



JOURNAL *of* DIALOGUE STUDIES

Special Issue

**Dialogue with and among the Existing,
Transforming and Emerging Communities**

Guest Editors:

Prof Anwar Alam

Dr Mary Earl

Dr Scherto Gill

Dr Paul Hedges

Prof Karim Murji

Dr Amina Yaqin

Prof Paul Weller



INSTITUTE
for
DIALOGUE
STUDIES

2021

Volume 9

Journal of Dialogue Studies

Volume 9

2021

Special Issue

Dialogue with and among the Existing, Transforming and Emerging Communities

Guest Editors:

Prof Anwar Alam

Dr Mary Earl

Dr Scherto Gill

Dr Paul Hedges

Prof Karim Murji

Dr Amina Yaqin

Prof Paul Weller

Editorial Team

Academic Editor: Prof Paul Weller - Executive Editor: Dr Ozcan Keles
Assistant Editors: Dr Mustafa Cakmak, Dr Mustafa Demir, Frances Sleaf

Editorial Board

Prof Ronald Arnett <i>Duquesne University</i>	Prof Eddie Halpin <i>Orkney College UHI</i>	Prof Ali Paya <i>The Islamic College</i>
Prof Michael Barnes <i>University of Roehampton London</i>	Dr Carool Kersten <i>Kings College London</i>	Dr Fabio Petito <i>University of Sussex</i>
Prof Joseph Camilleri <i>La Trobe University</i>	Prof Simon Keyes <i>University of Winchester</i>	Prof Simon Robinson <i>Leeds Beckett University</i>
Prof Donal Carbaugh <i>University of Massachusetts Amherst</i>	Prof Ian Linden <i>St. Mary's University Twickenham London</i>	Dr Erkan Toguslu <i>University of KU Leuven</i>
Prof Tony Evans <i>Winchester University</i>	Dr Johnston McMaster <i>Trinity College Dublin</i>	Prof Pnina Werbner <i>Keele University</i>
Dr Cem Erbil <i>Dialogue Society</i>	Prof Karim Murji <i>University of West London</i>	Dr Nicholas Wood <i>University of Oxford</i>
Prof Max Farrar <i>Leeds Beckett University</i>	Prof Alpaslan Ozerdem <i>George Mason University</i>	

The Editors appreciate comments and feedback from readers. They also value any help in increasing circulation in order to fulfil the Journal's objective, which is to bring together a body of original scholarship on the theory and practice of dialogue that can be critically appraised and discussed.

Aim and Scope

The Journal of Dialogue Studies is a multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed academic journal published once a year. Its aim is to study the theory and practice of dialogue, understood provisionally as: meaningful interaction and exchange between people (often of different social, cultural, political, religious or professional groups) who come together through various kinds of conversations or activities with a view to increased understanding. The Journal is published by the Institute for Dialogue Studies, the academic platform of the Dialogue Society.

Submission and Editorial Correspondence

Manuscripts submitted to the Journal for publication must be original, meet the standards and conventions of scholarly publication, and must not be simultaneously under consideration by another journal. Manuscripts should be presented in the form and style set out in the Journal's Style Guide.

For further information and Style Guide please visit www.dialoguestudies.org. To get in touch please email journal@dialoguesociety.org.

Subscription

The Journal of Dialogue Studies is published once a year. Annual subscription – Institutions: £15 + p&p; Individuals: £10 + p&p; Students/Concessions: £7.5 + p&p. For further information or to subscribe please email journal@dialoguesociety.org. Except where otherwise noted, the authors of papers and reviews alone are responsible for the opinions expressed therein.



**INSTITUTE
for
DIALOGUE
STUDIES**



**CENTRE
for
COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT**



**CENTRE
for
POLICY
OUTREACH**

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

EMPOWERING ENGAGEMENT

INSPIRING IDEAS



**DIALOGUE
SOCIETY**

LONDON 1999

Registered Charity
No: 1117039

www.DialogueSociety.org

The Journal of Dialogue Studies is a multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed academic journal published once a year by the Institute of Dialogue Studies, a subsidiary body of the Dialogue Society, which undertakes the Society's academic work including research, academic workshops and publications.

The Dialogue Society is a registered charity, established in London in 1999, with the aim of advancing social cohesion by connecting communities, empowering people to engage and contributing to the development of ideas on dialogue. It operates nation-wide with regional branches across the UK. Through discussion forums, courses, capacity building publications and outreach it enables people to venture across boundaries of religion, culture and social class. It provides a platform where people can meet to share narratives and perspectives, discover the values they have in common and be at ease with their differences.

Journal of Dialogue Studies

2021
Volume 9

First published in Great Britain 2021

© Dialogue Society 2021

All rights reserved. Except for downloading and storing this publication from the Dialogue Society website for personal use. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means or stored or made available on any information storage and retrieval system without prior written permission from the publisher.

ISSN 2054-3123

Contents

Editorial Introduction

Curating Spaces of Hope: Exploring the Potential for Intra-Communities' Dialogue (ICD) and Faith-Based Organisations, in a Post-COVID Society

Matthew Barber-Rowell..... 11

Caring and Power-Sharing: How Dialogue Influences Community Sustainability

Luisa Conti..... 34

A Place-based Approach to Online Dialogue: Appreciative Inquiry in Utrecht, the Netherlands during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Evelyn Henderson-Child..... 53

Community Campus as Threshold: A Space of Dialogue for Academia and the Community

Robert Brown, Paul Warwick, Zoe Latham, Rachel Manning, Seb Stevens..... 70

Exploring the Potential of Cross-Regional Dialogue Platforms in Protracted Conflict Settings

Marko Lehti, Élise Féron, Vadim Romashov & Sebastian Relitz..... 97

The Cohesion of Schools as Communities in the Management of COVID-19 Pandemic: Reflections, Narratives, Fears and Hopes from the Voices of Children in England and Italy

Federico Farini, Claudio Baraldi & Angela Scollan..... 120

Dialogue within and among Transnational Communities of Refugee Learners and Teachers: Covid-19, Dialogic Pedagogy and Dialogue Across Research Teams

Tony Capstick..... 149

Dialogue Method: A Proposal to Foster Intra- and Inter-community Dialogic Engagement

Rafael de Araujo Arosa Monteiro, Renata Ferraz de Toledo, and Pedro Roberto Jacobini..... 164

Dialogue: A Promising Vehicle to Steer Transformative Local Change towards More Sustainable Communities?

Nora Ratzmann, Anna Hüncke, and Julia Plessing.....189

REFLECTION: Connected or Separated? Transformation of Muslim Student Community in Japanese University under the COVID-19

Hiroko Kinoshita.....210

REFLECTION: Rethinking the Possibility and Meaning of Dialogue in a Globalised and Religiously Diverse World: A Mid-Covid Perspective from Southeast Asia

Paul Hedges.....228

Editorial Introduction

Dialogue with and among the Existing, Transforming and Emerging Communities

Communities have been designated as secure, physical, and emotional comfort zones for individuals and have unofficially regulated and codified relations between their members. There are communities in which people have a common interest or passion; communities that are united around the idea of bringing about change; communities of people who belong to the same region or country; communities that comprise people of the same profession; and finally, communities of circumstance, that is, groups of people who came together as a result of external factors.

More than a physical entity, a community is about commonalities, and it creates attachments. Like other social structures, communities always harbour their own values while they may have some underlying liabilities for individuals. However, community is an evolving phenomenon. Communities emerge, transform, and disappear in response to the context they were born into. Today, traditional communities exist side by side with new and emerging communities, ranging from online forums and social media groups to online gaming communities.

As such, new communities emerge every day and challenge traditional views on what a community is. In the life cycle of communities, 'dialogue' comes into the picture as a prominent instrument facilitating their transformation and evolution. It is dialogical engagements (inter- or intra-community) of the individuals that allow these social structures to evolve and transform.

In this issue of the Journal of Dialogue Studies, we have nine papers and two reflections that explore the theme of Dialogue with and among the Existing, Transforming and Emerging Communities. The papers are divided into the following themes – *Migrant Communities, Sense of Belonging, and Conflict Resolution; The Transformative Aspect of Dialogue and Emerging Communities; Dialogue Spaces and Communities.*

In his article titled 'Curating Spaces of Hope: Exploring The Potential For Intra-Communities' Dialogue (ICD) And Faith-Based Organisations, In A Post-COVID Society', Matthew Barber-Rowell analyses the role and functions of faith-based organisations in the post-Covid era, while discussing their potentials in terms of intra-community dialogue. Furthermore, the author discusses faith organisations in rela-

tion to the public sector and analyses how partnerships between faith-based organisations and the public sector can create new spaces of dialogue and engagement.

Luisa Conti ('Caring And Power-Sharing: How Dialogue Influences Community Sustainability') explores the potential influence of dialogue on community sustainability. Starting with an analysis of the roots of the concept of community, Conti discusses the meaning of community for individuals. Finally, through an online simulation game, Conti explores the effects of dialogue on inclusivity on the community and societal levels.

In 'A place-based approach to online dialogue: An Appreciative inquiry in Utrecht, The Netherlands during the coronavirus pandemic', Evelyn Henderson-Child (independent researcher) sets out to explore the place-based online dialogue meetings of Utrecht in Dialogue (UID), a local dialogue organisation, to understand how such dialogues can improve community cohesion and how they attract people who may or may not attend a dialogue meeting in person. By doing so, Evelyn Henderson-Child manages to trace the unique contributions of such online dialogues to Dutch society.

In 'Community Campus as Threshold: A Space of Dialogue for Academia and the Community', authors Robert Brown, Paul Warwick, Zoe Latham, Rachel Manning, and Seb Stevens discuss community campus as a space of dialogue, in relation to its relevance to both communities and academia, through the concept of the threshold.

Marko Lehti, Élise Féron, Vadim Romashov and Sebastian Relitz in 'Exploring the Potential of Cross-Regional Dialogue Platforms in Protracted Conflict Settings' discuss the potentials and limitations of international peace-building efforts in the promotion of reconciliation in societies with protracted conflicts. In addition, the authors successfully analyse the potentials of a cross-regional dialogue organised by third parties, allowing independent and diverse opinions to emerge and facilitate the dialogue process.

In 'The cohesion of schools as communities in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflections, narratives, fears and hopes from the voices of children in England and Italy', Claudio Baraldi, Federico Farini, and Angela Scollan listen to and analyse the concerns and hopes of pupils and teachers in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, at a time when the governments of Italy and the UK were weighing the possibility of closing down the schools. Working with 50 focus groups, the authors facilitate an open discussion on the difficulties and dialogic issues this situation brings in the educational context. Finally, they evaluate the role of the classroom as a dialogical community in fostering dialogue and integration.

Tony Capstick in his paper 'Dialogue within and among transnational communities of refugee learners and teachers: Covid-19, dialogic pedagogy and dialogue across research teams' discusses the role and functions of dialogue with and within transnational communities, particularly in relation to teachers and learners from refugee groups. Furthermore, the author analyses interactions between individuals in online spaces in terms of dialogic engagement and explores how displaced teachers and learners were affected by Covid-19 restrictions and their unique challenges in online dialogues.

In their paper 'Dialogue Method: A Proposal to Foster Intra- and Inter-community Dialogic Engagement', authors Rafael de Araujo Arosa Monteiro, Renata Ferraz de Toledo, and Pedro Roberto Jacobi introduce a dialogic method to facilitate dialogic engagement within and between communities, providing practical examples of how to do and how not to do dialogue, inspired by dialogue theories of David Bohm, Paulo Freire and William Isaacs.

In 'Dialogue: A promising vehicle to steer transformative local change towards more sustainable communities?', Nora Ratzmann, Anna Hüncke, and Julia Plessing evaluate the potential of dialogue to bring positive change to local communities. By taking the example of the German city of Marburg as a case, they specifically explore the role of dialogue in socio-ecological transition and climate neutrality. Finally, the authors argue that dialogue could be a self-reflection space to allow different stakeholders to contemplate and re-evaluate local climate policies.

In addition to the nine papers highlighted above, in 'Rethinking the Possibility and Meaning of Dialogue in a Globalised and Religiously Diverse World: A Mid-Covid Perspective from Southeast Asia', Paul Hedges reflects on the current meaning and perspectives of dialogue, exploring dialogue thinkers and scholars who are less recognised and acknowledged in academia and the study of dialogue in general. As such, Hedges brings to the discussion a range of dialogue practitioners and thinkers, from Daisaku Ikeda to Peruvian sociologist Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa and de-colonial scholars such as Frantz Fanon. By doing so, he enriches our understanding of dialogue beyond a Eurocentric and Western-centric dialogic perspective.

Finally, in 'Connected or Separated? Transformation of a Muslim Student Community at a Japanese University under COVID-19', Hiroko Kinoshita reflects on the role of the Covid-19 pandemic in bringing changes to a community of Muslim students at a Japanese university. Tracing the effects of the pandemic on higher education institutions, Kinoshita discusses how the Muslim student community at Kyushu University has been impacted by the restrictions that came with the pandemic. Kinoshita also analyses the dialogue among the Muslim students in these times of social distancing and isolation and how they maintained a sense of community, and

concludes that online dialogues cannot replace the importance of dialogue in person.

Curating Spaces of Hope: Exploring the Potential for Intra-Communities' Dialogue (ICD) and Faith-Based Organisations, in a Post-COVID Society

Matthew Barber-Rowell¹

Abstract: During this paper I will consider the role of Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) in connecting and resourcing communities through partnerships with the public sector, and the potential for partnerships of these kinds to inform curation of new spaces of hope, engagement, and practice, in a post-COVID society, using intra-communities dialogue. First, I will explore intra-communities dialogue (ICD). I will present ICD as the process of mapping and listening to shared matters of concern and socio-material practices that emerge from secular and religious actants who share and shape the same postsecular public spaces. Second, I will argue that to use ICD a new understanding of FBOs is required. Therefore, I will consider the deficit of understanding of FBOs within the literatures and propose a synthesis of different typologies of FBOs through the production of a new paradigm of FBOs, called Spaces of Hope. Third, I will use Spaces of Hope to open up the socio-material nuances of space within three FBOs, Mustard Seed, Beacon Community and Old Town Church (OTC) and address four matters of concern for FBOs: different practices, different spheres, different scales and different beliefs. This will show how Spaces of Hope can resource and support ICD within and between FBOs. Finally, in light of the capacity of Spaces of Hope to engage in ICD and map postsecular spaces, I will conclude by questioning how Spaces of Hope might support postsecular partnerships through ICD within a post-COVID society.

Keywords: Dialogue, Intra-communities dialogue (ICD), Postsecular, Spaces of hope, Faith-based organisations, FBOs, Post-COVID society, COVID-19, Assemblage, Affect, Difference

Introduction

Through this paper, I explore the concept of ICD. I propose ICD be understood in the following terms: mapping and listening to shared matters of concern and socio-material practices that emerge from secular and religious actants who share and shape the same postsecular public spaces. To justify this perspective, I open up the

¹ Dr Matthew Barber-Rowell is a William Temple Foundation Research Fellow. He completed his PhD at the Faith and Civil Societies Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London, with the support of a Temple Scholarship.

‘socio-material nuances of spaces’ of partnership between local authorities (LAs) and FBOs using the Spaces of Hope paradigm. I conclude the paper by considering how this might be relevant for post-covid society. First, I set out ICD using the conceptual lens of the postsecular (Habermas 2008), to open up the difference and creative potential between religious and secular actants. Whilst the postsecular is contested, I see that it offers a helpful lens to develop understanding of ICD. Second, I turn to FBOs, as key proponents of ICD. I set out the deficit of understanding of FBOs in public policy and practice (Johnsen 2014). I identify multiple typologies of FBO in terms of 1) scales (Cnaan et al. 1999, 2) beliefs (Smith 2002, 3) practices (Herman et al. 2012); and 4) spheres (Cloke and Pears 2016). I then offer synthesis of these different typologies using the Spaces of Hope paradigm, exhibiting a new means of engagement between FBOs and LAs. Using case studies from three FBOs, Mustard Seed, Beacon Community and OTC, I show how the ‘socio-material nuances of space’ enable mapping and listening to shared matters of concern and socio-material practices that emerge from secular and religious actants who share and shape the same postsecular public spaces. Finally, I consider the potential for ICD and FBOs for post-COVID society.

ICD

I will explore ICD as the process of mapping and listening to shared matters of concern and socio-material practices emerging from secular and religious actants who share and shape the same postsecular public spaces. ICD addresses the difference and creative potential that secular and religious affect can have on FBOs and LAs. To develop my argument, I will turn to the postsecular.

The postsecular is contested. Parmaksiz (2018) dispassionately notes ‘the concept cannot be much more than an eloquent way to disguise a sophisticated religious revivalism’ (p.111). Beckford (2012) finds six definitions, arguing the postsecular is discussed widely but lacks meaningful definition or application (pp.2-13). Others argue the postsecular either describes swaths of history recognised in other literature or ignores existing literatures regarding religion. See, Kong (2010); Ley (2011); Wilford (2010) Calhoun et al (2011).

Whilst contested, I see that the postsecular provides a contextually appropriate lens to view and differences between religious and secular actants. Olson et al (2013) notes: ‘Postsecular theory is concerned with understanding the coproduction of the religious and the secular in modern societies and the discourses, practices, and moral and political projects associated with this coproduction’ (pp.1423-1424). I will argue the postsecular aids understanding of ICD between FBOs.

I begin here by defining the religious and secular for a discussion of the postsecular. Religion and Secular are not binaries in postsecular spaces.

Religion: the conditions of being and cultural systems of belief and faith practice that seek imperfectly to interconnect humanity with the spiritual and transcendental

Secular; a political project to deny religion a place in the affairs of state; an imperfect social structure designed to limit conflict by privileging universal human rights above any religious demands (Clope, et al. 2019, 1).

Jurgen Habermas adopted and popularised the term postsecular. Habermas (2005) stated 'a postsecular self-understanding of society as a whole in which the vigorous continuation of religion in a continually secularising environment must be reckoned with' (p.26). Habermas (2008) sets out three concepts that shape the postsecular. The first is 'Sonderweg' (special path) that the western world has embarked upon. Habermas argued this was being disrupted by ruptures of religious content spilling out into the public space². The pertinence to ICD is captured in the following:

Rather than just condemning what he didn't like, Habermas struggled to articulate a theoretical account that would make sense of sharing citizenship with those who offer reasons rooted more in faith than reason and who sometimes reach troubling, literally terrifying conclusions (Calhoun, Mendieta and VanAntwerpen 2013, 3).

This sense of how the postsecular steps into difference and creative potential is speaking in response to religious inspired terrorism. This is the 'dark side' of the postsecular³ (Clope et al. 2019, 2). As I will show, ICD can express the more hopeful affective flows of postsecular partnerships.

The second concept Habermas (2008) offered was '*kulturkampf*' (cultural struggle). This comprised a duality of complementary considerations. 'The opening up of the

² Habermas tracked this departure and the subsequent ruptures through public dialogues. Habermas chose an October 2001 lecture, following the 09/11 terrorist attacks, to discuss Faith and Knowledge and new interest in faith and public life.

³ There are many pertinent examples of religiously inspired terrorism, which can be drawn on that sustain the case for the emergence of the postsecular. Elaine Graham, in her 2017 keynote lecture at the Spaces of Hope symposium at Chester Cathedral introduced her lecture on 'An Apologetics of Presence' in the context of postsecular partnerships, by referring to attacks on Westminster Bridge (April 2017) and at Manchester Arena (May 2017).

political community to a difference-sensitive inclusion of ... minorities [and] the reciprocal opening of these subcultures to a state where they encourage their individual members to participate in the political life at large' (Habermas 2008, 18). This struggle, symptomatic of *Sonderweg*, wrestles with difference beyond binary choices seeking greater integration of different views. This was a movement beyond a politics of identity (Habermas 2008, 27). Its pertinence for ICD is that going beyond binaries opens up our differences in potentially new and creative ways.

The third concept is 'translation'. Translation addresses how sources of motivation and inspiration from religious and secular sources are made accessible prior to and during use in public spaces. The postsecular is characterised by embracing these differences and creative potentials as part of a functioning civil society (Habermas 2010, 6).

In this section, I have set out concepts underpinning the postsecular: *Sonderweg*, *kulturkampf* and *translation*, and their role of framing differences and opening them up to ICD. To understand how dialogue in these basic terms relates to the potential for FBOs and LAs within a post-COVID society, I will turn to the discussion of FBOs.

What's the 'F' (?): The crisis of understanding of Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs)

Beaumont and Cloke (2012) define an FBO as an 'organisation [embodying] some form of religious belief in the mission statement of staff and volunteers' (p.10). They note FBO literatures offer multiple definitions and typologies for FBOs, with as many offered as there are studies conducted. Beaumont and Cloke point to a rationale for this being FBOs possess multiple differences, with the multiplicity of potential meaning leading to FBOs 'defy[ing] straightforward definition' (p.11).

Johnsen (2014) sets out this issue for understanding FBOs within a UK study into homelessness provision. Johnsen's central observation is that it is not clear what 'F' in FBO stands for. Without a clear understanding of 'F', it becomes difficult to understand the purpose behind FBOs, and therefore discern between them and secular equivalents. This encourages uncritical homogenisation of FBOs and non-FBOs, whilst different discernible characteristics are there to be identified. Nonetheless Johnsen argues, on the one hand 'F' should neither be used to seek nor oppose inclusion of FBOs, and on the other, he suggests different understandings of 'F' of FBOs should be sought. This deficit of understanding of FBOs creates a barrier to sustained and distinctive engagement with them.

