e Minatoreve/Mikronaselje.
- However and despite all the tensions, KND has managed to stimulate the daily contact between Serb and Albanians.
- The Community Centre is still operational and inter-ethnic activities are taking place on a regular basis.

NDN dialogue papers

dialogue: more than a tool, less
than a magic fix



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