To begin to reach a new understanding of FBOs, there are four typologies I will draw on. First Cnaan et al. (1999) identifies FBOs by scale, ranging from local congregation to religiously affiliated international organisations. This study does not consider faith dimensions. Smith (2002) identifies faith-related groups by role of belief, ranging from faith-saturated groups through to completely secular groups. Smith (2002) offers a clearer basis for understanding the 'F' of FBOs. Cnaan et al. and Smith's typologies offer a spectrum of categories for FBOs, but do not identify a spatial dimension where their differences can be examined in any detail. Herman et al. (2012) provides suggested styles or practices of FBOs, recognising that spaces are created by the nature of the engagement within them. This introduces the idea of spatial analysis. These are spaces of community, sanctuary, faith, care, learning, market interaction and so on (Herman et al. 2012, 63-65). Cloke and Pears (2016) provide a fourth typology, locating faith-based engagements in the economic, political, and social spheres, in order to engage interdisciplinary considerations of FBOs. The context for their analysis is that too often ideas and innovations from the 'outside' are dropped into marginal contexts, without understanding the interdisciplinary interplays, locally understood (70). These four typologies offer separate perspectives on differences that make up FBOs: different scales (Cnaan et al. 1999), different beliefs (Smith 2002), different practices (Herman et al. 2012) and different spheres (Cloke and Pears 2016).

Through my doctoral work I have achieved a synthesis of these four typologies of FBOs to produce a new paradigm of FBO, which enables the different scales, beliefs, practices, and spheres associated with FBOs to become constituent parts of shared emergent affects and relationships that are locally understood, which produce hopeful affective flows from FBO into communities. I will turn now to setting out the new paradigm, before exploring the potential it offers for ICD.

Spaces of Hope is a new paradigm of FBO, defined by the following terms of reference: 1) liminality (Turner 1967; 1969, 2) difference and creative potential (Deleuze 2014 [1968]); 3) rhizomatic or non-linear forms⁴ (Deleuze and Guattari 2016 [1988]); and 4) the coproduction of shared values. Thomas Kuhn notes that paradigm shifts take place through anomalies begetting crises, begetting revolutions within existing fields (2012 [1962], 6). This encourages new approaches to emerge in that field which are otherwise incommensurate with the old (2012, 103). These approaches should be sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for newly engaged practitioners to solve (Kuhn 2012, 10). So, in this way, Spaces of Hope as a

⁴ Rhizomes are guided by the following 6 principles: 1) connection, 2) heterogeneity, 3) multiplicity, 4) asignifying ruptures, 5) cartography, 6) decalomania (Deleuze and Guattari 2016, 1-27).

paradigm is being tested through its application within this paper, to questions relating to dialogue studies.

I have set out how ICD can engage with differences through discussion of the post-secular. Here I turn to ICD as mapping and listening to shared matters of concern and socio-material practices expressed through the affective flows of difference between FBOs and non-FBOs alike. To set out the pertinence of Spaces of Hope to the development of ICD in this way, I will briefly explore the title terms 'space' and 'hope'.

The spatial dynamics within Spaces of Hope have initially been articulated using spatial grammar from assemblage theory (Deleuze and Guattari 2016) and Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Latour 2007). One may look further back to Henri Lefebvre's work connecting space and everyday life (Lefebvre, 1991 [1947]) or the Production of Space (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]); however, thus far in developing Spaces of Hope I have not. Buchanan (2005) notes that the fit between Deleuze and Lefebvre's lineage is 'never an easy one' and that Deleuze and Guattari 'stand apart from the majority of theorists interested in the nexus between the everyday and the built environment' (p.16)⁵.

Deleuzian grammar offers a means of analysing the spatial in terms of production of emergent practices and values and their relationship with policy and practice (McFarlane 2011, 206-207). Assemblage is a central term within this grammar, briefly defined as 'a multiplicity constituted by heterogeneous terms which establishes [relations] between them' (Deleuze and Parnet 2007 [1977]). Assemblages are developed in terms of territories, continually passing through one another, and articulating the relationships between affective flows of difference within them. These differences adhere to principles of rhizome in that they express many different socio-material affects simultaneously and in a non-linear fashion (Deleuze and Guattari 2016, 24-25). In this sense assemblages are articulated in terms of their content and expression (Deleuze and Guattari 2016, 82-84) and also in terms of their deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari 2016, 376-380). In addition, ANT 'trails of association between heterogeneous elements' (Latour 2007, 5) offers additional 'finesse' (McFarlane 2011, 207) to assemblage theory. ANT does this by opening up the effects of human and non-human actors through 'matters of concern' as opposed to taken for granted matters of fact (Latour 2007, 87-120) such that the socio-material affective flows of the human and non-human are used to open up new

⁵ I acknowledge that this point could also be an example of the open-ended nature of new paradigms that Kuhn (2012) refers to, where emergent problems can be addressed. I am open to exploring this question regarding lineages and contexts for understanding the spatial within Spaces of Hope, elsewhere.

understandings of the world, as opposed to '*deciding in advance what the furniture of the world should look like*' (Latour 2007, 115). In this way, I will show later how the socio-material nuances of space can be used to open up new understanding of FBOs, with respect to specific matters of concern, through ICD.

Before this, a conception of hope is needed. For this, Massumi's (2015) discussion of affect is informative. Affect is a continuation of the journey through and between territories, the presence of and opening up of potential (Massumi 2015, 5), and synonymous with potential sources of and expressions of hope (p.1). So, where the affective flows of different socio-material nuances of space are deterritorialising and reterritorialising, be that in terms of what are deemed to be either positive or negative accounts, there is always hope. In fact, within *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (2016) place greater emphasis on the deterritorialisation, as the affective flows away from assemblages offer greater potential, and therefore, following Massumi (2015) offer greater potential for hope. So, within Spaces of Hope, hope is not conceived as a positive emotion or as singularly held view by a specific religious tradition. Rather hope is conceived as an ontological becoming of the content expressed as affect within and between the socio-material nuances of spaces, understood through the lens of Spaces of Hope.

Methodological considerations

I have offered definitional clarity for the term Spaces of Hope. Regarding the production of the Spaces of Hope paradigm, this was achieved through testing for the four terms of reference; liminality, difference and creative potential, rhizomatic or non-linear flows, and shared values, using a transformative methodology that utilised assemblage theory (Deleuze and Guattari 2016), ANT (Latour 2007) and ethnographic methods, across three sites in northwest England. These sites were a town-centre church (OTC), a faith-based café (Mustard Seed), and an estate church in an area of significant multiple deprivation (Beacon Community). I conducted 27 interviews, 114 surveys and 90 hours of participant observations including document analysis, across the three sites and other aspects of my professional practice in the area. Research participants were provided with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, so data presented here does not contain the real names of participants. This research was produced with reference to Christian, and non-religious ethnographic sites. Therefore, the discussion to follow will only exhibit Christian and non-religious perspectives. This being said, the Spaces of Hope paradigm can be applied and should be tested further in environments that include other religious and secular beliefs, values, and worldviews. I was testing for terms of reference, by considering what forms of power, leadership, assets, and alliances might be present or are formed. Following Thematic Network Analysis (Attride-Stirling 2001), a set

of six global themes and 18 organising themes, or modalities and supplementary characteristics, emerged. The emergence of these themes was indicative of the potential for one conceptual framework, to map the relationships between different content and expressions across multiple spaces and put these spaces in dialogue with one another with respect to shared matters of concern pertinent to FBOs. The data shows how each modality provided a distinct vantage point on the complex gatherings of overlapping contents and expressions of each of the FBOs. These modalities are set out in table 1. I summarise these modalities and characteristics as the ‘socio-material nuances of space’. The socio-material nuances of space are the heart of the paradigm. A plain reading of each of the characteristics will present in much the same way as existing paradigms of FBO (see Putnam 2000). When read with respect to spatial grammar set out above, each are distinct and simultaneously interdependent characteristics that map the different and creative potential affects expressed within spaces of postsecular partnership. The rhizomatic or non-linear structure of the paradigm means that any of the six modalities can emerge as a guiding influence on the others. For example, dialogue as a facet of modality 4 – the interface with the public space – informs and is informed by the other socio-material nuances of space.

Having set out the socio-material nuances of space and having briefly summarised the affective relationship between them, I will now turn to the data. I will show how different matters of concern in FBOs; scale, belief, practices, and spheres, can be synthesised, by mapping and listening to shared matters of concern and socio-material practices that emerge from secular and religious actants who share and shape the same postsecular public spaces.

Modalities	Characteristics
1. Types of Relationships	1.1 Relationship with Place 1.2 Relational Service 1.3 Transformative Potential
2. Leadership, Roles and Responsibilities	2.1 Incarnational ⁶ and Negotiated 2.2 Roles and Responsibilities
3. Sources of Motivation	3.1 Emergent Beliefs, Values and Worldviews 3.2 The Significance of Context 3.3 Foundations 3.4 Formation:
4. The Interface between FBOs and the Public Space	4.1 Communication: Prayer ⁷ and Dialogue 4.2 Welcome and Caring for Others 4.3 Professionalising

Modalities	Characteristics
5. Stories: Prophecy and Authenticity	5.1 Stories 5.2 Prophecy ⁸ : 5.3 Authenticity
6. Administrative and Relational Flows	6.1 Changing Expressions of FBO: Finding the Flow 6.2 Alliances; Partnerships, Networks and Movements 6.3 Counting the Cost and Embracing Change

Table 1: The Socio-Material Nuances of space expressed as sets of modalities and characteristics that make each up.

-
- ⁶ The term 'Incarnational' does possess potentially religious connotations, which might offer a barrier to non-religious actants. However within the socio-material nuances of space, 'incarnational' possesses a more general and applicable definition, not limited to religious actants. The definition that is being used is incarnation as the virtual multiplicity, or potential, within a gathering or assemblage, becoming actual or concrete (Bonta and Pretovi, 2006, p.49) In this sense, incarnational leadership refers to the affective flows of potential within the socio-material nuances of space becoming real through the production of concrete expressions of leadership.
- ⁷ The term 'prayer' could reasonably be considered an explicitly religious term. In terms of the act of prayer, this might be conducted using specific practices associated with a particular religion and may preclude those who do not share a given worldview from practicing in that way. However, in terms of the socio-material nuances of space, the operant capacities of prayer are characterised within communications alongside dialogue. This characterisation holds open the potential for the concrete practices of prayer that affect the socio-material nuances of space to be included as a means of communicating with other potential and concrete actants within the gathering or assemblage, without privileging or excluding either religious or secular actants.
- ⁸ The term 'prophecy' is associated with religious traditions of different kinds. In order to understand the use of this term within the context of a paradigm of FBOs open to non-religious or secular partners, I have used Walter Brueggemann's understanding of the role of prophecy as follows: 1) recognising and hearing cries of pain and loss, 2) drawing through the different sources of available within a community to energeise a response, 3) offering hope for the future (Hankins, 2018, p.94). This terminology affords space for the potential for religious sources and religious actants, but does not limit access to the prophetic or exclude non-religious or secular actants.

FBOs, the socio-material nuances of space and ICD

In this section, I address each typology of FBO: practices, spheres, scales, and belief. In doing so, I will centre discussion around these shared matters of concern. I will use the differences mapped by the socio-material nuances of space to show how each concern can be considered differently in different FBOs. I will use case studies from Beacon Community, Mustard Seed and OTC. I will discuss each in turn to show that the understandings of different matters of concern can be synthesised to offer a polyphonic synthesis of each FBO and can be set in dialogue with one another.

Different practices

Within the Spaces of Hope paradigm, different practices begin to be addressed by considering modality 4, the interface with the public space. Within the data many examples were provided, from running a Drop In or a café or a foodbank, to working in partnership to run an allotment club. I do not intend to enumerate long lists of different practices of FBOs here. What I will show through the following case studies is that whilst the content of different practices is initially expressed through characteristics of modality 4, they necessarily relate to the other modalities too, opening up, not linear relationship, but new rhizomatic understandings of affective flows of difference within the socio-material nuances of space which form FBOs.

Mustard Seed Café

This was run by two café managers and volunteers. Volunteers were drawn from a wide variety of places including a local social care provider called Local Values. Jane, one of the managers, and Annie, a volunteer, had developed a close working relationship. Annie had learning difficulties and struggled to work. Through talking with Annie, Jane learned that Annie liked show tunes. Jane sang show tunes with Annie whilst they mopped the floor, swept up, and cleared tables. Over time, Annie became a productive member of the team. Jane reflected.

It's a form of encouragement that we can sing whilst we're working. And so sometimes she'll actually take direction if we can sing together. And she responded really well to that. And so, yes, I see sort of an increase in and her doing a job... But it also builds rapport. She's in a place where she feels comfortable enough to just burst out into song and that really makes me smile. (Interview with Jane)

Jane was a prominent presence throughout the data at Mustard Seed Café. Jane's approach to leadership practice went beyond the training offered as part of the café

model. Towards the end of the research, Jane announced her resignation from her role. This sent shockwaves through the Mustard Seed. I will use the below discussion of different spheres, scale, and beliefs, to open up the reasons behind this, including a lack of awareness of difference.

OTC

This was in a period of interregnum (a time within Anglican churches where one vicar has left and another is being sought). OTC were exploring how best to serve the town they worked in, through public dialogue. The area bishop supported this process, and seconded a priest (John Wright) from another parish to be a positive and disruptive influence and scope potential for the new rector to take forward with them. As part of the public dialogue, the area bishop opened up the vision for how OTC might develop its relationship with the town and other partners. The bishop said:

the uninvited perhaps rather, unexpected maybe even disruptive people who just wandered in... they forced us to, to stop our thing in itself and make space for them. To be present and to be heard and to participate albeit in a transitory way, that may prove to be the [most] important space of hope. (Fieldnotes – Conference Proceedings)

The challenge that emerged for OTC and the other partners present was to be oriented towards the 'uninvited and the unexpected' in terms of the way they practise their faith in the place they live. This emic emerged out of a reflection on the presence of a homeless man who attended the public dialogue and showed up elsewhere in the life of OTC. How different people responded to the uninvited and unexpected came to characterise a prophetic story for OTC and their partners. I will pick this up in discussion of spheres, scale, and belief, below.

In this section I have given examples of modality 4 characteristics, dialogue at OTC, welcome and care at Beacon Community and professionalising at Mustard Seed. These examples show that the socio-material nuances of space map the relationship between different affects within FBOs. I will now turn to different spheres to show how the socio-material nuances of space can open up affective flows of differences not named within the modalities and characteristics.

Different spheres

The subtle influences of the social economic, and political spheres are not named as a characteristic or modality, but nonetheless are found within the data. Here I show both that different spheres can be mapped by the socio-material nuances of space,

but also evidence their capacity to map and synthesise conceptual considerations shaping FBOs, developing the capacity to identify named practices as per the last section. Here each sphere is taken in turn. The social sphere is evidenced at Beacon Community, the economic sphere is evidenced at Mustard Seed and the political sphere is evidenced at OTC.

Beacon community and the social sphere

In addition to the foodbank and the Drop In Café, there is a 'Place Pastors' Network run by Beacon Community. Place Pastors befriend people in the community and visit them wherever is convenient for them. One example was of a woman who was agoraphobic. The Place Pastor approach to befriending was to meet the woman where she was and to care for her by sharing in the journey with her. Roxy (Beacon Community Leader) reflected,

[First] we got to the front doorstep, then gradually over a year and a half, we manage to get her to go to the post office ... it's not long ... you don't even think about it, but for her that was our major thing. And then now I just get updates off her ... she had gone out on the bus to town and gone and sat in Costa and had a brew. She was so happy. She texted me saying 'I have done it. I have gone to Costa!', because she knows that I love coffee.

This sort of personal transformation was noticed by Local Authority Officers who partnered with Beacon Community. The Local Authority Officers recognised the authentic way that Beacon Community built relationships in the social sphere and how that was reflected in their wider story. One Local Authority officer reflected,

I think we feel really comfortable [referring] people into their services, because we know they just look after them, they befriend them, they support them, they have cups of coffee with them, they invite them round the house for a meal and actually gifts this extra support which [Local Authorities] can't provide (Interview with Olga).

This sense of authenticity observed by Olga took a number of years to establish as Beacon Community found the flow and embraced changes that were required to be effective at serving that community, but once it was, trust had formed and that became a central part of Beacon Communities story. Below I will turn to different scales and see that in contrast to Beacon Community's authenticity forged in the social sphere, other organisations are not as trustworthy as they claim.

The Mustard Seed Café and the economic sphere

There were two cafes on the same street that used the name 'Seed', inspired by the story of a community member, Margery 'Seeds' Bennett. Seeds was well known for serving others across her community). When Seeds passed away, she was memorialised by the Seeds project. The Mustard Seed Café, the initial fruit of this, opened after a local entrepreneur offered to fund the development of the Seeds vision. The Mustard Seed Café was planted, but before they opened their doors, the entrepreneur, now patron of the café, said she would only hand over the keys if a faith-based franchise model she supported (National Church Social Action Network or NCSAN) became a key partner. This meant adding their name to the project and installing two trustees with veto powers to protect NCSAN's reputation. NCSAN governance and operating practices were adopted, placing a premium on professionalism and high-quality aesthetic. This ultimatum, leveraged by the financial power and self-interest of the patron, was reluctantly accepted by the local volunteers. The introduction of the franchise approach and the leveraging of financial resource against control of the FBO meant that the reality was not an authentic emulation of Seeds vision. This led to another manifestation of Seeds' legacy being produced. The Seeds Café opened in 2015. One volunteer said,

I realised that I could take [people to Mustard Seed] for a coffee but then when we'd drunk our coffee that's it, it's over with. You have to move on. Whereas here, people can come and sometimes are here at 10 o'clock and [leave] at 4 o'clock. If they come from a cold home and they're lonely and obviously they can take advantage of a warm place and a free coffee and plenty of company and support. And so, we've developed this, The Seed Café, branching out from the original Seed concept. (Fieldnotes – Interview with Janice)

The Seed Project and the Mustard Seed Café now exist at opposite ends of the same street. The coercive influence of the economic sphere created division and a breaking down of relationships with local people. The concerns arising from prioritising the installation of the NCSAN franchise model over good relationships with the community is developed next through considering different scales.

OTC and the political sphere

OTC was the civic church. It supported the Borough Council meetings with prayer before each session. The public dialogue (M4.1) and the introduction of the seconded vicar (John Wright) in 2017 were followed in 2018 by the emergence of House Church and Assemble Network, seeking the renewal of the town, and the Cultivate Gathering, which was centred on prayer. House Church was sanctioned by

OTC but run by The Planting Network, a prominent free church network. House Church was led by Senior Leader Dwayne Johnson and his mentor Boris Nixon⁹. John Wright reflected,

My future for [OTC would be] very much as part of a network of largely evangelical (but not exclusively) churches, in the centre of town, seeking renewal and actually we do have people from House Church working in that area, and we are praying and hoping that's what's going to happen. (Interview with John)

The political sphere is understood through the effect that everything can have on everything else. So, within Spaces of Hope the political sphere is expressed by the affective flows of relationship between all the socio-material nuances of space. At OTC the recognition of all the different affective flows became a critical and costly considerations. The establishment of House Church and its emergence along with Assemble and Cultivate led by Boris, in partnership with OTC could have been understood as a fruitful next step following the public dialogue in 2017; however, this was not the case. I will pick this up through discussion of different scales below.

In this section, I have contextualised the socio-material nuances of space within each FBO as part of the wider concern of FBOs in different spheres. Within the social sphere, I have shown that the different practices at Beacon Community were recognised as authentic by the Local Authority officer. In the economic sphere, the socio-material nuances of space evidence that the self-interest of the patron was prioritised over good relationships and catalysed the departure of project members and the establishment of a similar venture down the road. At OTC, the nuances of the political sphere are opened up through, on the one hand, recognition of relationships with a Borough Councillor and the establishment of partnership and prayer networks, and, on the other, seeing potential for dialogue to inform affective partnerships.

Different Scales

Here I will show the different scales typology can become more than simply noting the local, regional, or national status of the FBO as per Canaan et al. (1999). Rather, the different scales can be considered not as binary categories, but as part of co-terminous and critical considerations of differences.

⁹ Boris was an Independent Councillor and instigator of Assemble Network and Cultivate Gathering. As a Borough Councillor, Boris was one of three who brokered power in the Council. The three independent councillors joined whichever group won the election to offer a slim working majority.

Beacon Community

Within the same geographic community as Beacon, there is an umbrella organisation called the Brighter Futures Fund (BFF). BFF provided £1 million over 10 years to transform the place. BFF was brokered (M2.2) by a 'Local Trusted Organisation' (LTO) in the region and was described as being run by community members. As the reputation of Beacon Community became authenticated within the place, they received funding from BFF. During the research, the partnership between the regional LTO and BFF became significant. The LTO received and rejected a funding bid for a two-year social prescription programme competitively costed at approximately £80,000, which had support from a wide range of community partners including the local GP. The LTO claimed in writing to the applicant that the decision to reject the application had been made by the committee of community members. In reality, the committee had not been presented with the bid at all and the decision to reject it was taken via dishonest and unaccountable means, by the LTO themselves¹⁰.

I encountered some of the [Brighter Futures Fund] committee members [and] asked them about the decision not to move forward with project... [they] had no knowledge of the project being discussed at all... I was shocked [especially as one of the committee members I spoke to had] chaired the meeting in question. [Another] long-standing committee member detailed what she would have expected to see, had she been pitched a project, and she had not seen any of it, so could not have made a decision. (Fieldnotes)

When the organisations working at different scales were tested, their authenticity and trustworthiness became clear. Beacon Community was tested through opening up the differences seen through their engagement with people in different spheres. The veracity of the LTO was tested by identifying the disconnect between the values they claimed to represent, i.e., trust, and the reality of that locally understood and expressed through their processes and procedures. The significance of different beliefs will be considered in the next section.

¹⁰ I made the content of these observations known to a member of the Brighter Futures Fund, but they returned to me saying that the critical points were not acknowledged by the Brighter Futures Fund or the LTO. Since then, however, there have been structural changes to the Brighter Futures Fund, with staff removed and new members of staff put in place. It is unclear whether these changes were directly due to the dishonest brokerage of public funds that was highlighted or simply a coincidence.

Mustard Seed

The pertinence of different scales and the partnerships in the local community were evident in the interface between NCSAN and Mustard Seed. NCSAN governance and processes were implemented in a way that provided a fixed approach for roles and responsibilities. This came at the cost of relational service to staff and volunteers. Losing Jane's leadership, discussed above, laid bare the deficit of welcome and care within the NCSAN franchise approach. Jackie reflected on Jane's departure,

[This] is going to leave an enormous... an absolutely massive hole to fill... we're all praying very hard contacting lots and lots of church contacts and we've put things upon the Christian job website. We're doing everything in our power but mostly we're sort of giving it to God and from prayer chains and things trying to get the right person not just for the staff but the customers; the whole future of the café is in this post really. (Jackie, Interview)

It is significant that this unexpected change to one staff member was deemed to have implications for the existence of the FBO. This highlights the way in which counting the cost of changes locally understood implicates the wider story of the FBO such that sensitivity to difference at scale is a necessity.

OTC

The relationship between FBOs at different scales was prominent at OTC too. Leadership by the area bishop used dialogue to inspire local action with an accompanying vision for relational service to the uninvited and unexpected. Action had developed within the political sphere suggesting a possible future for OTC, who were working through a period of change. However, the vision for OTC was not simply about the establishment of partnership and leveraging influence. Rather it was set out in terms of the welcome and care for the uninvited and unexpected; embodied by a homeless man who had been present at the dialogue. The area bishop reflected,

It was really valuable to have the attention drawn to the spaces between things, which helps to kind of see the things themselves, more clearly ... that's a way of saying I think, perhaps the most hopeful space are those spaces that we are ordinarily inattentive to, that we disregard [or] are blind to ... [Our] 'hubris' means that we become blind to [these] more creative spaces. (Fieldnotes, Conference Proceedings)

Later, the homeless man appeared at a House Church worship service. They were treated as an inconvenience, required to conform to the established mannerisms of attendance, and at one point engaged in physical confrontation. When the homeless man had become subdued, Dwayne noted that the 'presence of God' had returned. Following this service, the homeless man did not return. In 2019, I was made aware by the church warden at OTC that House Church had closed in order to reassess its vision following dwindling attendance and members of the leadership team leaving. OTC employed a new rector and changed their parish boundaries to include a community that is within the top 0.1% of depression statistics nationally. The vision for the uninvited and the unexpected was easy to become blind to at the expense of larger scale influence, networks, and partnerships. However, in turning a blind eye, the vision was lost, bringing the different beliefs of OTC into question.

Different beliefs

The concern of different beliefs is where the 'F' of FBOs is made sense of. As is clear from this paper, there are a multiplicity of differences that can be expressed through the socio-material nuances of space. This concluding section will consider the different beliefs. Whereas Smith (2002) developed a typology that acknowledges FBOs have different beliefs, here I open up the difference and creative potential and operant capacities that affect and are affected by the different beliefs held by the FBOs.

Beacon Community

Mark, the pastor of Beacon, said in clear terms that it was Jesus that inspired his leadership, which was expressed through welcome and care of the man at the food-bank and café, discussed earlier.

[Jesus] was much more focused on [disciples] understanding the Kingdom of God and being a part of that kingdom... [we became] more Kingdom-minded... saying, 'Well, we can reach them wherever they are, and we can give them Jesus wherever they are,' if they join church, that's great. God will bring the people he wants to join the church, but we will still be doing the good things that we need to do in the community and with the community. (Interview with Mark)

This underpinning source of motivation – Jesus as the stated foundation of the authentic and relational service – was observed by the LA. Anna, a Public Health officer, noted,

one of the things we need to be doing is working with that community asset a lot more on whether that's in a faith space or in the

community and people are thinking a lot more around that space there now, because what they offer under that roof is fantastic. (Interview with Anna)

Mustard Seed

The story of the two Seeds; the Mustard Seed and the Seed Project is offered greater nuance by the foundations of faith at Mustard Seed. There was a clear emphasis on 'unity'. Karen, a long-standing café manager reflected, 'When we dwell in unity there is great power in that. And so that was very much a message at the beginning when we reached out to all the local churches to take part in establishing the Mustard Seed Café' (Interview with Karen). This sense of unity was characterised by language of being 'non-denominational' and emphasis on 'one church' and 'all one in Christ'. The foundational motivation of unity was variously reinforced by narratives of obedience and unity bringing blessing. However, becoming united was seen in the hegemonic expression within the economic sphere by the patron of the Mustard Seed as she imposed NCSAN on the Seeds vision in exchange for the ownership of what had become the Mustard Seed. Unity had a homogenising affect and paradoxically created division. From these experiences emerged new expressions of belief made real in renewed relationships between people from Mustard Seed and Seed Project. Jackie from Mustard Seed noted,

Whilst it appeared [the Seed projects] were in competition with each other [and] weren't really [getting] on, God honoured both visions... [they] now bookend the high street, and I think that's really a wonderful thing ... We serve very diverse people by [having] different clientele. But we do support each other as well so it's just lovely how it all worked. (Interview with Jackie)

OTC

The search for a new vision during the interregnum led John Wright to question what the foundations of the beliefs at OTC really were. Partnering with House Church had not flourished, and Assemble Network faltered. There was a clear narrative, from John and the wardens at OTC, that OTC should be 'like Christ' in the way that they serve; however, there was a demonstrable disconnect between this stated aim and the expressions by the FBO at the interface with the public space. John reflected,

Our prime goal should be to serve our community like Christ... But we need to set our own agenda ... You could actually look at [the town] and say who is actually Christ to [the town]? You might sud-

denly very quickly come to the conclusion that it's not [OTC], on the contrary actually, other people, secular agencies [are] more Christ-like. (Interview with John)

Whilst this reflection captures a bleak outlook for OTC, the realistic assessment of the relationship between the foundations of the beliefs and the interface with the public space in the context of the wider story of OTC in the town offers opportunity for a dialogue between religious and secular partners to emerge, in the future.

In this section I used the socio-material nuances of space to map the affective flows of difference within 3 FBOs and engage them with respect to four different shared matters of concern. I have shown that this approach can be used to engage in ICD understood as mapping and listening to shared matters of concern and socio-material practices that emerge from secular and religious actants who share and shape the same postsecular public spaces. Now I will move on to briefly consider potential for ICD in a post-COVID society.

Keeping the Faith: The potential for ICD and postsecular partnerships in a post-COVID society

In this final section, I use the Keeping the Faith report to consider the potential for ICD and FBOs understood through Spaces of Hope in a post-COVID society. Keeping the Faith (2020) was commissioned in June 2020 by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Faith and Society. The report analysed how LAs and FBOs across the UK worked together during the first lockdown of the pandemic. A key finding of the report was that LAs across the UK endorsed 'a commitment to build on their pandemic partnerships, supporting long-term policy interventions in ways that are different to the current practice and norms'. (Keeping the Faith 2020, 3). Sustaining and developing these partnerships needs a clear understanding of FBOs. As such, more resources are needed to realise the aspiration and commitment to sustaining and developing relationships between religious and secular partners in a post-COVID society.

During this paper I have set out how ICD might be understood, developing it in terms of the postsecular assemblage theory and the Spaces of Hope paradigm of FBOs. By recognising where ruptures and emergence of postsecular spaces between religious and secular actants are taking place, there is a greater preparedness to engage in ICD understood in terms of mapping and listening to shared matters of concern and socio-material practices that emerge from secular and religious actants.

The Spaces of Hope paradigm opens up the difference and creative potential of affective flows of the socio-material nuances of space within and between FBOs and

LAs. I have shown through case studies of the Mustard Seed, Beacon Community and OTC that ICD can be understood as the process of mapping and listening to shared matters of concern and socio-material practices that emerge from secular and religious actants who share and shape the same postsecular public spaces. In light of the responses by FBOs and LAs to the COVID-19 pandemic and the desire to build partnerships in ways that are different to the current practices and norms, this paper shows that there is potential for Spaces of Hope to address shared matters of concern within and between different partners using ICD.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the research participants from the Mustard Seed, Beacon Community and OTC, without whom this paper could not have been written. Acknowledgement must also go to the 900+ people from the Northwest of England, who have journeyed with the Spaces of Hope movement and contributed to the emerging paradigm. This paper would not exist without them either. I would like to thank the William Temple Foundation under the leadership of Director Professor Chris Baker, and the Faith and Civil Societies Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London, for their shared vision, collegiality, and practical support. I must also acknowledge and thank the Dialogue Society Journal for their interest in this paper and the associated research.

Bibliography

- Attride-Stirling, J. (2001) 'Thematic Networks: An analytic tool for qualitative research', *Qualitative Research*, 1(3), 385-405.
- Barber, M., (2017) 'Curating Spaces of Hope: A New Definition and Model of Faith Based Organisations'. Temple Tract Series. William Temple Foundation. [Online] Available at: <https://williamtemplefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Matthew-Barber-Spaces-of-Hope.pdf> [Accessed 24th August 2021].
- Barber-Rowell, M. (2021) *Curating Spaces of Hope: Towards a Liminal, Rhizomatic and Productive Paradigm of Faith Based Organisations (FBOs)*. Doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London [Thesis]
- Beaumont, J., & Cloke, P. (2012) 'Introduction'. In: *Faith based Organisations and Exclusion in European Cities*. Bristol: Policy Press, University of Bristol, 1-36.
- Beckford, J. (2012) *Public Religions and the postsecular: Critical Reflections*. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 51(1), 1-19
- Bonta, M., & Pretovi, J. (2006) 'Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary', Edinburgh: University Press, 49.
- Brueggemann, W. (2018 [1978]) *The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Buchanan, I. (2005) 'Space in an Age of Non-Place'. In: *Deleuze and Space*. Edinburgh: University Press, 16-35.
- Calhoun, C., Juergensmeyer, M. & Van Antwerpen, J. (2011) *Rethinking Secularism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Calhoun, C., Mendieta, E., and VanAntwerpen, J. (2013) *Habermas and Religion*. Polity Press. Cambridge. 1-23
- Cloke, , Pears, M. (2016) *Mission in Marginal Places: The Practice*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster.
- Cloke, P. , Baker, C., Sutherland, C., Williams, A. (2019) *Geographies of Postsecularity: Re-envisioning Politics, Subjectivity and Ethics*. London: Routledge.
- Cnaan, R. A., Wineburg, R. J., Boddie, S. C. (1999) *A Newer Deal: Social Work and Religion in Partnership*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (2014 [1968]) *Difference and Repetition*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Deleuze, G., and Parnet, C. (2007 [1977]) *Dialogues II*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (2016 [1988]) *A Thousand Plateaus*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Habermas, J. (2005) 'Equal Treatment of Cultures and the limits of Post-modern Liberalism'. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 13(1), 1-28.
- Habermas, J. (2008) 'Notes on Post-Secular Society'. *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 25(4), 17-29.
- Habermas, J. (2010) *An Awareness of what is missing: Faith and Reason in a post-secular age*. 1st ed. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hankins, D. (2018) 'Forward'. In: Brueggemann, W., (2018 [1978]) *The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Herman, A., Beaumont, J., Cloke, P. & Walliser, A. (2012) 'Spaces of postsecular engagement in cities.' In: *Faith Based Organisations and Exclusion in European Cities*. Bristol: Policy Press, University of Bristol, 59-80.
- Johnsen, S. (2014) 'Where is the "F" in FBO? The evolution and Practice of Faith Based Homelessness Services in the UK'. *Journal of Social Policy*, 43(2), 413-430.
- Keeping the Faith. All Party Parliamentary Group for Faith and Society (APPG). (2020) *Keeping the Faith: Partnerships between faith groups and local authorities during and beyond the pandemic*. All Party Parliamentary Group for Faith and Society. [https://www.faithandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/APPG - CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf](https://www.faithandsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/APPG_-_CovidReport_Full_V4.pdf) [Accessed 24th August 2021]
- Kong, L. (2010) 'Global shifts, theoretical shifts: Changing geographies of religion'. *Progress in Human Geography*, 34(6), 755-776.
- Kuhn, T. (2012 [1962]) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Latour, B. (2007) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991 [1974]) *The Production of Space*. Blackwell Publishing
- Lefebvre, H. (1991[1947]) *Critique of Everyday Life: Volume One*. Trans Moore, J., London: Verso.
- Ley, D. (2011) 'Preface: Towards a Postsecular City?'. In: Beaumont, J., Baker, C., (2011) eds. *Postsecular cities: Space, Theory and Practice*. London: Continuum, p.xii-xiv.
- Massumi, B. (2015) *Politics of Affect*. Cambridge: Polity Press

- McFarlane, C. (2011) 'Assemblages and Critical Urban Praxis: Part One', *City*, 15(2), 204-224.
- Olson, E., Hopkins, P., Pain, R., Vincent, G. (2013) 'Rethorizing the postsecular present: Embodiment, Spatial Transcendence, and Challenges to Authenticity Among Young Christians in Glasgow', Scotland. *Association of American Geographers*, 103, 1421-1436.
- Parmaksiz, U. (2018) 'Making Sense of the Postsecular'. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 21(1), 98-116.
- Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. 1st Edition. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Smith, G. (2002) *Faith in the Voluntary Sector: A common or distinctive experience of religious organisations*, London: Centre for Institutional Studies, University of East London.
- Turner, V. (1967) *Betwixt and Between; The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage*. Open Court. La Salle. Illinois [Online].
- Turner, V. (1969) *Liminality and Communitas, in the Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing.
- Wilford, J. (2010) 'Sacred Archipelagos: Geographies of Secularisation'. *Progress in Human Geography*, 34, 328-248.

Caring and Power-Sharing: How Dialogue Influences Community Sustainability

Luisa Conti¹

Abstract: Dialogue is a concept replete with great potentiality for the re-orientating process towards the more inclusive transformation of society, which indeed the Covid-19 pandemic has made even more urgent. This study verifies this statement, while also identifying the specific factors which have had a meaningful impact upon the engagement of people, embedded in their various communities. The undertaken research shows that these factors –related to the agents’ own role in the community, to their personal relationship with others and to their own perception of the general context– are interdependent and intersubjective. Indeed, feedback loops have emerged with an evident impact on the well-being of the community members and, therefore, of the community itself. The analysis of the data shows that a genuine dialogic culture, defined as a culture of acknowledging differences, embracing them with respectful openness and facilitating their expression through a non-hierarchical attitude, fosters positive feedback loops and, therefore, the development of sustainable communities. Communities, on the other hand, in which exclusion is tolerated place themselves in danger. The widespread reproduction of subtle discriminating practices, which were observed also in the framework of this study, remain thus alarming. Underlying the research design is indeed the formation process of international online communities in the context of an online simulation game. The crossmatching of the individual reflections of the members and the observation of their behaviour shows how their actions and interactions are entangled with handed down power structures, such as racism and sexism. Establishing an inclusive community implies therefore one fundamental condition: tackling the reproduction of power dynamics through conscious power-sharing.

Keywords: Power, Power-sharing, Care, Dialogue, Community, Team, Collaboration, Simulation game, Intersectionality, Gender, Diversity, Racism, Participation, Virtual collaboration, Social cohesion, Empowerment

Introduction

Just as molecules are formed from atoms by processes of self-organisation, so communities come into being when individuals join together. As the Latin noun *com-*

1 Dr Luisa Conti is since 2006 lecturer on Intercultural Communication at the University of Jena (Germany) and has been visiting lecturer and researcher at various foreign Universities. She is co-founder of the research group ReDICO (Researching Digital Interculturality Cooperatively, www.redico.eu) and principal investigator of KIDS4ALL (Key Inclusive Development Strategies for LifeLong Learning (www.kids4all.eu)). Her work focuses on the chances and challenges of creating an inclusive society with specific attention to the potential of the concept of dialogue.

munitas and its related verb *communicare* highlight, being part of a community is not detachable from participating to it. In Latin, *communitas* means community and at the same time active participation in the community, conviviality and friendliness, public spirit and a common living environment (Federici & Federici 2003, 9f.). Esposito (2004, 47, own translation) specifies that '[...] *communitas* refers to that relation which binds its (fellow) members by a promise of reciprocal gift exchange and thereby puts their individual identity at risk [...]'. This doesn't refer to the *do ut des* reciprocity of the market economy but rather to a reciprocity free of constraints. The Latin understanding of community as a group of people emerging and developing through participation in a convivial, friendly environment, permeated by public spirit, displays a consciousness of the role of reciprocity and trust at its conceptual core, as demonstrated by numerous scholars (Hobbes 1660, Durkheim 1903, Simmel 1950, Garfinkel 1967, Lane & Bachmann 1998, Stegbauer 2002).

The dynamic underlying the creation and the existence of such a community is described by the Latin verb *communicare*, which in its primary connotation means to impart and partake, to join and share, to unite and combine (Hau 2011) and only in its secondary connotation has a force closer to that of the present-day Latin-derived verbs such as *kommunizieren*, *comunicare* and *to communicate*, i.e. 'to discuss, consult', 'to communicate with someone, to be in contact/relation with someone' (ibid.). Communication as understood today is a *conditio sine qua none* of community formation and community persistence as it is the medium through which community members express themselves, get in relation with others and thus get involved, producing and reproducing community.

The sketched etymological analysis of *community* brings up elements which resonate with the semantic network around the concept of *dialogue*. Is this connection (still) real?

In order to answer this question, I conducted an online simulation game. The data allow me to investigate the factors relevant for the formation and persistence of communities. In order to do it in the most objective and unbiased way possible, I limit myself to using statements from members of an emerging online-community about the factors which motivate or demotivate them to engage in it. These factors are clustered and connections with theories of dialogue investigated. Following this, the focus is shifted to factors which prevent equal participation. A mixed-method approach allows key barriers manifesting in the simulation game to emerge.

The insights gained through the empirical analysis and its theoretical discussion can foster the conceptualisation of innovative strategies towards the development of inclusive communities and, on a larger scale, an inclusive society.

Research Design

The framework of this study is the simulation game ‘Megacities’ conceived by Jürgen Bolten (cf. Bolten & Berhault 2018) as a didactic tool to strengthen intercultural competence. The game is based on the following story: a wealthy senior citizen owns a wasteland of about 100 km² bordered by three cities with different characteristics. He is willing to give the wasteland to the cities, on condition that their consultants succeed in working out a common vision for the wasteland that benefits all three towns equally.

Each of the three teams participating in the simulation game must choose first the town they wish to represent, negotiate with each other in case they choose the same one, and then, starting from the key element given, draw up its profile. On this basis they work with the other teams (in the game representatives of the other two cities) to develop a concept for the wasteland which, on the one hand, is in line with the interests of the different cities, but which, on the other, satisfies the holistic orientation of the owner, the potential donor of the wasteland.

The simulation game is organised in six rounds of about three hours each. In these rounds there are phases in small teams (both city-based groups and mixed groups) and in plenary. These are complemented by individual reflection phases between the sessions. There are four kinds of tasks which must be solved: framework construction (e.g. drawing up the main rules of their town); game tasks (e.g. creating the logo for the wasteland); organisation tasks (e.g. decisions about the working language); reflection tasks (e.g. evaluation of their own experience and learning process).

In order to realise this study, which is part of the ReDICO (Researching Digital Interculturality Co-operatively) research project funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research, I organised two games running in parallel. Both took place from May to July 2021 on the Zoom platform for video conferencing and webinars. In the first game, 14 students participated: 7 from the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (hereafter Hamburg), 5 from the Friedrich Schiller University Jena (hereafter Jena) and two from the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht (hereafter Utrecht). In the second game 12 students played: 5 from Hamburg, four from Jena and three from the University of Udine (hereafter Udine). The teams were organised on the basis of the University the participants study at, though the students didn’t know each other beforehand and went therefore through two phases of community-building: first of all inside their own city, secondly among the whole online-community. The first game was played in English, the second one in German. Each game was facilitated by a moderator who organised the materials and prepared the ses-

sions. Both facilitators stepped back during the game to give the participants the possibility to take over the facilitation themselves.

The corpus which I analyse for this paper consists of the reflection sheets which the students filled in individually after every session as well as the recordings of the two games in their entirety. I also draw material from an interview I held with a student who was present during the first sessions though not really participating.

Recording the interactions taking place in the plenary and in the various break-out rooms made necessary my presence and that of one of my research assistants. All assistants introduced themselves at the beginning of the game and otherwise were present with camera and microphone off, although we were all visibly present as a black tile with our name. In order to research the corpus from a neutral position, I did not take any active role in the simulation game. I also attended all rounds of both games with camera off, except for the greetings at the beginning and at the end of each session, as well as at the very start of each of the two games, when I explained my research interest and give the participants all relevant information on data protection. All necessary permissions to record and use the recordings and the reflection sheets written by the participants for scientific and didactic purposes were collected.

Even though simulation games maximise the ecological validity of the study as they create situations which are similar to real life while having control over environment and control variables (Ćwil 2021), a clear limitation is set by the consciousness of the participants of being recorded and feeling observed by me or my research assistants while interacting. Both points were flagged by some participants.

For my analysis of the data in this study I adopted mainly a qualitative approach, although as participation is something which can also be measured quantitatively, I used the program 'Gender Avenger' to verify the presence of intersectional patterns. This program provides timers to measure manually (without voice detectors) the time in which a man is speaking and the time in which a person of another gender is speaking, while also giving the possibility of distinguishing speakers who are white or of colour. On the basis of my qualitative observation of the corpus, I selected representative samples to be analysed quantitatively, for each game of around 30 minutes.

The qualitative analysis is developed according to Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967, 1998) which states that theories are not to be introduced to the object under investigation but discovered in engagement with the field and the empirical data encountered (Glaser & Strauss 1998, 39). Although it is possible to select constructs from the literature and examine them in more detail in the research, freedom

of hypothesis and theory is important for the analysis (Glaser & Strauss 1998, 39, Eisenhardt 1989, 536). In line with these precepts of Grounded Theory, I first analyse the statements of the students which refer to the factors with a positive/negative impact on their participation and afterwards I check whether or not the dialogue is in keeping with these statements.

Key factors for well-being in the community

The analysis of the data shows that there is a tight link between feeling comfortable in the community and participating to it. There is a range of key factors which regulate the choice of engaging in the community, that is of being a real part of it. I present these using excerpts chosen from the reflection sheets and statements in the reflection rounds and in the interview.

The perception of being seen, heard, and taken seriously (here: **acknowledgement**), emerging from the interpretation of the communicative behaviour of the others has a strong influence on the well-being of the individual in a group.

‘I was surprised that the other groups liked our proposal for the logo and that made me happy.’

While appreciation strengthens positive feelings, the feeling of not being listened to, understood or one’s own effort not being considered has a clear demotivating effect.

‘While we were presenting our ideas for the Wasteland, ((name)) interrupted us sharply and said that if we continue like this, we won’t get the wasteland. That frustrated my group very much, above all because, in my understanding, after much discussion, we went in the right direction.’

‘[...] It also bothered me that a member of the press team took over the tasks of the communication team and constantly interrupted me.’

As this last example shows, acknowledgement is tightly related with the role of the person in the group and in general the need to feel useful (here: **own role**), as the following excerpt demonstrates:

‘It was nice that the Idea Management group was able to split up with the other groups to continue participating in the design process. So I was able to help a little bit with the design of the billboard.’

Complementary to the need to feel useful by playing a certain role, is the need to feel competent (here: **competence**). Its lack might create frustration and eventually embarrassment:

‘I can’t understand everything and that annoyed me.’

‘Due to our language barriers, we experienced some difficulty and sometimes embarrassment in the negotiation process with the other teams.’

In order to be able to engage in the community, playing their own role, possibly in a successful way, it is favourable to feel **in control** of the situation, that is to understand what is happening:

‘Today everything was fine, but in general I’m a bit nervous because I can’t always understand everything that is said.’

or why a certain task must be solved:

‘I was confused as I couldn’t understand why so much emphasis was placed on which city with which characteristics and which budget we should choose, when that’s not really the point.’

or in general what to expect:

‘Of course, we were a bit nervous at the beginning because we didn’t know what to expect.’

The feeling of having things under control allows people (to at least try) to act in an adequate way and depends on the level of **familiarity** people feel with the others:

‘You could already tell that everyone had slightly different ideas, sometimes even opposing opinions. In the beginning, this slowed down our progress a bit, but after a while we found good compromises. I think we can now better assess the attitudes and ideas of the others and weigh up our own ideas better.’

This feeling of familiarity is given if the members of the group are already known or if they are considered similar to themselves. If that is not the case, even if all human beings share many similarities, a tension emerges: trust must be instilled and the need for safety satisfied.

‘Before we mixed up the groups, I was kind of scared about how the new situation was going to be, but it worked out pretty well, so I guess I realised again that it’s important to leave my comfort zone.’

The following statement exemplifies the surprise people experienced noticing that the members they do not know yet are not so different from them:

‘Performing tasks in the newly formed groups was unproblematic, even though it was the first time we worked directly with them. [...] Stepping out of the well-rehearsed groups into new ones is a good change and was good for the game.’

An interesting aspect very clearly articulated in the following statement, is that familiarity develops through spending time together:

‘Overall, the cooperation with the other residents was much more familiar and fluid compared to last week. While at the beginning everything was still very unfamiliar and many were shy, at the end everyone was able to communicate with each other without any worries: we were no longer three individuals but one big group. Personally, I was very satisfied in this last round with the cooperation in my own group as well as in the cooperation with the other groups.’

The emergence of a community means creating familiarity, on the one hand by developing a common culture through frequent interaction, on the other by strengthening the relationships among its members. These two aspects are reflected also in the following statement:

‘In my opinion, in the last phase, the communication between the residents of the cities was a bit easier, more direct and open, because by now we knew each other better and knew how to behave towards the others.’

However, to build relationships time is needed and short contacts with repeatedly new people can be challenging, as this experience shows:

‘Today I didn’t like so much that we were divided into different small groups several times. I think small groups are a good solution to help people express themselves and speak more, but I would have preferred to stay in the same small group all the time instead of changing it.’

Communication becomes easier and more spontaneous the more acquainted people are, as this observation shows:

‘In our own group, a kind of normality actually developed after the first session. [...] Nevertheless, there was a bit of a tendency to talk a bit more with one’s own team partners in the mixed groups than with those from the other groups.’

As said, familiarity implies building relationships among the members of the community. Therefore, **caring** is an important attitude to facilitate contact among people and to foster positive relationships:

‘I wished that more was done, that a pleasant climate was created and that everyone felt cared. Certainly the main problem was that it was online and you couldn’t get to know the other participants before, during and after the lessons, which would have done a lot for the group community.’

Being involved in good relationships (here: **relatedness**) makes people feel part of the community and comfortable to join and share as well as foster decision-making processes.

‘You got to know the team members of the other groups a bit more over time and also exchanged something on an informal level. This loosened up the atmosphere.’

Building positive relationships strengthens community and helps to build **public spirit**, understood here as a sense of unity on one hand:

‘By mixing the teams, there was a shift and considerations were henceforth made jointly as a team.’

and a sense of shared responsibility on the other hand:

‘The missing participants unfortunately did not always ask what was discussed.’

Public Spirit is not about homogenisation but more about recognition and appreciation of differences. The perception of the **openness** of others towards oneself or others has a clear impact on the well-being of its members as well as on the persistence of a community. As the following assertion testifies, there is a need for sensibility, flexibility and readiness to compromise:

‘Today, I rather developed competences: respectful interaction with each other and discussion culture. Weighing the pros and cons of different opinions respectfully and coming to a compromise.’

This difference is though not just a challenge to cope with but a chance to take:

‘So, I can just speak for myself (short laugh). But I’ve just realised, hum, again, that sometimes, it’s like, I have an idea in mind, and I think that might be the best solution and then somebody else comes up with a completely new point and I realise that the idea of the other person is way better. So, I’ve just realised all over again that it’s, hum, sometimes really way easier and more productive to work in a group and also, hum, I really like that we mixed up hum, the cities in the beginning ‘cos, uh, at the end, because there was even more impact. So, yeah, I guess it’s (...) just, yeah, the more voices the better, I guess. Yeah, that’s a learning that I experienced [...].’

Even those who decided to stay in their language group for more sessions were very satisfied, once they separated and mixed with the others:

‘The situation which broadened my knowledge/perspective is when I was the only Italian in the group.’

Equality and equity foster participation, creating space for all perspectives:

‘This process was very calm and orderly. We agreed that for the time being there would be no team leader if there was no need for one, so that we could communicate with each other as equals as possible and make all decisions democratically and together. Everyone participated equally and no one pushed themselves to the fore. All in all, there was also a rather relaxed atmosphere, even though we all didn’t really know each other. The digital format didn’t really detract from that either’

Equality is tightly linked to **fairness**; its lack fosters the development of a feeling of frustration. Both don’t just foster public spirit but reflect its presence or absence, in particular, showing if responsibility is really shared:

‘I personally found the work in the communication team quite difficult. I had the feeling that we had the most work of all. Especially when we were supposed to lead through the discussions and no reaction was shown by the other participants, it was not so nice.’

The perceived **engagement** of the others is in general a further factor with an important impact on the well-being of the individuals in the community. Engagement expresses itself in active participation, though a lack of active participation does not

necessarily result from a lack of engagement. However, if it is interpreted as such, it demotivates people from engaging.

‘It was a pity that some people took very little part in the discussion. I actually started the meeting with a lot of enthusiasm, but unfortunately lost it in the course of the meeting.’

The key factors which have been presented so far influence the level of engagement of the members of a community as they have an impact on the way they feel in that social context. However, there are also factors which do not refer to the social relationship among the members but also have an important impact on participation. These factors relate to the **efficiency** of the community organisation and its communication flows.

‘Unmotivatedness or insecurity? I couldn’t quite tell. But I had the feeling that due to the bumpy organisation the motivation of all participants was getting less and less.’

In the analysed corpus, efficiency has been praised or lack of efficiency has been pointed out in relation to the definition of common goals, of the division of roles and tasks, of the decision-making process and the strategic management of complexity as well as to the facilitation of communication processes.

The last factor which the data brought to light is embedded in the social dimension though at the same time reflects also in the organisational one: it is the flow, the vibes, the energy, the mood, the rhythm spreading in the community through paraverbal and nonverbal communication elements, sped up by mirror neurons, and shaping its **atmosphere**.

‘Unfortunately, ((name))’s moderation seemed very monotonous to me. I am sure that ((name)) is very trained in communication and knows how to talk in a non-judgemental way, with I-messages, listening to all, etc. And certainly, that is the right way to go into a crisis conversation, but perhaps a more natural and animating way of speaking would have provided more motivation in the simulation game.’

Matching empirical results with dialogue theoretical framework

By clustering the key factors emerging from the analysis of the perceptions of the Megacities community members, the following feelings surface as factors fostering engagement, and thus active membership, of people in their communities:

1. feeling comfortable with their own role and feeling competent;
2. feeling in control of the situation, feeling familiar with others and the context;
3. feeling acknowledged, appreciated, and not ignored but rather cared for, at best in the context of positive social relationships;
4. feeling an open attitude to who and what is not familiar (yet): one's own attitude, the attitude of others towards oneself and the general attitude;
5. feeling that participation is not regulated by hierarchy but by fairness and equity, in general and related to oneself: the feeling of having equal dignity and right to participate as others;
6. feeling of being a member of a united community in which members share responsibilities and engage together to reach common goals;
7. feeling that the resources flowing in the community are not wasted, but mobilised in an efficient way, at best in a (re)charging atmosphere.

These feelings are interwoven with each other, provoking positive or negative feedback loops which increase or decrease the motivation to be part of and engage in the community. Furthermore, it must be considered that these feelings are experienced in a group context and therefore, even if they are experienced individually, they are often shared: the community members are *per definitionem* all embedded in the same social context in which, through actions and interactions, a community culture develops. It is therefore probable that similar individual feedback loops take place at the same time. Considering the observed facts, that the degree of engagement perceived in the group influences the engagement of individual members, it can be stated that feedback loops are inter-subjective chain-reaction phenomena which can become dynamics on a large scale with an existential impact for the community.

It is therefore of vital importance to understand the kind of culture which should be fostered in communities, in order to create a context in which positive feedback loops easily develop. Do the clustered factors evoke a *culture of dialogue*?

A multidisciplinary review of the literature around the concept of dialogue² shows that at its core is an open, acknowledging attitude towards difference, that is the pe-

² The term 'dialogue' underlies a basic distinction between a concrete meaning of dialogue as a synchronous verbal exchange and an abstract one of dialogue as an attitude, a vision, an ideal (Conti 2012, 104).

culiarity of every person or perspective. The willingness to experience this implies the wish to let it be expressed and the necessity of creating a context in which everyone has the best chance of expressing themselves and being perceived (Conti 2012, 107-133). The relational space of the dialogic encounter is the 'sphere of the between' (Buber 1947), where people are not side by side but meet with each other through a dialogic relation, as Daniely (2015, 77) describes:

'a present and holistic relation, which consists of openness, listening, devotion and responsiveness [...] one turns to the other as a whole, tunes in to the other whole heartedly, and opens up when encountering him. His/Her appeal is free of image and impression calculations, it is direct, immediate and personal.'

Observing the seven clusters emerging from the corpus, no point can be found which contrasts with the dialogic framework and indeed most of the factors identified reflect it in an evident way. The need for acknowledgement, appreciation and care confirms the 'sphere of the between' as an ideal for human encounters (cluster 2). It reflects in it also the desire of union, in which members share responsibilities and engage with each other to reach common goals (cluster 6).

Connected to this, but a point in itself, is the open attitude towards the unknown and the different (cluster 4). It is not surprising that this core characteristic of dialogue is a key factor that emerged in the empirical study presented here, as a lack of openness is frightening because it produces exclusion. Moreover, openness towards newness and otherness is a condition for enriching oneself through new knowledge and new relationships. Considering that there is no familiarity which was not once unfamiliar, the contradiction between the appreciation of openness to newness and otherness and the need to feel in control of the situation and feel familiar with others and the context (cluster 3) is just apparent: these are two sides of the same coin.

The quality of the *human relations* inside the community has a decisive impact on the well-being of individuals in their community: feeling acknowledged, appreciated and cared for allows participation, though a condition for this is the freedom from limiting hierarchies, as postulated in the dialogic theory (e.g. Habermas 1971) as well as observed by Megacities-members (cluster 5).

The two clusters which are not directly related to the dialogic framework, are in harmony with it or even support it: the first (cluster 1) puts in evidence the importance of fostering a system in which people can feel self-confident, as self-confidence is a condition to open up and getting involved in the community. The other (cluster 7) relates to the importance of protecting the system from avoidable losses which would entail a dissipation of energies.

While the empirical findings on the key needs of individuals as members of a community match the dialogic framework, a core challenge to the realisation of community must also be recognised: power asymmetries.

Key barriers to equal participation

As the key factors displayed above show, the experience of the single members in their community depends on the quality of their relationships in the community, which flow into their willingness, on one hand, and possibility, on the other, to participate. Fundamental variables are the members themselves with their own specific needs, interests, abilities, personalities, knowledge, past experiences, but also appearance, socio-demographic characteristics, belongings... Who they are and how they are perceived influence the participation of individual members of the community and regulate the emergence of power relations within it. In this section I present the factors which act as fulcrums of division in the community I have observed.

First, the data reflect the presence of the ‘matrix of domination’, as Collins (1990) names the intersecting relations of oppression (in this case: **sexism and racism**) pervading society. The analysis shows that while among white people there is just a small difference between genders in relation to talking time – men speak slightly more than women – an evident difference is observed in relation to the talking time taken by white and by members of colour, as the following typical situation exemplifies:

At a break-out room the members of a team had to read the task for the day and discuss if they understood everything. In a five-minute discussion, the white male of the group (A) spoke 98% of the time while his female classmates of colour as well as his male classmate of colour spoke 2% of the time. With a super positive attitude that included phrases like ‘I think we can handle this, right?!’, and right after: ‘We can handle everything, we are the best team!’, the student described the task, what he thought they could do and presented his ideas and then asked the others if they agreed. While some of the other participants responded affirmatively with words, others simply nodded. Also, the facilitator had asked the students to decide which team could moderate the following sessions. A thought that they could take that role and asked the other students in his group if they agree. Again, most of them just nodded. One female student of colour asked him if the moderation would be done only by one of them (meaning him) or by all. The dialogue was as follows:

A.: What about the moderation? Would you like to do it today?

((Silence))

A.: Ok, everyone is happy about it?

((Silence))

A.: Good.

B.: I'm really excited.

A.: Yaaaah! ((laughing)). It's a nice day, the sun is shining, be happy, be motivated! So, what's the final result? What do you think? Moderation yes? Or no? Would you like to do it next time?

B.: But how is it going to work? Hum, should we *all* talk or moderate the whole session or just one of us?

A.: I don't know, I don't know. I th- (.) Yeah (...) I really don't know I th-I think it wou-would be possible if-if everyone could do it like, it's only the moderation. Like, OK, now you can say something to it, what's your opinion on it. I think it's not a big deal, I would say ((B looks down while he speaks)) Okay, so: yes? Let's say yes? (.) It's a never mind. It doesn't matter to you all, right? Yeah? ((laughing)) Everyone is so motivated today! ((ironically)) Let's go guys, eh!

A informed the facilitator that his group would take over the moderation and he himself moderated the session.

The analysis of the game in German made another barrier evident: language skills. The only person on the Jena team in the German game who was not a native speaker was a woman and PoC. She said in the interview with me, before definitively leaving the game after being ignored for two sessions:

'To be honest, I still have this complex also because of my language, because of my pronunciation, because I have an accent and I'm still afraid to say something wrong. [...] I want to think carefully about what I say, I don't want to say something stupid. [...] When everyone speaks in English, I feel better, I don't feel insecure, I can express myself, contribute my ideas, I feel on the same level. Even if everyone says that I've learned super German in 5 years, I'm still somehow so afraid to be active and speak.'

The other participants in the game played in German who were not German native speakers were three women from Udine, who had, despite their good language proficiency, difficulties in expressing themselves in the plenary:

'Communication is sometimes difficult because sometimes the voices of the group members overlap, because they speak quickly, and we don't have a sufficient level of language. I try to understand what is being said, but I don't always manage. [...] Due to our language barrier, we experienced the negotiation process with the other teams with some difficulty and sometimes embarrassment.'

In order to display the (un)balanced participation I shall briefly describe an emblematic situation, inserting the results of measurements of the speaking time.

In the fourth round, the German-speaking group had to jointly discuss the development plan while responding to the wealthy senior citizen's feedback to their first proposal. The moderator asked them to discuss among themselves how they would proceed from now on, whether they would do it in separate groups or together. A female student from Hamburg took over the moderation. In 30 minutes of conversation, with some interventions by the original moderator, the fluent German-speaking women used altogether ten minutes of speaking time, the men about 5 minutes while the non-native Italian women only 7 seconds.

While language proficiency represents in this case study a strong barrier to participation, there are **unique skills**, that is skills which just some of the members have and therefore enable their participation. Indeed, participation doesn't flow just through communication but also through other kinds of actions which allow them to solve tasks useful for the community, as the following excerpt exemplifies:

C: 'So, we do not have so much time left. So, would we like to start and actually create the new logo?'

D: 'Ah, yeah!'

C: 'Can you do it, E, because you've shared, hum, the screen?'

E: 'Yeah, just don't know (.) don't know what to do at the moment.'

D: 'Well, I have one site that I used for the logo, is really nice. It's called Canva with a C.'

E: 'Ok, if you have it then maybe you share the screen and you do it?'

D: 'Yeah, well, I don't have the logos, so...'

E: 'Since we do have to create a new one, I think it doesn't matter, you can see them here.'

Having all the **information** needed or, to say it more precisely, feeling as though one has all the information needed, is a further factor which gives people the courage to participate actively in the process, as explained by the student who was present although not engaging actively when I asked her why:

'[...] at the beginning, since I was not there, they explained to me in the group, a bit rough but... Now now (.) on Monday was my first participation in the game, at the beginning I didn't know what it was about but slowly I understood (.) maybe a little bit because of this I was not there at the beginning, I lacked information.'

Last but not least, **personality** itself makes it more or less challenging to take power in a certain context to display one's own agency. The corpus highlights two aspects: first whether people are more introverted or extroverted, and second how they deal with unfamiliarity.

'Mmh, to be honest, it's something new for me. I haven't done anything like this before. I find it interesting, I'm usually not that active either, out of my personality, I prefer to listen than to talk.'

The factors presented intersect with each other and depending on the context they have a major or minor impact on the participation of the various members. Indeed, these factors make it more or less difficult for each one of them *to feel* the power allocated to them – in the context of a community based on equality – and *to use* it. Two key challenges must be overcome: one is the inheritance of possible disempowering experiences of this person in the past, while the other is the willingness of others to share power with them.

Conclusions

This study aimed to obtain insights about the factors which motivate and demotivate individuals to engage in communities. The data have shown that a condition for engagement is people's sense of well-being in the community. Their well-being itself depends on how comfortable people feel with their role in the group (own role, competence), in the relations with the others (acknowledgement, familiarity, caring, relatedness, openness, equality, fairness) and in relation to the process (in control, efficiency, energy). Positive relationships within the community spread a feeling of being part of it (public spirit) which itself strengthens participation.

These key factors, found to be perfectly in line with the dialogic framework, have been clustered in seven main needs whose degree of satisfaction influences the well-being of an individual in a community. They are linked to one another and reinforce each other, either in a positive feedback loop or in a negative one. The positive feedback loop fosters the well-being of the members of a community and therefore the community well-being itself, the negative one fosters instead negative feelings which adversely affect community cohesion and therefore put its existence at risk. Indeed, these feedback loops are a source and become symptoms of the community culture, which can be more or less favourable to its existence. The positive feedback loop reflects the presence in the community of a dialogic culture, that is a culture of acknowledging differences, embracing them with respectful openness and facilitating their expression through a non-hierarchical attitude (cf. Conti 2012).

The data have shown that implementing a culture of dialogue is a task which is as vital as it is challenging. An important challenge is the development of an open attitude towards difference and newness, above all, as it tends to be overestimated. Openness requires the courage to *dare* to step out of the realm of the familiar, though who dares is rewarded with the access to the chances linked to it. A specific focus has been put on another central challenge to the implementation of a dialogic attitude, that is, on the factors which create power asymmetries, preventing equal participation among community members. In the Megacities community the following intersecting elements played a gate-keeping role: gender, 'race', language proficiency, further specific skills, information, and personality. Indeed, not everyone had the same power to claim the power theoretically allocated to them. *Sharing power* needs on the one hand for people who have power to *care about* others, fostering their participation and not ignoring them, and *care for* the others, empowering them; on the other hand, sharing power requires that the ones who for any reason have a reduced access to it *dare* to claim it. Awareness on this matter is therefore essential.

The empirical study object of this paper confirms what in the ancient world was already clear, confirming its validity also in our own times: a convivial, friendly environment, permeated by public spirit, fosters the engagement of individuals in the sustainable development of their community. Acknowledgement of the others despite and because of their peculiarities, daring to open up to them, caring about and for them, and sharing power with them is not a matter of benevolence or pietism, but rather a condition for the development of a sustainable community. A system which tolerates exclusion contributes therefore to its own self-destruction.

Bibliography

- Bolten, J., Berhault, M. (2018) VUCA-World, virtuelle Teamarbeit und interkulturelle Zusammenarbeit. In K. von Helmolt and D. Ittstein (eds.) *Digitalisierung und (Inter-)Kulturalität. Formen, Wirkung und Wandel von Kultur in der digitalisierten Welt*, Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag, 105-131. http://iwk-jena.uni-jena.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2018_Bolten_Berhault_Virtuelle_Team-s_final.pdf (Accessed 13 August 2021)
- Buber, M. (1947) *Between Man and Man*, London: Kegan Paul.
- Conti, L. (2012) *Interkultureller Dialog im virtuellen Zeitalter. Neue Perspektiven für Theorie und Praxis*, Berlin/Münster: Lit Verlag.
- Ćwil, M. (2021) Simulation Games as a Framework to Conduct Scientific Experiments – The Example of Prospect Theory Research. In M. Wardaszko, S. Meijer, H. Lukosch, H. Kanegae, W.C. Kriz and M. Grzybowska-Brzezińska (eds.) *Simulation Gaming Through Times and Disciplines*. ISAGA 2019. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol 11988, Springer, Cham, 235-246. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72132-9_21
- Daniely, D. L. (2015) The Buberian Dialogical Man as a Struggler in the Field of Existential Choice. *Journal of Dialogue Studies*, 3(1), 71-88. URL: http://www.dialoguestudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Journal_of_Dialogue_Studies_Vol_3_No_1_The_Buberian_Dialogical_Man_as_a_Struggler-in_the_Field_of_Existential_Choice.pdf (Accessed 1 October 2021)
- Durkheim, E. (1903) *Erziehung, Moral und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989) Building Theories from Case Study Research. *Academy of Management Review* 14 Nr. 4, 532–550
- Endress, M. (2002) *Vertrauen*, Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Esposito, R. (2004) *Bios, Biopolitica e Filosofia*, Torino: Einaudi.
- Federici, Maria C. & Federici, R. (2003) *Elementi Sociologici della Comunicazione nella Società Postmoderna*, Band 1, Perugia: Morlacchi.
- Garfinkel, H. (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

- Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. (1967) The discovery of grounded theory – Strategies of qualitative research, London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson.
- Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. (1998) Grounded Theory. Strategien qualitativer Forschung, Bern: Hans Huber.
- Habermas, J. (1971) Vorbereitende Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie der kommunikativen Kompetenz. In: Ders.; Luhmann, Niklas (Hgg.): Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie. Was leistet die Systemforschung. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 101-141.
- Hau, R. (Ed.) (2011) PONS Standardwörterbuch Latein-Deutsch, Stuttgart: Pons.
- Hobbes, T. (1660) The Leviathan. URL: <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-contents.html>
- Keohane, R. (2002) Hobbes' dilemma and institutional change in world politics: Sovereignty in International Society. In R. Keohane (ed.) *Power and governance in a Partially Globalized World*, London/New York: Routledge, 63-87. URL: https://dl1.cuni.cz/pluginfile.php/456753/mod_resource/content/0/Robert%20Keohane%20Power%20and%20Governance%20in%20a%20Partially%20Globalized%20World.pdf (Accessed 13 August 2021)
- Lane, C. & Bachmann, R. (1998) Trust Within and Between Organizations, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Luhmann, N. (2000) Vertrauen: Ein Mechanismus der Reduktion sozialer Komplexität, Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius.
- Simmel, G. (1950) The Sociology of Georg Simmel, New York: Free Press.
- Stegbauer, C. (2002) Reziprozität. Einführung in soziale Formen der Gegenseitigkeit, Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.

A Place-based Approach to Online Dialogue: Appreciative Inquiry in Utrecht, the Netherlands during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Evelyn Henderson-Child¹

Abstract: Dialogue has a unique place in Dutch society. In 2001, in response to the 9/11 attacks in New York, the first Day of Dialogue was held in Rotterdam. The event was organised by the municipality with the aim of creating greater social cohesion and mutual understanding between local people of different backgrounds, using the principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). In 2008, this became a week-long event, which has since been replicated in 100 municipalities throughout the Netherlands by a network of local dialogue organisations. In some cities, these organisations now hold dialogue meetings all year round. Utrecht in Dialogue (UID) is one of these organisations, working with government, business and civil society partners to create events that speak to Utrecht residents since 2008. True to its mission, UID welcomes loyal participants, first-timers, speakers of different mother tongues, long-time Utrecht residents, newcomers: anyone who wants to engage in this dialogue practice. When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in 2020, UID moved all dialogues online and continued to coordinate Zoom dialogues on at least a weekly basis. Thanks to the online format, a growing contingent joined meetings from other places in the Netherlands and even abroad. Several participants would never attend a face-to-face meeting. Yet even as the virtual format gives rise to a more geographically dispersed audience, UID remains highly local in its focus on community cohesion and mutual understanding; the community-building strategy is centred around the city districts, as are the topic choices and partner network. This article explores these structured online dialogues as a place-based practice, by means of ethnographic observation of ten dialogue meetings. The research thus contributes to an understanding of the role of online dialogue in creating local community cohesion, of online and offline dialogue and to the specific practice of AI dialogue in the Netherlands.

Keywords: Dialogue, Appreciative Inquiry, Place, Community, Cohesion

¹ Evelyn Henderson-Child holds a Master's degree in Intercultural Communication from Utrecht University in the Netherlands, with a specialism in the study of multilingual interactions and language policies fostering inclusive multilingualism. She gained her Bachelor's degree in Languages (French, German and Dutch) and Management from the University of Cambridge in 2019. Her MA thesis explored virtual conversations between native and non-native speakers, comparing the approaches of monolingual and multilingual native speakers to instances of misunderstanding. She has worked as an event coordinator and dialogue facilitator at Utrecht in Dialogue, a foundation bringing local people from different backgrounds into a conversation, with the aim of creating greater mutual understanding and combatting polarisation in Dutch society. She is now an independent researcher and social impact consultant.

Background

Dialogue in the Netherlands

Since 2001, dialogue has been practised across the Netherlands in a highly intentional manner. This 'structural approach' to achieving greater community cohesion and mutual understanding in Dutch cities began with the first Day of Dialogue in Rotterdam, following the 9/11 attacks in New York (Plokhooij 2020). Social organisations, local government, businesses and religious organisations, concerned that the debates emerging in the wake of the attacks were only creating greater polarisation among Rotterdam's inhabitants, decided that a form of dialogue would contribute to greater cohesion and understanding in the city. At the suggestion of the Brahma Kumaris Spirituele Academie, organisers chose to ground the Day of Dialogue in the principles of AI, an asset-based approach to community change that focuses on individual experiences of what is working well and encourages participants to dream together of a shared future.

In practice, this AI dialogue looks like a round table of six to eight people sharing experiences connected to a predetermined theme. The conversation unfolds according to a particular structure, with the support of a trained facilitator who ensures that all participants have an opportunity to share their experiences. In her reflection upon the evolution of the Day of Dialogue, Olga Plokhooij, co-initiator of the Day of Dialogue in Amsterdam, notes that this event took dialogue out of the intellectual sphere and made it accessible to a wider audience, contributing to another aim of the dialogue: to bring people together who would not otherwise have met (Plokhooij 2020).

In the years following the first Day of Dialogue in Rotterdam, the concept was taken up by other municipalities across the Netherlands and organisations dedicated to this practice of dialogue began to crop up in various cities. In 2008, the Day of Dialogue became the Week of Dialogue and in some cities, AI dialogue began to be practised all year round. By this time, dialogue coordinators across the Netherlands were collaborating as a national network to select annual themes, run facilitation training and provide guidance on the dialogue approach. In 2011, the Netherlands in Dialogue (NID) Foundation was established. Plokhooij (2020) describes the waxing and waning of this coalition of local dialogue facilitators over time. At its peak, the foundation had a budget of €300,000 to put towards national coordination of dialogue activities; dialogue was being practised across the whole of the Netherlands, NID trained a total of 3000 facilitators in AI dialogue, and 100 local coordinators or organisations were coordinating dialogues in their local area. However, the foundation experienced challenges too: tensions between national and local under-

standings of dialogue and varied preferences for dialogue methodologies led to decreased activity at a national coordination level (Plokhooij 2020). Although the foundation was dissolved in 2019, dialogue continued to be practised across the country at a local level and coordinators continued to communicate with one another in a more informal network and to share best practice. In 2021, a new document was written to set the direction for dialogue in the Netherlands, under the network name *Dialogue in the Netherlands*. This document introduces a new focus on the Sustainable Development Goals and proposes that dialogues should be offered in both online and offline formats (De Buck 2021).

Utrecht in Dialogue

The Day of Dialogue came to Utrecht for the first time in November 2008, and in 2015 dialogue began to be practised in the city all year round, with support from the Utrecht Municipality and other social organisations based in the city. Since 2018, UID has been the national training centre for the practice of dialogue. The new steering group for Dialogue in the Netherlands includes three members of UID, making up the largest contingent from a local dialogue organisation (Utrecht in Dialogue n.d.a).

Utrecht in Dialogue describes its mission as follows:

Utrecht in Dialogue stimulates meaningful conversations between people from Utrecht with different backgrounds, about themes that are important to them. A dialogue respects differences, leads to new, enriching insights and connectedness in the city. (Utrecht in Dialogue n.d.b)

The organisation is particularly proud of its city-wide presence, which spans every *wijk* (an officially recognised neighbourhood or part of a city in the Netherlands) in Utrecht. UID coordinates dialogues with more than 100 partners in (prior to the shift online necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic) around 50 locations in the city, including libraries, community centres, schools and sports clubs. The dialogues, which happen at least weekly, cover a wide range of themes: including poverty, loneliness, sustainability and inclusion. A key guiding principle for UID is their *Buurtaanpak Erbij Horen* [neighbourhood approach to belonging]. With this in mind, UID has identified a number of neighbourhoods in Utrecht where they want to focus their efforts. The aim of this is to build ‘*sterke gemeenschappen*’ [strong communities] while also combatting loneliness and exclusion (Utrecht in Dialogue n.d.c).

In 2020, then, when the coronavirus pandemic began to change daily life in the Netherlands, and around the world, the usual locations for dialogue in Utrecht became inaccessible to UID. While some local dialogue organisations in the Netherlands decided to put their operations on hold during lockdown, UID decided to continue with their frequent dialogue meetings, moving them all online, using the video conferencing platform Zoom. This decision was made to ensure that people could stay in contact with one another, even when it was not possible to do so in person.

I started volunteering as an event coordinator at UID in January 2021, by which point UID had months of experience of coordinating and facilitating online dialogue meetings. During my time with the organisation, I undertook an ethnographic exploration of the relationship between online dialogue and sense of place, which I present here. In particular, I reflect on the role of online dialogue in creating place-based community cohesion in the city of Utrecht during the coronavirus pandemic, begin to describe the new communities that emerge from these interactions, and pose questions to be considered when coordinating online dialogues in the future. I begin by sketching a theoretical framework for this study, before introducing my method, results and discussion. Finally, I share some reflections and possible avenues for future study.

Theoretical framework

Appreciative dialogue

It seems important to begin by unpicking what is meant by dialogue, in a national context where the term carries a particular meaning and history. A glance at the UID website reveals multiple ways of defining dialogue: in terms of the people involved (people with diverse backgrounds or people who would not usually come into conversation with one another), the structure of the meeting (four key stages, which will be outlined below), the outcomes of the event (new insights and connections) and in opposition to debate (Utrecht in Dialogue n.d.d).

Central to the approach of both NID and UID are the principles of AI, which were developed by David Cooperrider and colleagues at Case Western Reserve University. AI is a social constructionist, asset-based approach to community change that locates the root of all knowledge in people's relationships and experiences: 'social knowledge resides in the interactive collectivity' (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987, 136). As a form of action research, AI allows researchers to gather more insights about the world in which they find themselves, while simultaneously shaping the world of the future. As such, the practice of AI is concerned with imagining a shared future, based on the parts of a system that are working already, with the aim of empowering

people to bring that future about together. AI is often used to promote community engagement in decision-making. For example, the organisation Appreciating People used the practice of AI to support community-building and the establishment of a community network among the BME population in Liverpool in 2007 (Appreciating People n.d.); Involve, the UK charity for public participation also promotes AI as a means to foster community engagement and cohesion (Involve 2018). In this study, it is the relationship between online AI dialogue and sense of place in the city of Utrecht that is under investigation.

There are five key principles of AI (Finegold, Holland, and Lingham 2002):

1. Constructionist principle (knowledge shapes action)
2. Principle of simultaneity (research is action)
3. Poetic principle (human systems are open to interpretation)
4. Positive principle (inquiry into what works is more enduring than interrogation of the problems)
5. Anticipatory principles (be guided by a vision of the future)

These principles form the basis of AI activities, which are further structured around four stages: discover, dream, design, destiny. Through this cycle, groups can move from appreciating what works in a system, to imagining how it could look, to designing and living that future system (Finegold, Holland, and Lingham 2002). This is known as the 4-D cycle and it is recursive by nature, as the imagined future is realised and a new one imagined.

Recalling the UID mission statement and the origins of dialogue in the Netherlands, the motivation for grounding dialogue in the principles and methodology of AI become evident; AI serves the aims of these dialogue activities very well. In particular, the poetic principle of AI can be recognised in the respecting and appreciating of difference that is central to UID dialogues. That is to say, the ideal UID dialogue table brings together people with diverse interpretations of the world around them, who together make a new, collective interpretation and thus co-create a new future. The positive principle is perhaps the most explicitly upheld AI principle in UID communications; the UID website reads as follows:

We talk about themes from a positive angle, look for more or other possibilities and perspectives and what actually works. We investigate themes that deserve attention, that we want more of, that we want to progress further together. (Utrecht in Dialogue n.d.e.)

Indeed, the annual dialogue theme for 2021 was *worthwhile*. While not the focus of this study, it is interesting to consider the role of the positive principle in dialogue that necessarily took place online, due to a devastating global pandemic. To what degree can online dialogue be a source of optimism in dark times? Is there a place for negative themes in appreciative dialogue? These are the very questions that Cooperrider himself asks in his recent article, *Appreciative Inquiry in a Pandemic: An Improbable Pairing* (Cooperrider and Fry 2020). Cooperrider and Fry argue that the practice of AI is the search for ‘what gives life, what fuels developmental potential’, rather than simply looking at the world through rose-tinted glasses (269); it is about looking for what makes us strong as a community and using this knowledge as a tool for collective empowerment.

True to the AI structure, UID dialogues follow a four-step cycle: get to know one another, share experiences, dream, do. These stages are depicted, along with UID’s own principles of dialogue, on the placemat given to participants in Figure 1.

Figure 1. UID Participant Placemat (Utrecht in Dialogue n.d.f)



While Plokhooij (2020) makes a distinction between dialogue organisations employing AI principles and Bohmian principles, it is clear that central concepts are consistent across both dialogue schools. Notably, both conceptualise dialogue as a

creative process, through which some new meaning, understanding or insights emerge, by drawing on experiences as the locus of knowledge.

The way in which these principles and format are realised in online dialogue and the degree to which they connect to conceptions of place will be explored in the discussion.

Place

Considering the role of online dialogue in the city of Utrecht, it is first necessary to reflect upon how we define place at all.

A city could be defined or delineated in terms of its streets, distance from neighbouring cities, local government jurisdiction, institutions, sports teams, the accents of its residents or its history, to name a few commonly used markers. There are endless markers that could be used to define a city or place, yet no single one seems sufficient to sum up any in its totality. Indeed, in the context of a study of dialogue, where individual experience is knowledge and systems are open to interpretation, description of place using any one or several of these markers excludes other perspectives or interpretations of place. Doreen Massey's (2008) definition of place is helpful here. In her seminal work, *A Global Sense of Place*, she suggests that place can be understood as 'articulated moments in networks of social relations' at a particular locus (p. 28), rather than an area with particular boundaries around it. This definition recognises the fact that the concept of place is dynamic and shaped by the people who interact with it. It also represents an outward-facing conceptualisation of place that does not pit the local against the global; this is Massey's global sense of place. Massey (2008) proposes four key principles that underpin her definition:

1. Place should not be conflated with community;
2. Places do not have boundaries; they are not enclosed;
3. Places do not have singular identities but are made up of conflicts;
4. Places are unique, a particular coincidence of social relations.

The concept of a 'particular locus' is hard to grasp and allows for a highly flexible conceptualisation of the word place (Massey 2008, 28). With this definition and these principles in mind, we might well see the Zoom environment as a place, unbounded and representing a particular moment in a social network. It will be important to consider the different ways of defining this locus in the discussion to follow, by asking why and how social relations came together in the online meetings of UID.

Here, it is useful to draw on a study by Keith Hampton (2002), who examines the role of computer-mediated communication in creating a sense of shared place. In his review of research into ‘wired’ cities and neighbourhoods, he suggests that ‘ICTs may hold as much promise of reconnecting us to communities of place as they do in liberating us from them’ (Hampton 2002, 1). He finds that computer-mediated communication encourages the formation of local community, through increased visiting, neighbour recognition and collective action; computer-mediated communication represents increased potential for social contact, rather than a replacement, therefore. These findings being from an era long before pandemic-induced lockdowns and isolation, it is interesting to consider them in this recent, unique context. For many, virtual communication was indeed a replacement for in-person social contact. The question remains as to what this virtual communication meant and means for local, place-based relations. Furthermore, it is important to consider how computer-mediated communication might mean different things for the diverse participants at the dialogue table. Andrea Kavanaugh and colleagues (2005) call for a nuanced approach to studies of community and digital communication:

Internet use can strengthen social contacts, community engagement and attachment for people with relatively high levels of education, extroversion, sense of community belonging, community collective efficacy, group memberships, activism and social use of the Internet. But these results have a darker side with respect to the potential impact of computer networking on people with lower levels of education, extroversion, efficacy, and community belonging. Over time, will not these patterns aggravate the digital divide? (18)

Both Massey and Cooperrider figure the individual as participant or agent, with a role to play in shaping the reality that they live and will live. However, in the context of the virtual dialogue, it is important to consider the degree to which this is always true and think about how voices that are not at the table are or are not heard.

This ethnographic study endeavours to answer the question: how is sense of (local) place constructed and revealed through the practice of online dialogue? The later discussion will draw on the theories of AI and place laid out above in order to answer this question.

Method and Data

In order to understand the relationship between online dialogue and sense of (local) place, I decided to conduct an ethnographic study, to create a ‘thick description’ of virtual dialogue culture and practice (Dörnyei 2007, 130). By employing the method of participant observation, I was able to observe the unfolding of interaction and collect data while preserving the naturalness of the setting to some extent. Martyn

Denscombe (2017) notes that participant observation may be covert, overt or somewhere in between. In this case, I made my role as researcher known to and sought approval from the UID coordinator and facilitators. Some participants were aware of my role as researcher from its advertisement in the organisational newsletter and an announcement at the start of each dialogue meeting. However, those that joined the session late and did not read the newsletter may not have been aware of my role. Thus, my observation of these participants was covert. While the observation took place in a public forum, it was important to ensure that no participant could be identified in this study, so that no one would be negatively impacted as a result.

I took part as a participant rather than facilitator, in order to limit my influence over the structure or focus of the dialogue and in order to preserve the naturalness of the dialogue. Having already taken part in several dialogues before beginning my research, I already had a general feel for the setting. I therefore engaged in focused observation, paying attention to aspects of the setting that related to place, community, online and offline interactions, while also leaving room for other interesting features to emerge (Denscombe 2017). I made observation notes, which serve as my primary data in this study. After each dialogue, I took time to write up my notes based on the bullet points made during the meetings. I later analysed these, coding the various emergent features to draw out themes that go some way to indicate how sense of place was constructed and revealed through online AI dialogue. These are articulated and discussed in the next section.

In many ways, these online dialogue meetings resembled the offline version that preceded them, with a few key changes. Notably, the meetings were shortened, from 120 to 90 minutes. As before, participants could sign up for dialogue events via the UID website, as could dialogue facilitators. Prior to the event, participants received an email containing the Zoom link for the meeting, which was the same every time. While some dialogue event themes reflected the strange times in which the meetings took place (with themes such as creativity in lockdown, or returning to normal), many maintained a broader focus that was not specific to the coronavirus pandemic. Dialogue facilitators and volunteers had the opportunity to take part in special training sessions for dialogue hosting and facilitation in the online environment, but broadly the methodology remained the same.

Most dialogues took place between 19:30 and 21:30 on weekday evenings, with some taking place on weekday or Sunday afternoons. The standard agenda for online dialogue meetings was as follows:

19:00 Zoom space opens

19:30 Introduction and inspiration material (e.g. poetry, video)

19:45 Into breakout rooms for the four-step dialogue
21:15 Plenary session, group reflection on the dialogue
21:30 End of meeting

Results and Discussion

In the following section, I present four features of these dialogue meetings and discuss these with respect to the theory laid out above, in order to answer the question: how is sense of (local) place constructed and revealed through the practice of online dialogue?

Self-identification in relation to place

On arrival in the Zoom space, participants would often spontaneously introduce themselves with reference to their current location. Most frequently, participants named neighbourhoods in Utrecht as the location from which they were calling. If someone else was from the same neighbourhood, they might go as far as comparing street names to find out where they lived in relation to one another. Two participants reacted very positively to discovering that they both lived in a small Dutch village (outside of Utrecht). One dialogue was focused on community-building in Utrecht neighbourhoods and in this meeting, participants actively sought out other participants who lived close to them, asking to join the same breakout rooms as one another, for example, so that they could think up new local initiatives together.

While the UID mission centres the poetic principle, or, in other words, encourages participants to seek out and make new meaning from their differences, it was interesting to observe that many nonetheless looked for aspects of their own identity in others and used this as a basis through which to construct a new reality or sense of place.

These findings seem to align with those of Hampton (2002): online interactions serve to strengthen sense of place. Participants were keen to recognise their neighbours in these interactions and at times used dialogue meetings as an opportunity for local community action. The online environment enabled non-Utrecht residents to enjoy this same opportunity too, although far more rarely, as participants could in theory join from anywhere although they did so less frequently than those located in Utrecht. However, the degree to which neighbourly sentiment, or simply face recognition, played out in the streets of Utrecht (or elsewhere) following these dialogues is impossible to determine.

Some participants joined from other cities or towns in the Netherlands. Sometimes they explained that they used to live in Utrecht before moving away and were joining

because they used to take part in dialogues in person and were now able to take part remotely. Rarer were participants who joined from other countries and this usually only became clear when they were asked to introduce themselves, particularly when a host or facilitator did not recognise the participant. In one dialogue, a new participant was asked to introduce herself and explained that she was calling from Scotland and saw the dialogue as an opportunity to get to know her future home, as she planned to move to the Netherlands in the following year. In a dialogue about cultural diversity, participants were asked to type where they were from into a word cloud. Inputs varied from Utrecht neighbourhoods and Dutch city names to other countries or even *the world*.

While the online medium resulted in the participation of more geographically dispersed participants, by dissolving boundaries to participation that were previously imposed by travel times, several participants insisted on the importance of the dialogues' rooting in Utrecht, in some cases even while they joined from somewhere entirely different. For the participant looking ahead to her move to the Netherlands, this particular moment in a network of social relations, or this place as defined by Massey (2008), was interesting and valuable to her precisely because she saw them as situated in Utrecht, or saw Utrecht to have brought these social relations into being.

The frequent, often spontaneous, references to various physical locations, such as street names, ensured that the online dialogue space felt rooted in the geography of the city. In dialogues where many participants were based in Utrecht, it almost felt as if you could step out of the virtual room onto the streets of the city. At times this created a distinction between Utrechters and non-Utrechters and thus a boundary was drawn, even in the virtual space that was accessible from around the world.

Online dialogue: temporary or here to stay?

Time and again participants and facilitators talked about online dialogue as a temporary measure. They used turns of phrase such as 'when we meet for dialogue in person again', implying an assumption that dialogue would go back to the same format as before. In several cases, this was accompanied by an expression of preference for the in-person format, as participants hoped to be able to return to live dialogues in the summer. However, for some participants, including active volunteers such as me, the online format was all that they knew. One such participant commented that the use of the same Zoom link every time created the feeling of arriving in the same room each week. Other relatively new participants posed lots of questions about what live dialogues used to be like.

In some ways, this discussion of the future 'return to normal' felt to be in conflict with the AI principle of simultaneity, which positions research as action. It created a

sense that participants were waiting to do the real dialogue work, and that this could only be done properly in person. Indeed, the dialogue about community-building in Utrecht, some participants (who were also dialogue coordinators in their local area) explained that they had decided not to organise any online dialogues and instead waited until it was possible to do them in person again. By contrast, one dialogue host explained that some dialogues would stay online indefinitely, due to the different public that could be attracted to dialogue tables via this medium. Similarly, one participant talked about the greater diversity of perspectives that could be found at online (versus offline) dialogue tables, as it allowed people from around the world to join. She saw this to be particularly preferable for dialogues focused on inclusion or cultural diversity, for example, as participants had the opportunity to draw on a wider breadth of experiences which could enrich their dialogue.

On the one hand, by imagining a return to in-person dialogues, participants were being guided by the anticipatory principle, by a vision of the future (Finegold, Holland, and Lingham 2002). Yet, as they waited until they could 'do dialogue properly', participants and hosts disregarded the simultaneity of inquiry and action and seemed to cast online dialogue as a weak replacement for in-person dialogue. This prompts an interesting question around AI's positive principle: if the aim of AI is to identify what gives a system strength and to bring this version of the system into being, as Cooperrider and Fry (2020) argue, what happens when strength is found in a version of the system that is out of reach? It is a challenge for (online) dialogue facilitators to bring the focus to the power in the resources in the system that we have, rather than focusing on those that we lack. The impact of this attitude on dialogue quality and perceived value was not investigated in this study, but it does suggest that the AI dialogue was realised differently in the online environment.

Even as online dialogue was dispreferred in favour of in-person dialogues, the online Zoom meeting had become a distinct place in itself. Drawing on Massey's (2008, 28) definition of place, online dialogues created new 'moments in networks of social relations', bringing together different people with different perspectives to inhabit this place for a couple of hours at a time. This place was highly dynamic and extraverted, open to change and to the participation of those who entered it. However, this openness seemed at times to be conditional; extraversion supported the goals of events with explicitly 'global' themes such as cultural diversity. What did this mean for other dialogues without such themes or with a focus on 'local' matters? In some ways it sets up an opposition between the local and the global, inward- versus outward-looking. Who is part of the static, stable local identity, while others come and go at the dynamic, global level?

Community-building

Some dialogues started with the stating of the dialogue principles, format and purpose, particularly when multiple participants were taking part for the first time. On several occasions, hosts explained that dialogue played an important role in building strong communities. It was rare for them to elaborate further. However, on a few occasions participants spoke about dialogue representing an opportunity for newcomers to build connections in the city of Utrecht.

In the dialogue about community-building, participants talked about the advantages of building dialogue communities in a neighbourhood, whereby the same participants returned time and again to have dialogues about different topics. This would allow them to build more trusting relationships with one another and thus to have deeper, more insightful dialogues. These neighbourhood dialogues were said to be about creating a sense of belonging in the local area. Here, we can recognise the importance of the principle of simultaneity in building place-based relations through online dialogue: not only is dialogue a means to an end (to create a more connected local area), but it is also an end in itself: the practice of online dialogue brings into being a (dialogue) community and a (virtual) place, at a particular moment in a network of social relations that may never be repeated again.

The idea that place is constructed through interaction is important here; participants agreed that to know a place (for example, as a newcomer), it is necessary to know the people that make it up. Furthermore, by recognising participants' agency and giving them the opportunity to co-create this place through the practice of AI, ties to place are strengthened. At the same time, while Massey (2008) defines place as a moment in a network of social relations, what recurred here was the importance of continuity of place, in order to build community. It was particularly interesting that relationships at the level of city neighbourhood remained so important for participants, even in a time where in-person interactions were so limited. The meaning that place gave to these online relationships was of real significance to many participants. It would be interesting to observe the degree to which these went on to support increased neighbour recognition, for example, and thus the degree to which these online interactions supported or were an addition to in-person interaction, rather than a replacement. Furthermore, the degree to which this is specific to the Dutch context cannot be determined from this study alone.

Who was and was not present

While the online environment granted some people access to dialogue who would not otherwise have been able to participate (people joining from abroad, people isolated in their homes, for example), it is important to note that some voices were

excluded precisely because dialogues took place online. Those who did not have or had limited internet access, for example, were unable to participate in these dialogues. Furthermore, the removal of dialogue from places such as community centres or schools meant that some audiences no longer participated; previously, the fact that some places were used for multiple different activities meant that some participants joined in dialogues out of convenience or coincidence. In this way, we see that the dedicated Zoom space for dialogue served to attract participants who were looking for dialogue (for one reason or another), rather than those who happened across it. The motivations of individual participants for joining a meeting and the perspectives that they brought to the dialogue table may have been impacted by this fact. With this in mind, it is clear that the Utrecht experienced in the virtual setting is likely to be a different place to the one experienced at the physical dialogue table, not just because of the location of dialogue, but more importantly because of the people and perspectives that it welcomes and excludes.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that connections to physical place can be constructed, maintained and sense of local place even strengthened by the practice of online dialogue; These online interactions can serve to encourage and provide more opportunities for interaction with neighbours, rather than simply replacing the in-person. This supports the findings of Hampton (2002), who suggested that 'ICTs may hold as much promise of reconnecting us to communities of place as they do in liberating us from them' (Hampton 2002, 1). In a time when in-person interactions were necessarily reduced, and as we continue to navigate hybrid interaction, this idea may provide some optimism for the formation of local community. Indeed, for many participants it was the dialogues' rooting in the locality of Utrecht that was so important, as it allowed them to make connections at their neighbourhood level, or to feel connected to a city that they wanted to discover.

While connection to a local place can be established and revealed through reference to physical locations and can contribute to a local sense of inclusion for some, for others, a rooting in the physical environment may serve to exclude them from the virtual space. It is important to remember that even as the virtual environment is open to all in theory, in practice, the social relations that emerge constitute a place that may not be welcoming to all. For example, those who join without connection, knowledge of or interest in Utrecht may feel that they cannot participate fully. Different motivations for joining dialogues should therefore be taken into account by dialogue coordinators and hosts. Furthermore, the virtual space creates a new kind of exclusion, digital exclusion, whereby participants who might be able to participate

in person are not able to access the online environment and therefore unable to co-construct this dialogue space.

This reminds us that the Zoom room is in fact a place in itself, constructed through social interaction, which can be as extraverted or introverted as a non-virtual space. For the most part, the Zoom room was figured as an outward-looking space or opportunity for interaction with participants beyond Utrecht. This extraversion was seen as particularly desirable or valuable when it came to dialogues about themes of diversity or inclusion or about being a newcomer in the city of Utrecht. This is reminiscent of Massey's (2008) discussion of the counterposition of local and global that can emerge through definition of place.

Finally, even while Zoom asserted itself as a new place for dialogue, reference to its temporary nature at times seemed to undermine its validity as a space for dialogue. Whether it is in fact temporary, however, remains to be seen.

Limitations and further research

It is important to note that this was a small study conducted by one researcher. While I made efforts to ensure that my position as volunteer did not influence my findings, it is likely that another researcher who was not working in the organisation would not have had access to the same information which may have influenced the way that I interpreted information or interacted with other participants during the dialogue sessions. Furthermore, without experience of the offline dialogues that came before and have begun to be organised since, I am unable to make comparisons between the characteristics of online and offline dialogues, nor am I able to be more precise about the way in which participation has been affected by the move online. Indeed, it is hard to say how much is a result of the very particular context of a pandemic, rather than a voluntary move online and how much is specific to the Utrecht or Dutch context. Finally, I was obliged to choose one dialogue table on each occasion and so I only heard the conversations of a few participants each time.

In future research, it would be interesting to consider the differences between place-based dialogues that have always been online, versus those that moved online necessarily due to the pandemic. Furthermore, it would be interesting to consider the degree to which local community-building activities, such as neighbour recognition, contributed to life in the neighbourhood beyond the Zoom meetings and beyond the period of the pandemic that I observed. Finally, it will be intriguing to follow the evolution of online and offline dialogues in the Netherlands, to see which changes are here to stay and how these are (or are not) integrated into the approach of the Dutch dialogue network.

Bibliography

- Appreciating People (n.d.) *Toxteth BME Community Project* [online] Available at <https://appreciatingpeople.co.uk/portfolio/community-development-and-collaboration-with-toxteth-bme/> [23 October 2021]
- Cooperrider, D. and Srivastva, S. (1987) 'Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life'. *Research in Organization Change and Development* 1
- Cooperrider, D.L. and Fry, R. (2020) 'Appreciative Inquiry in a Pandemic: An Improbable Pairing'. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 56 (3), 266–271
- De Buck, W. (2021) *Voorstel Dialoog in NL*. Available at <https://www.utrechtindialoog.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Voorstel-Dialoog-in-NL.pdf> [30 August 2021]
- Denscombe, M. (2017) *The Good Research Guide: For Small-Scale Social Research Projects*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK)
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007) *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methodologies*. Oxford Applied Linguistics. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press
- Finegold, M.A., Holland, B.M., and Lingham, T. (2002) 'Appreciative Inquiry and Public Dialogue: An Approach to Community Change'. *Public Organization Review*, 2(3), 235–252
- Hampton, K. (2002) 'Place-Based and IT Mediated 'Community''. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 3(2), 228–231
- Involve (2018) *Appreciative Inquiry* [online] Available at <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods/appreciative-inquiry> [23 October 2021]
- Kavanaugh, A., Carroll, J.M., Rosson, M.B., Zin, T.T., & Reese, D.D. (2005) 'Community Networks: Where Offline Communities Meet Online'. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* [online] 10 (4). Available at <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2005.tb00266.x> [29 August 2021]
- Massey, D. (2008) *A Global Sense of Place*. Routledge
- Plokhooij, O. (2020) *The Netherlands in Dialogue: A Structural Approach to Dialogue Across Society – Leerweg Dialoog*. [15 April 2020] Available at <http://leerwegdialoog.nl/2020/04/15/the-netherlands-in-dialogue-a-structural-approach-to-dialogue-across-society/> [21 August 2021]
- Utrecht in Dialogue (n.d.a) *Dialoog in Nederland - Landelijk netwerk Dag/Week van de Dialoog* [online] Available at <https://www.utrechtindialoog.nl/nederland-in-dialoog/> [29 August 2021]

Utrecht in Dialogue (n.d.b) *Homepage* [online] Available at <https://www.utrechtindialoog.nl/> [21 June 2021]

Utrecht in Dialogue (n.d.c) *Buurtaanpak Erbij Horen* [online] Available at <https://www.utrechtindialoog.nl/buurtaanpak-eeenzaamheid/> [30 August 2021]

Utrecht in Dialogue (n.d.d) *Wat Is Een Dialoog* [online] Available at <https://www.utrechtindialoog.nl/wat-is-eeen-dialoog/> [30 August 2021]

Utrecht in Dialogue (n.d.) *What Do We Talk About?* [online] Available at <https://www.utrechtindialoog.nl/en/what-do-we-talk-about/> [23 October 2021]

Utrecht in Dialogue (n.d.e) *What Is a Dialogue?* [online] Available at <https://www.utrechtindialoog.nl/en/what-is-a-dialogue/> [30 August 2021]

Community Campus as Threshold: A Space of Dialogue for Academia and the Community

Robert Brown, Paul Warwick, Zoe Latham, Rachel Manning, Seb Stevens¹

Abstract: This paper explores an argument for community-situated spaces of encounter – acting as thresholds – between community and academia, through which: learning can be enhanced; a greater sense of identity and efficacy can be fostered; and a defined agency can be enabled. This proposition prioritises a dialogic relationship in a shared ground of agency and discourse, whose potential is reinforced through a rediscovery of the local arising from the COVID pandemic. The rediscovery of the local has pushed civic-minded universities pre-existing interrogation of their community-based learning practice in the context of marginalised communities; a key challenge is how to foster a dialogic relationship with a community when academia is not really part of the community? A concurrent question considers the spatiality of such practice? Proposed here is a situating of the civic university directly within the community offering opportunity for everyday dialogue on and experience of local life. This proposal re-sites the university's civic initiatives outside the academy in community-based campuses. Central to this campus would be the coming together of the community and academia to envision and action joined-up approaches to multi-

¹ Professor Robert Brown's research is grounded in professional and personal experience of operating as the other, having worked on community development projects in Africa, India and the UK. This engagement is paralleled by having taught in 11 countries. His research focuses on socio-cultural identity, urbanism and pedagogy framed by a dialogical perspective. Together with Paul Warwick he is co-leader of the University of Plymouth's Urban Dialogues Network.

Dr Paul Warwick is Director of the University of Plymouth's Centre of Sustainable Futures. He sits on numerous regional and national bodies advancing education for sustainability. His work focuses on how education might engage with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and the potential for civic-engaged learning and leadership in sustainable education and development.

Zoe Latham is a Doctoral Teaching Assistant in Architecture. Her PhD research explores the relationship between people and place as a ritualised body-oriented activity and within a broader conceptualisation within cultural landscape.

Dr Rachel Manning is a research assistant at the University of Plymouth. She has previously been a lecturer in Education at Plymouth, and education officer for Sustrans. She is involved in community outreach providing educational support for youth. Her research interests focus on community education and empowerment.

Dr Sebastian Stevens is Research Director and Co-Founder of Apollo Health Innovations and contributes to research at the University of Plymouth. He was Research Fellow at the Universities of Cardiff, Exeter and Plymouth, and associate lecturer at the University of Plymouth over much of the last 10 years.

valent issues. This initiative would simultaneously afford an innovative education while enabling students and staff to contribute to the wider community; at the same time the community campus would serve as an active agent in bringing the community together and reshaping its future. The community campus would act as a dialogic threshold between academia and the community, a space grounded in its social nature, mutual embrace and exchange.

Keywords: Academia, Campus, Community, Dialogic, Development, Learning

Introduction

The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness...Not that which takes place within, but that which takes place on the boundary between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the threshold. (Bakhtin 1984b, 287)

Introduced here is the concept of a community campus as threshold – a community-situated place of encounter and agency between (and that is co-authored by) the community and academia. Serving simultaneously as an extension of academia into the community, and as a campus for the community, the community campus will act as a threshold between the community and academia; it will provide a place of meeting for the community and academia; of departure for a co-joined civic agency² of knowledge exchange (through civically engaged learning), and community development (the implementation of cultural, ecological³, economic, political and/or social initiatives, as well as physical regeneration) and building individual and shared identities.

The situating of academia in the community can better enable civic agency, offering academia better connectivity with the community within their place and simultaneously easing access to academic learning for the community, while enabling encoun-

² For reasons of brevity, we use the phrase 'civic agency' within this text as a representation of a co-joined agenda of civic learning and community development. 'Civic learning' is used where there is need for specific reference to it this as a concept and practice.

³ We use the word ecological here instead of environmental; we understand ecological as 'of or relating to the environments of living things or to the relationships between living things and their environments (Merriam-Webster "Ecological")' with emphasis on the reciprocal relationship between people and the environment which they inhabit. The use of ecological is in favour of environmental, understood as relating to 'the conditions that surround someone or something: the conditions and influences that affect the growth, health, progress, etc., of someone or something (Merriam-Webster "Environment")' which suggests a more unidirectional relationship.

ters between the community and academia. Equally critical is the nature of this place of encounter in its creation, physical structure, and everyday inhabitation. Philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's delineation of a dialogic threshold as a site for constructing self-consciousness (where we understand this self-consciousness as the making of the whole self through interaction with another) provides useful orientation for our conceptualisation of a community campus as threshold.

We will begin our discussion by identifying the significance of our proposition and exploring the primary theory – dialogism – that frames it. We will also outline the methodology employed in investigating this proposition. We will then delineate the community campus as threshold with reference to three considerations: firstly, we will situate civic agency in the context of relevant discourse. This is presented both for those not familiar with civic agency (notably as advanced through civic learning), and to note primary outcomes that would be associated with a community campus. Further identified will be theoretical linkages between civic agency (drawing particularly on situated learning) and dialogism.

Secondly, we will explore the underexamined role of the spatialisation of the encounter between the community and academia in civic agency, i.e., the placing of this encounter as an activity in a particular place and time (Shields 2013). Our discussion will consider the situating of the community campus within the community and include reference to academia's historic position in relation to the wider community. Enabled by an act of co-authorship between the community and academia, our proposed spatialisation will foster everyday exchange between the two.

Thirdly, we will explore the nature of the community campus as threshold, considering its physicality and inhabitation. This will include examining threshold as a concept. We will then explore its key performative-spatial attributes and illustrate these through reference to relevant precedents.

Significance and methodology

The significance of our proposition is reflected in growing global advocacy for an agency of civic learning. This includes the UNESCO Global Action Program on Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO 2014) call for academia to support students through education that seeks to make a difference in the wider community. In parallel, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals advise that by 2030 all teaching should promote sustainable development (Owusu-Agyeman & Fourie-Malherbe 2019). Such education goes beyond the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge and skills, and provides students with real-world experiences connecting them to their communities (Berard and Ravelli 2020; Dias and Soares 2018).

Civic learning has become particularly significant in UK higher education, as advanced by the Civic University Network. It is further evidenced in its broad-based support by the UK government and government-funded bodies (Department for Education and the Arts Council England), independent organisations (Carnegie Trust UK and University Partnerships Programme Foundation), and universities themselves. The Civic University Network challenges universities to:

re-shape their role and responsibility to their communities to realise their potential as drivers of a new civic agenda...(and) ensure that a university's geographic role and responsibility is used more effectively as an agent to drive positive societal change...including prioritising issues around 'place' to level up the economy and society. (Civic University Network)

This challenge builds from 'Truly Civic: Strengthening the connection between universities and their places' (UPP Foundation Civic University Commission 2018), which identified steps for universities and the government to advance. 'Truly Civic' draws particular attention to the impact universities can make on the cultural, economic, ecological, and social well-being of the wider community, notably those socio-economically vulnerable communities hardest hit by austerity and spatial inequalities. (UPP Foundation Civic University Commission 2018).

While the report outlines various measures, the latter reference to the spatial dimension – place – is pertinent to our discussion of a metaphorical and spatialised threshold between the community and academia. Place is equally present in the Civic University Network's primary statement, with reference to a university's 'geographic role' and "prioritising issues around 'place' (Civic University Network)." It is however two interrelated strands within the 'Truly Civic' report to which we draw attention. The first strand highlights that today's economic challenges exacerbate the divide between 'town and gown', notably in places more economically challenged⁴. The report further identifies that while positive examples of academic civic engagement exist, there is a need to better understand the local population and that academia has to 'constantly earn the right to be part of that place' (Ibid, 30). Another strand suggests enhancing academia's civic engagement through a proactive spatial agenda including that 'a really simple change that some universities could make would be to open up their campus to the general public' (Ibid, 15). The report

⁴ The authors' own university is located within a city that is within the lowest third of socio-economically deprived UK local authorities; one of the communities in the city with which the university collaborates is ranked in the lowest 1% nationally in terms of socio-economic deprivation (Public Health).

further states that academia's civic engagement needs to be embedded in day-to-day activity, a proposition welcomed by the public.

These themes reflect challenges encountered in our own approach to civic agency as a designated civic university, and in exploring how to move our university's civic agenda forward. There are of course multiple challenges encountered in civic agency, including: an expanded sense of mission at a time of reduced resources; management of processes and institutional procedures (both internal to the academy and in relation to other external organisations) which can inhibit such work; navigating power inequalities between participants; negotiating disparities in expectations between students, staff and community; and tension over the ownership of the process (Warwick, Morgan and Miller 2019). These challenges have been well discussed elsewhere however, and are not the focus here. Our primary interest is the previously underexplored spatialisation of civic agency.

Our work to date has helped advance opening up the university, notably through a transdisciplinary Sustainability Hub on campus. This hub welcomes a range of events supporting students, staff, and external partners on sustainability agendas. This includes the Urban Dialogues Network, which hosts a regular series of seminars exploring civic agency as advanced by colleagues from across the University together with external partners. Particularly relevant here is our efforts over the past two years (however much inhibited by the ongoing presence of COVID), on university-funded research to examine the concept of a community campus. Included in this work has been an ongoing inductive review of our university's civic agency practice, and examination through a deductive literature-based review of civically engaged practices of other UK and overseas universities. This has been supplemented by interviews with academics and social-enterprise and voluntary sector community partners, and (re)reading of relevant discourse on civic learning and community development.

This text builds on that work and marks where we are headed. The range of theoretical discourse informing this work is broad, such as Augusto Boal or Paolo Freire (see Brown and Warwick 2019). We also recognise others' work delineating the concept of dialogue in community development practice (e.g., Westoby 2014), drawing for example on Martin Buber or Hans Gadamer. Our own writing is framed primarily by a reading of Bakhtin's thinking on dialogism. Our reading recognises that who we are as individuals is not an autogenic authoring, but that our attitudes, beliefs, and identity are informed by our families, friends, teachers, colleagues, and others. As Bakhtin (1984b, 287) suggests, 'I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another.' Through such dialogue we are exposed to different ideas and equally to how others

respond to our discourse, fostering an ongoing testing and evaluation of own thoughts.

Within genuine dialogue there is reciprocity, as we both gain from and share with the other. Central to Bakhtin's thinking is that through interaction with the other we achieve a true, full sense of consciousness. 'To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself' (Ibid.). Such thinking was radical at its inception and remains equally radical at a time when everyday actions and broader socio-political declarations place emphasis on claims of a self-authenticity that Charles Taylor (1991) warned against, or towards monologue against which Kojin Karatani cautioned (1995). Yet however radical, Bakhtin's dialogism gives cause for hope that through dialogue we can develop greater knowledge and understanding of ourself and the other.

Our reading of Bakhtin places emphasises on the mutual illumination offered to one and other through their engagement. This intentionality is reflected in literary scholar Michael Holquist's summation of Bakhtin's thoughts on the relation of the self and other: 'A logical implication of the fact that I can see things you cannot, and you can see things that I cannot, is that our excess of seeing is defined by a lack of seeing; my excess is your lack, and vice versa. If we wish to overcome this lack, we try to see what is there together' (Holquist 1990, xxvi). Present in Bakhtin's discourse, and implied by Holquist's reference, is that we each occupy a unique position, affording opportunity for distinctive perspectives. Intrinsic to this difference is that it offers value as we share our distinct perspectives with others. The aim however is not to generate a dialectical synthesis as Bakhtin warns against (1984a), but rather to allow self and other to remain independent while affording new insight.

Our appropriation of Bakhtin's dialogism is prompted by the authors' own experience of civic engagement in higher education and community development practice in the UK, Africa and Asia. Much of this is grounded in working in communities where the authors crossed socio-cultural and economic boundaries and realised they themselves were the other, i.e., the one outside normalised, local perspectives. Emergent from such an experience is understanding of the importance of engaging with the local perspective, and that one's own view as an outsider is filtered through a priori ways of looking, thinking and working; while affording a fresh perspective, this a priori sensibility and practice can also be limiting (Rapport 1995; Tuan 1982). This experience and our dialogical orientation come together with our research in the literature review and interviews, echoing the threshold encounter between the community and academia our work explores.

Civic learning

The case for civic learning has been building since at least the 1960s, arising from the spirit of change present at the time, and in response to hegemonic forces that had led to significant socio-economic and political inequalities (Schuman 2014). While advanced by numerous practitioners and researchers, Jean Lave's and Etienne Wenger's seminal *Situated Learning* notably identified that 'social engagements provide the proper context of learning to take place' (Hanks 1991, 14). This social engagement is not limited to academia or even with like-minded individuals outside it, but more significantly it extends to the socio-economically challenged in our communities too often marginalised as others. Such engagement seeks to support the common good and foster creative, compassionate students who have knowledge, skill, confidence, and agency to engage in education that simultaneously enables social change (Brown and Warwick 2019). Summarised below are key benefits of this practice, as well an outline of observed links between civic agency and dialogism.

The record on the impact of civic learning on students' learning is extensive. Building on *Situated Learning*, further research confirms it increases students' understanding of course content (Atkinson and Hunt 2008; Mayer 2019) and the development of transferable career skills (McTier and McGregor 2011). Such engagement also enables students to acquire competencies in sustainability (Molderez and Fonseca 2018; Cebrián, Junyent and Mulà 2020). Moreover, students learn they can gain knowledge and understand problems in a more complex and interconnected way (Clevenger and Ozbek 2013), while learning to communicate this knowledge to others (Jickling 2003; Barth 2007). Furthermore, working with other students and community partners helps students develop an understanding of a range of perspectives, and how to consolidate this into knowledge to share it with others (Barth 2007). Such practice will be highly relevant in the future where the co-joining of information across disciplines and with others will be essential (Molderez and Fonseca 2018).

Civic learning equally affords opportunities for students to reveal, explore, reflect upon and develop their own perspectives (Jickling 2003; Barth 2007). Through civic learning students are prompted to re-examine their existing beliefs, knowledge, and thinking (Nicol 1997; Rowe 1996). It has also been found to build students' self-esteem and self-confidence (Eppler 2011; Muhlestein and Mccann 2019; Johnston 2020). Moving beyond more personal orientation, fostered is a greater sense of multi-cultural awareness (Toncar 2006), and concurrently a heightened capacity to understand other individuals' perspectives (Jickling 2003; Barth 2007). This is further evidenced in a boosting of students' feelings of social connectedness (Eppler

2011; Muhlestein and Mccann 2019; Johnston 2020), notably with the wider community (Gullion and Ellis 2014; Graizbord 2019; Siza 2019).

Beyond students' own sense of self and efficacy, students feel a greater sense of civic engagement (Kahne and Westheimer 2006; Lee 2019), and they become more active and engaged citizens (Berard and Ravelli 2020). Through engaged learning students reflect upon the contribution they can make to wider society (Berard and Ravelli 2020; Mtawa 2021). Further research has highlighted that students develop a greater sense of agency, which resonates with leadership capacity and a civic disposition (Mtawa 2021). Oriented with such agency, students begin to envision how they can use their knowledge and skills to make a difference to communities, beyond any intellectually or socially self-perceived limits (Pleasant 2004; Mtawa 2021). Arising from this are students with greater awareness of and sensitivity to the realities faced by marginalised members of society (Walker and McLean 2013).

The communities involved in such engagement benefit as well, notably through contributions of public service that enhance the community's livelihoods (Norton 2018). Concurrently, from both community development discourse and anecdotal evidence, it is clear that communities' identities, sense of efficacy and sense of agency are heightened. Compared however to research on benefits to students, there is far less discourse on the benefits afforded to the community by civic learning. Underexamined in particular is the role that academia can play as an agent in enhancing community identity, efficacy and agency. There is clearly scope here for further investigation, but that is beyond the scope of this study.

In exploring the concept of civic agency, notably Lave and Wengers's Situated Learning, we encountered theoretical overlaps with Bakhtin's dialogism. In positing 'situated' learning, Lave and Wenger (1991) recognised they needed to distinguish their concept from existing concepts of 'learning in situ' or 'learning by doing', with which their work might otherwise be equated and as such not fully realised. They understood the need to better articulate their concept, and to understand 'situatedness' from a theoretical perspective. Such thinking echoes Bakhtin's challenge that we need to theorise our agenda, and to place our discussion within an 'overarching conceptual framework' (Holquist 1990, x). Our doing so here not only positions our discussion within its relevant field, but it equally fosters a greater criticality.

Lave and Wenger's situated learning is further underpinned by a comprehension that integral to it is a person carrying out the act (i.e., the agent), the act itself (i.e., the activity), and the wider world beyond the person and act; moreover, this 'agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other' (1991, 33). Such emphasis acknowledges the involvement of the whole person, rather than reducing learning simply to the passive receipt of knowledge. Intrinsic to this making of the whole is

that ‘learning involves the construction of identities’ (Lave and Wenger 1991, 53). This conceptualisation of situated learning has strong overlaps with Bakhtin’s dialogism. Central to the latter is the argument that greater understanding is achieved in dialogue with another, indeed that we can only become our whole selves through encounter and interaction with another. In this encounter we are active participants with the world and those within it, and through this we gain a full and true sense of consciousness of ourselves – that is, a genuine and full sense of identity (Bakhtin 1984b).

Situatedness

Everything must be approached from the point of view of – point of view. And point of view is always situated (Holquist 1990, xxviii).

The beginning of this paper noted Bakhtin’s proposition that an encounter between one consciousness and another is situated, transpiring in a particular place. Holquist’s statement, drawn from his introduction to Bakhtin’s *Art and Answerability*, further reinforces the significance of situatedness. Emphasised through these propositions is that our experiences of the world – our encounters with others, our approach to them and the world as a whole – are framed by where we position ourselves. We believe that this situatedness is critical to civic agency.

The spatial dimension of civic agency, despite the length of time such practice has been pursued and discussed, is surprisingly underexamined in discourse. Civic agency does not occur in the abstract, but like all human activities as philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1992) argued, is spatially situated and through that relations between people, event and space are engendered. This thinking is underpinned by the overarching spatial turn in philosophy anticipated by philosophers Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec (1986). The linkage of people, event and space is further reinforced in anthropological and environment behaviour research, (see for example: Bell 1992; Brown 2013; Hester 1993; or Kawano 2005); these discourses reflect Bakhtin’s (1990) own unification of people and event in a particular place. While acknowledging that virtual experiences have validity, even in fostering a sense of community (Mathews 2000), both our own experience and specific investigation of civic learning practice and community development attests to the very tangible impact of place. Our interviews with community-based collaborators further evidences the significance place plays in civic agency. So, in acknowledging the spatial dimension of civic agency, just what sort of place are we talking about?

Our response begins by first examining the received history of the academy, whose origins lie in cathedral and monastic schools (Riché 1978). The academy’s originating ethos can be found in its initial meaning in Latin, which reflected a number of

people brought together and associated into one body (Lewis and Short 1966). By intention this association of people was an introverted community, reflected epistemologically, ontologically, and spatially. Historically the academy set itself up within a distinct site to protect its knowledge from the interference and challenges of wider everyday life. This introversion was often reinforced by the presence of a boundary – whether physical or implied – between the campus and the surrounding community. The courtyards of Cambridge or Oxford, many of which one can only look into but not enter, reflect this. Similar demarcation has been signified through the physical character of the campus itself; phrases such as ‘ivy-covered walls’ have come to be associated with universities, such as Harvard University. Such delimitation and practices fuelled perceptions of academia as a place apart, sitting behind a boundary with its people and practices disconnected from the wider world.

Over the last 60 years academia has moved away from such a self-fostered seclusion. Architect and educator Anthony Schuman’s (2014) account of the history of civic agency, and the current presence of the Civic University Network and UN SDG, all evidence this, along with numerous other initiatives. At the same time critique of academia’s spatial position and orientation still retains validity. While found across various institutions, civic agency is not universal as reflected in still emergent calls for its implementation (Hurtado 2019). We recognise that meaningful civic engagement by academia with the community does exist; equally, we do not seek to suggest all learning be pursued within civic agency. Yet where civic agency is pursued, our own research finds it typically carried out from the university campus; as attested to by community partners, there is a sense of academia “parachuting” into the community on its own terms and time and departing once the academy’s agenda has been met. Such experiences reinforce perceptions of academia inserting itself to impose its own agenda⁵. A key danger identified is not giving space for the voice of the community, or the coercion of the community’s voice by academia (Boyle-Baise 2005). All this reifies a perception that the academy is not part of the community.

That such a perception exists is in part not so surprising. Typically, the communities with which academia works are socio-economically challenged. Using our own institution as an example, our civic agency in just one community (amongst others) ranges across a pro-bono law clinic to health awareness (e.g., food nutrition) and health care (e.g., medical and nursing students supporting local clinics) to the arts (e.g., recording oral and physical histories through film). Further agency is enacted through transdisciplinary projects involving architecture and education students co-designing with school children and then building outdoor education centres for loc-

⁵ This is not to say that all civic agency initiatives operate in this way, as there exist examples of situated practice. What we are referring to here is tendencies rather than some absolute.

al schools; other work brings architecture, arts and medical students together in scenario planning for the long-term regeneration of the community. This work arises as a response to that community unfortunately ranking in the highest 1% nationally of multiple deprivation, most notably in depressed levels of income and employment, poor health, higher than average levels of crime, relatively low educational attainment, and a poor quality of the indoor and outdoor living environment (Public Health) which has been too long neglected. Further undermining many in the community is a lack of self-belief or hope of possibility of employment or higher attainment in education; not only are many unemployed, but their parents and even grandparents also did not know regular employment.

These conditions stand in marked contrast to academic students and staff who typically are from more relatively advantaged backgrounds. While our university has long prided itself for its outreach in making higher education accessible to those often marginalised or overlooked portions of society, the reality is that our students and staff tend to benefit from relatively higher levels of income and/or prospects for future employment, better health, and a safer environment which contributes to their well-being. In contrast to the forgotten and underattended physical landscape of our partner community, our campus (like many others in the UK) benefits from the provision of accessible, well-maintained, and often greened open spaces between buildings, not to mention the high standard of the buildings themselves. Students and staff's well-being is further reinforced by the efficacy they feel in orienting themselves towards a positive future.

Such difference is reflective of a wider urban condition; the places we live, notably our cities, are defined by multiplicity as attested to by numerous cultural geographers, philosophers, and urbanists (see for example: Amin and Thrift 2002; Bridge 2005; Donald 1997; Lefebvre 1991; Madsen and Plunz 2002; Massey 2005). Such multiplicity is intrinsic to the city as site to which multiple, diverse groups of people are drawn. Yet equally intrinsic to this multiplicity and diversity is difference. The question is how we work with and generate positive moves from this difference.

So, returning to our initial question, just what sort of place are we talking about? Back in the 1970s writer Adrienne Rich (1979) spoke of a 'university-without-walls' which would not only break down the barriers between community and academia but also act as an agent in restructuring education. More recent have been calls for universities to open up their campuses and re-organise themselves together with the wider community and so find alternative ways of teaching and learning amidst what are radically changed and charged conditions of contemporary life (Sperlinger, McLellan and Pettigrew 2018). What is argued for is a move toward collaborative

environments which can better foster approaches which are open to experimentation (Pereira 2019b).

While there are multiple examples of civic agency, an exemplar for us is the University of Miami's (Ohio) Over-the-Rhine Program. Engaging like others in various initiatives of civic agency such as the design and construction and/or refurbishment of buildings or teaching in local schools, distinctive in their work is the residential immersion of the students in the community itself. Spending a semester in the community, students are afforded an alternative experience in being situated in the community, with opportunity to co-author their own learning in consultation with the university and through collaboration with the community.

A community campus reflecting the intentionality of the Over-the-Rhine Program would offer a spatial move away from the traditional space of the academy. The community campus would literally be present within the built fabric of the community. Our intention here is not however of some aspiration to be first, and rather to better articulate what this situatedness might afford. Various discourse attests to the emotional and mental, and even spiritual connection that is formed between people and place (see for example: Bachelard 1969; Lovell 1998; Norberg Schulz 1979; Tuan 1974). It is a seemingly metaphysical link that is perhaps best illustrated in French writer Noel Arnaud's poetic, 'I am the space where I am' (cited in Bachelard 1969, p. 137). Further recognised here is that what people do, that is their performances most notably in the everyday, are intertwined with where they enact those performances, and in turn with their identity (Allen 2007; Butler 1999). Here people's identity, their performances and the place they inhabit are dialogic, mutually informing each other.

A community campus represents an ontological shift away from the institutional nature and place of the academy. Given the dialogic nature of people's identity, performances, and place, changing where a particular performance (or activity) is enacted in turn impacts on its performance and my identification with it. Through the situating of the academy in the community, the way that the academy thinks of itself would be transformed, being understood as part of that community's social fabric. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation evidences that locality – i.e., being local – prevails over relations of ethnicity, race or socio-economic class in generating a sense of belonging to place and connection within the community (Hickman, Crowley and Mai 2014). This is not to presume that by merely showing up academia would be accepted as part of the community. However, experience from the authors' own professional community development practice, in which local offices were established within the community, demonstrated its effectiveness in helping to build a relationship within the community. The community's challenges and successes

would be something that academia would share in, fostering not just greater awareness but a deeper sense of empathy and understanding with the place and its inhabitants. By occupying a space within the community, academia can demonstrate a commitment to the community – a willingness to engage with the community on its terms, to participate and share in its everyday life, and contribute to its livelihoods. As researcher Laura Pereira (2019b) posits, *gravitas* is gained by extending the commitment beyond any single act and becoming part of an ongoing process. This view is supported by our own discussions with community-based individuals. Such a situated commitment by academia would have a pronounced impact on community-academy relations, both as networked and/or organisational entities and on an individual level between community inhabitants and academic students and staff.

More pragmatically, the significance of the community campus being situated in the community has received added impetus from the rediscovery of the local during the COVID pandemic. Owing to governmental lockdowns and concerns for their own well-being, urban inhabitants spent less time in urban centres for shopping and related activity; instead, the once-forgotten local shop or amenity was rediscovered (Mortimer, Grimmer and Maginn 2021). This coincides with already proposed shifts in the provision of community services to more local hubs, such as for healthcare (Braithwaite 2018). Through this the local has taken on added value with a greater critical mass of people present in and around local neighbourhood centres. Moreover, the COVID experience has reaffirmed that we are social creatures and that the spatial dimension of our socialisation – i.e., face-to-face interaction with one another – is significant (Hales, Woods and Williams 2021).

Threshold

Crucial to our proposition of a community campus is a conception of it as a threshold, both in a metaphorical sense and in its literal representation spatially and through its inhabitation. To explore this, it will first be necessary to articulate inherited meanings of a threshold and how it applies here. Following this we can then apply this understanding to how the community campus would act both metaphorically and literally as a place of encounter between the community and academia, and as a place of departure for civic agency. We will then illustrate our thinking with a few examples.

Historically, places have been defined by a boundary, a physical or implied element defining and dividing one space from another (Eckler 2012). Through the presence of a boundary inside and outside are delineated, affording a sense of enclosure and presence to a place (Norberg Schulz 1979). This delineation of boundary contributed to places being conceived of as bounded and self-contained, distinct from other spaces around it (Charlesworth and Cochrane 1997). Such thinking can be useful in

identifying a particular place conceptually, in discourse with another, and navigating our way within the physical environment.

Such thinking has limitations however; at its worst it can be used to delineate not just one place from another, but equally those inhabiting each, fostering and reinforcing notions of us and them. This of course runs contrary to our intentions and practice of civic agency. Moreover, recent discourse has both challenged and expanded our sense of boundary. We now understand a boundary not as a divide but rather as a meeting point which 'implies that there is a continuation beyond' it (Eckler 2012, 80). Further discourse recognises that any domain – e.g., a neighbourhood, a city – is not some hermetically sealed, bounded self-determinant entity, but rather is better understood as being situated in a wider multifarious context of various networks of activity, interrelations, knowledge and movement extended across its boundaries (Amin and Thrift 2002).

Such understanding underpins our own thinking on threshold, and the relation between community and academia. Moreover, we conceptualise the threshold shared between community and academia as a meeting point and a point of departure. It both welcomes movement inward and generates possibilities for action outward. We are aided in this conception by returning to Bakhtin's reference to the meeting that occurs 'between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the threshold (1984b, 278)' In his writing Bakhtin invites the reader to take up this position and to orient him/herself not only inward, but also outward. It is a place of meeting, exchange and movement. Bakhtin articulated his discussion of threshold further in exploring the literary works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Bakhtin highlights within Dostoevsky's novels the marked role that spaces like staircases, the front hall and corridors play. These act as physical thresholds between one space and another, and as literal thresholds in the narrative of the novel. Bakhtin (1981, 248) suggests that these thresholds 'are the main places of action in those works, places where... events occur...decisions that determine the whole life of a man.'

There are of course other metaphors that have been suggested in the course of our own discussions. Given the public nature of the interaction between community and academia, an oft suggested precedent is that of a public square. Images of squares resonate well with the idea of gathering implied in our discussion of the community campus. Even Bakhtin refers to squares in his own discourse (Bakhtin 1981). Yet however accessible and positive the imagery, recent critique of the square exposes its coercive and/or exclusionary capacity. One historic example is presented by the much-referenced agora as the locus of Greek communal life and an early exemplar of public space. Closer examination however finds that the agora was site of exclusion, with participation limited to free-born males (Basson 2004). Critiques of

contemporary public squares reveal a commodification of public space (see for example Smith and Low 2006). The latter raises questions about ‘marketplace’ as a suitable metaphor, as we wish to avoid associations with a commercialisation of social exchange, and the socio-economic and political connotations that poses.

Much has been made earlier in this text about the situating of the community campus within the community. While that holds true, metaphorically we can understand it as a threshold site which links the space of the community and space of academia together. Again we draw from Bakhtin to expand upon our discussion. For Bakhtin an aesthetic event – i.e., the attempt to make a whole, how things are brought together into a mutually supportive relationship – can only happen when there are two participants present and engaging together in dialogue. This aesthetic event can’t happen through a monologue advanced by one party (Bakhtin 1990), but rather happens in our encounter with an other. This encounter enables us to be exposed to not only different ideas and ways of acting, but also to prompt critical reflection upon our own thinking and operations. Bakhtin suggests that by positioning ourselves at a threshold, we not only expose ourselves to others’ thinking but that we also reduce the difference between how one and an other see and engage with the world (Bakhtin 1990). This is not to suggest that they enter into some form of dialectic synthesis through which individual identity might be lost; rather, Bakhtin was adamant that while mutually informing each other each retain their sense of independence (Bakhtin 1984a). This simultaneous embrace with, but also independence from the other is reflected in our thinking of the meeting space of community and academia as a threshold.

Enabled by this threshold the community and academia – as spatialised social structures – converge and overlap. Yet the threshold equally acts as a literal representation of a place where people, both as individuals and communally, meet. This meeting of community and academia begins with their co-authoring of the community campus. Rather than precedents in which academia has positioned a university space within the community, our conception of the community campus prioritises its co-creation and ongoing operation as implemented by both the community and academia (and other relevant partners).

In the context of community development, when contributing professionals operate from a space of which they are the sole authors, the community regards that space as belonging to the professionals and not the community. Our own research with community-based organisations affirms this. Lessons drawn from the authors’ own professional experience in community development not only in the UK but also in the Global South further testifies to this (Brown, Kalra and Theis 2005). While not community campuses, Pereira (2018) carried out a review of a number of com-

munity-based spaces utilised in co-joined community development and research projects. Revealed through this latter work was the significance of such spaces being co-created and co-realised.

Central to both our own and other's findings was that this co-authoring affords each participant a tangible sense of connection to and ownership of that place, of being part of its making and ongoing life. It should be understood that the co-authoring need not involve any literal construction; rather, as stated by architect John Turner (1976), seminal for his work with the urban poor in Peru, crucial is the community having a role in determining their future. Afforded by this is a sense that all participants can share in that place, and contribute to what emerges from it particularly here through civic agency. Further enabled through this is a greater sense of efficacy about what the community and academia can collaboratively achieve.

Yet just as a threshold is a place of meeting (i.e., arrival), it is equally a place of departure. This thinking reflects not a literal movement away from the threshold, but rather extends our earlier discussion of place being defined by a mutually informing relationship between physical place and the people who inhabit and enact performances within it. Place in this sense is not a thing unto itself, and rather is equally defined by what we do there and the nature of how it has come into being. We are thus able to open up place from being a fixed, found entity which remains static and immutable, and understand its potential for being in a continual state of becoming through its construction and continual remaking in the everyday. Thus departure here is not about physical movement, and rather about actively enabling change.

Bakhtin's (1981) discussion of threshold (drawing on Dostoevsky) articulates thresholds as places of action, and of change. Implied however is that such places are not deterministic, and instead provide a setting within which human-precipitated events occur. As such they operate dialogically with those that inhabit them. This dialogic place is not some simple universal space that accommodates everything, and thus nothing. Rather, it suggests and implies, and opens itself up to what people can make of it. Thus people, place and performance become co-joined in a shared act of creation and discovery.

There are two key spatial qualities that inform the dialogic nature of this threshold. First is its ambiguity. It is neither one nor the other, but rather occupies multiple positions (e.g., inside, outside, and in-between) even simultaneously. It is both a place in its own right, and equally part of spaces adjacent to it. It is multi-layered, both physically and programmatically rather than being just one singular place. Physically it has gradations of space, whether pronounced or subtle in their presence. Its ambiguity affords it being open to appropriation and reinterpretation as people colonise and adapt it. This ambiguity is equally presented in how activities and

people move from one space to another, both into and across this threshold, so that the place both expands and compresses in response to its inhabitation. A further characteristic of this ambiguity is that programmatically this dialogic threshold can not only accommodate different things at different times, but also different things simultaneously; crucial is that these things inform each other through their presence.

The second key spatial characteristic about this dialogic threshold is its playfulness. We understand playfulness as an attitude that frames how we engage with other people, ideas, activities and objects and places. While it can be disruptive and challenging like play, it is equally respectful of its found context. Yet simultaneously that found context is open to reinterpretation, inviting users to (re)make it and take possession of it through their inhabitation. It affords inhabitants opportunity to play off the context and find new, even lateral ways of using it, and so redefine its meaning. Perhaps most notably, in its playfulness a place can prompt the imagination of the inhabitant. Dialogic in nature, it can stimulate new expressions, knowledge and even values (Sicart 2014). This sense of playfulness is evoked in what educator Jos Boys (2010) has identified as informal learning spaces. Operating outside but in compliment to the more formal, traditional education delivered in formal teaching spaces such as lecture and seminar rooms, informal learning spaces are more ambiguous and playful in character. These are the residual spaces in buildings that can be playfully appropriated by students and staff for informal gatherings, turning for example objects a window ledge into a place of learning. While seemingly insignificant, the appropriation and redefinition of a simple window ledge (whether as space in which to set work, or as frame through which to critically examine the world outside) can offer a platform for learning. Such spaces and the spontaneous activities that arise there have been found to play a crucial role in students learning, fostering a deeper, more critical approach as they engage in dialogue with others.

Precedents

To help illustrate our spatial conception of threshold we will quickly refer to four precedents. The first three present different conditions of threshold, from being on the edge, to being internalised, to occupying a position of in-betweenness. These examples are drawn from outside of civic agency, though are programmatically related to aspects of it. Each of these exhibit ambiguity and playfulness, inviting inhabitants to change these spaces to accommodate different usages. The fourth example, drawn from community development practice, discusses how a place as whole might be reimaged through the introduction of a new activity.

Our first example is the Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York. This small art gallery occupies the space of a former store at ground floor level, playing host to a variety of exhibitions of art and architecture as well as holding a small shop. The key

feature of this place the “Storefront” is front façade, which opens up literally to the street. Different panels – some bigger than a person – pivot inwards or outwards or fold downwards, projecting into the gallery and also outside onto the footpath in nice weather. This allows the gallery to open up to the street, and pedestrians to move seamlessly into the building. The shifted panels offer an element of surprise, animating the street with exhibition material suddenly taking up position outside, while animating users as they move around and between the panels into the gallery. Created is an ambiguous layering of space, in which outside and inside merge together.

Our second example is the Apollo Schools complex in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Here a central internal multi-storey atrium sits in the middle of the complex, surrounded by classrooms and other educational spaces. Key in this atrium are subtle invitations to the children to occupy spaces within it in various ways while formally serving different functions. The latter is present in the atrium functioning as a lecture/performance hall, vertical circulation, and informal gathering and learning space. This multiplicity of function is enabled by a series of platforms that step up from the ground floor to the first floor, and which can be occupied as seating during a lecture or performance or used as stairs. The deep size of these platforms allows children to spread out with learning materials or gather in small groups. Balconies overlook this space, serving as additional platforms for seating during a performance, while offering further spaces for children to colonise for semi-secluded learning or gathering.

Our third example is the KwaZulu Natal Society of the Arts in Durban, South Africa. The distinguishing feature of the building is a lattice-covered veranda which sits in front of the building’s main, mostly enclosed block which contains art gallery space. The moveable lattice and overhanging roof enable the veranda to act environmentally to keep the sun out while allowing cooling breezes to enter the building. Simultaneously, the veranda acts as a flexible space, serving as the main circulation space in the building while being appropriated as needed for extra space for exhibition or for dining tables for the café. The panels of the moveable lattice swing upwards, providing overhead canopies to block the sun and a shadowed space underneath in which to situate café tables.

Our fourth precedent is the Ndlovu Medical Centre in Elandsdoorn-town, South Africa, just north of Pretoria. The centre is situated in a community mostly defined by the social and economic challenges it faces. Operating in a joined-up way, the Centre provides in addition to health care, health awareness programmes (e.g., AIDS-HIVS awareness, food nutrition) and dental care, further support to the community including through childcare, a technology training centre, social activit-

ies, a post office and a bakery. One of the more interesting challenges the Centre addressed occurred when wives in the community came to them complaining that too many of their husbands were misspending too much of their pay checks while out drinking on the nights they got paid. But rather than admonish the men for their behaviour, the centre fomented a more dialogical response, embracing the problem as a solution; the problem was that the men were partying, so the Centre decided to host a party. The Centre instituted a Friday night braai (barbecue) to which both the male employees *and* their wives were invited, using the braai as an event at which to distribute paychecks from local employers. With the wives in attendance, the paychecks quickly found their way into the families' household finances and not the men's evening entertainment (Brown, Kalra and Theis 2005). What we admire here is both the lateral thinking shown in responding to the problem of how men were spending their paychecks, and the sense of playfulness that the Centre's management exhibited in reimaging and reappropriating spaces in the centre as the site for a braai.

Conclusion

In our discussion we have introduced the concept of a community campus as threshold – a place co-authored between the community and academia and situated in the community offering opportunity for encounter and agency. This community campus would act as both a metaphorical threshold between community and academia; it would enable a place for meeting but also the pursuit of a co-joined civic agency of civic learning and community development, and the building of identities. Explored has been its theoretical underpinnings, grounding in civic learning, situatedness in the community, and its dialogic nature as a site of encounter and departure. Such a proposition warrants consideration as universities pursue the challenge to advance their civic engagement and contribution to the wider community. This dialogic threshold can provide a new space in which agency can be activated, allowing for a stepping outside of normative places, ideas and ways of thinking (Charli-Joseph 2019); benefitting from this are not only the academics, but equally (if not more significantly) the too-often previously marginalised community who acquire an enhanced sense of agency (Drimie 2019; Pereira 2019a).

Scope for further work remains. What is needed is further detailed examination of other spaces which have some relevance to the discussion here; for example, non-campus based sites of civic learning which are not situated in the community but say in the urban centre, and/or are not co-authored by the community. Also not addressed are challenges to our sense of public space posed by civil unrest and confrontation. While public space has previously been understood as a site of conflict (Merrifield 2002) and even been argued as vital to its potential (Sennett 1996), recent disturbances arising out of political tensions pose challenges to any space of

gathering by the public. While worth exploring such an inquiry demands a discussion in its own right.

What this text has argued for is community campuses situated within the community, that are co-authored between community and academia, and from which joined-up civic agency can be pursued. Moreover, the co-authoring and activation of this space through its appropriation can contribute to the sense of identity and efficacy felt by community and academia alike. Prompted by its ambiguity and playfulness, community and academia can extend their thinking to new ways of operating. Significant to this dialogic space is the co-joining of community and academia and event and space. It offers a threshold to a more situated and dialogic practice of civic agency.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been supported through research funded by the University of Plymouth's Higher Education Innovation Fund and the University of Plymouth's Arts Institute.

Bibliography

- Allen, B. (2007) 'On Performative Regionalism', *Architectural Regionalism – Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 420-426.
- Atkinson, M. P. and Hunt, A. N. (2008) 'Inquiry-Guided Learning in Sociology', *Teaching Sociology*, 36(1), 1-7.
- Amin, A. and Thrift, N. (2002) *Cities – Reimagining the Urban*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bachelard, G. (1969) *The Poetics of Space*, trans. M. Jolas, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981) 'Forms of Chronotope in the Novel', in M. Holquist (Ed.), *The Dialogical Imagination – Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, Trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 84-258.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984a) 'Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics', in C. Emerson (Ed.), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. C. Emerson, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 3-273.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984b) 'Appendix II: Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book', in C. Emerson (Ed.), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. C. Emerson, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 283-302.
- Bakhtin, M. (1990) 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity', in M. Holquist and V. Liapunov (Eds.), *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, trans. V. Liapunov and K. Brostrom, Austin: University of Texas, 4-256.
- Barth, M. et al. (2007) 'Developing key competencies for sustainable development in higher education', in M. Adomssent (Ed.), *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 8(4), 416-430.
- Basson, S. (2004) 'Beware Greeks Bearing Gifts: The Greek agora revisited as a discontinuous subject of historical knowledge', in *Limits: Proceedings from the 21st Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Australia and New Zealand. Melbourne: Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand, 14-19.
- Bell, C. (1992) *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Berard, A. and Ravelli, B. (2020) 'In Their Words: What Undergraduate Sociology Students Say about Community-Engaged Learning', *Journal of Applied Social Science*, 197-210.

- Boyle-Baise, M. (2005) 'Preparing Community-Oriented Teachers: Reflections from a Multicultural Service-Learning Standpoint', *Diversity*. Paper 10.
- Braithwaite, J., et. al. (2018) 'The Future of Health Systems to 2030: A roadmap for global progress and sustainability', *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 30(10), 823-831.
- Bridge, G. (2005) *Reason in the City of Difference – Pragmatism, Communicative Action and Contemporary Urbanism*, London: Routledge.
- Boys, J. (2010) *Towards Creative Learning Spaces: Re-thinking the Architecture of Post-Compulsory Education*, London: Routledge.
- Brown, R. (2013) 'Emplacement, Embodiment and Ritual: Some considerations from shikii wo matagu for our understanding of place and identity', in S. Bandyopadhyay and G. Garma-Montiel (Eds.), *The Territories of Identity: Architecture in the Age of Evolving Globalisation*. London: Routledge, 31–41.
- Brown, R., Kalra, R. and Theis, M. (2005) *The Rough Guide to Community Asset Management*, London: MLC Press.
- Brown and Warwick (2019) 'Civic Learning in Conversation: The Common Ground of Difference', *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, March, 31.
- Butler, J. (1999) 'Performativity's Social Magic', in R. Shusterman (ed.) *Bourdieu – A Critical Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cebrián, G., Junyent, M. and Mulà, I. (2020) 'Competencies in Education for Sustainable Development: Emerging Teaching and Research Developments', *Sustainability*, 12(2).
- Charlesworth, J. and Cochrane, A. (1997) "Anglicising the American Dream – Tragedy, farce and the 'postmodern' city", in S. Westwood and J. Williams (Eds.), *Imagining Cities – Scripts, signs, memories*, London: Routledge, 219–132.
- Charli-Joseph, L., et. al. (2019) 'Promoting Agency for Socio-Ecological Transformation: A transformation-lab in the Xochimilco socio-ecological system', *Ecology and Society*, 23(2), 46.
- Clevenger, C. M. and Ozbek, M. E. (2013) 'Service-Learning Assessment: Sustainability Competencies in Construction Education', *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management*, 139(12).
- Civic University Network (n.d.) Available at: <https://civicuniversitynetwork.co.uk/>.
- Corner, J. (2002) 'The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, critique and invention', in D. Cosgrove (Ed.) *Mappings*, London: Reaktion Books, 89-100.

- Dias, D. and Soares, D. (2018) 'Civic learning outcomes: a step towards an inclusive higher education', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 22(4), 360-374.
- Drimie, S., et. al. (2019) 'Creating Transformative Spaces for Dialogue and Action: Reflecting on the experience of the Southern Africa Food Lab', *Ecology and Society*, 23(2), 2.
- Donald, J. (1997) 'Imaging the Modern City', in S. Westwood and J. Williams (Eds.), *Imagining Cities – Scripts, signs, memories*, London: Routledge, 181-201.
- Eckler, J. (2012) *Language of Space and Form*, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.
- Eppler, M. A. et al. (2011) 'Benefits of service-learning for freshmen college students and elementary school children', *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning*, 11(4), 102–115.
- Foucault, M. and Miskowiec, J. (1986) 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16 (1), 22-27.
- Graizbord, D. (2019) 'Toward an organic policy sociology', *Sociology Compass*, 13(11).
- Gullion, J. S. and Ellis, E. G. (2014) 'A Pedagogical Approach to Action Research', *Journal of Applied Social Science*, 8(1), 61-72.
- Hales, A., Woods, N. and Williams, K. (2021) 'Navigating COVID-10: Insights from research on social ostracism', *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, March.
- Hanks, W. (1991) 'Foreward', in J. Lave and E. Wenger, *Situated Learning – Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hester, R. T. Jr. (1993) 'Sacred Structures and Everyday Life: A Return to Manteo, North Carolina', in D. Seamon (Ed.) *Dwelling, Seeing, and Designing – Towards a Phenomenological Ecology*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hickman, M., Crowley, H. and Mai, N. (2014) 'Immigration and social cohesion in the UK – The rhythms and realities of everyday life', York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Holquist, M., (1990) 'Introduction', in M. Holquist and V. Liapunov (Eds.), *The Architectonics of Answerability, Art and Answerability – Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, trans V. Liapunov, Austin: University of Texas Press, ix – xlix.
- Hurtado, S., (2019) 'Now is the Time: Civic Learning for a Strong Democracy', *Daedalus*, 148(4), 94-107.

- Jickling, B. (2003) 'Environmental Education and Environmental Advocacy: Revisited', *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 34(2), 20-27.
- Johnston, J. B. (2020) 'The Walking School Bus: Critical Community-Engaged Learning in Action?', *Teaching Sociology*, 48(2), 140-151.
- Kahne, J. and Westheimer, J. (2006) 'The Limits of Political Efficacy: Educating Citizens for a Democratic Society', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 39(02), 289-296.
- Karatani, K. (1995) *Architecture as Metaphor*, trans. S. Kohso, Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Kawano, S. (2005) *Ritual Practice in Modern Japan – Ordering People, Place and Action*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Lee, T. et al. (2019) 'An Experiment of Community-Based Learning Effects on Civic Participation', *Journal of Political Science Education*, 15(4), 443-458.
- Lefebvre, H. 1991 (1974, 1984) *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, Malden: Blackwell.
- Lewis, C. and Short, C. (1966) *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lovell, N., (Ed.) (1998) *Locality and Belonging*, London: Routledge.
- Madsen, P., and Plunz, R. (Eds.) (2002) *The Urban Lifeworld – Formation Perception Representation*, London: Routledge.
- Massey, D. (2005) *For Space*, London: Routledge.
- Mathews, G. (2000) *Global Culture / Individual Identity – Searching for Home in the Cultural Supermarket*, London: Routledge.
- Mayer, B. et al. (2019) 'Improving Student Learning Outcomes through Community-based Research: The Poverty Workshop', *Teaching Sociology*, 47(2), 135-147.
- McTier, A. and McGregor, A. (2011) 'Integrating employment and skills: the role of community-based learning', *Policy Studies*, 32(1), 73-90.
- Merriam-Webster (n.d.) 'Ecological', Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ecological>.
- Merriam-Webster (n.d.) 'Environmental', Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/environmental>.
- Miami University (n.d.) 'Over-the-Rhine', Available at: <https://www.miamioh.edu/cca/academics/departments/arch-id/academics/sasa/over-the-rhine/>.

- Molderez, I. and Fonseca, E. (2018) 'The efficacy of real-world experiences and service learning for fostering competences for sustainable development in higher education', *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 172, 4397-4410.
- Mortimer, G., Grimmer, L., and Maginn, P. (2021) 'The suburbs are the future of post-COVID retail, High Streets Task Force'. Available at <https://www.high-streetstaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id+8803b664-5b2c-4f2d-bc42-0df-b2e4c9259>.
- Mtawa, N., Fongwa, S. and Wilson-Strydom, M. (2021) 'Enhancing graduate employability attributes and capabilities formation: a service-learning approach', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 26(5), 679-695.
- Muhlestein, B. J. and Mccann, R. (2019) 'Assessing Community-Engaged Learning Impacts using Ripple Effects Mapping', *Journal on Empowering Teaching Excellence*, 3(2).
- Nicol, David J. (1997) "Research on Learning and Higher Education Teaching, UCoSDA Briefing Paper Forty-Five.
- Norberg Schulz, C. (1979) *Genius Loci – Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, New York: Rizzoli.
- Norton, R., et. al. (2018) *The Promise and Challenge of Integrating Multidisciplinary and Civically Engaged Learning*, *Journal of Education and Planning Research*.
- Owusu-Agyeman, Y. and Fourie-Malherbe, M. (2021) 'Students as partners in the promotion of civic engagement in higher education', *Studies in Higher Education*, 46(6), 1241-1255.
- Pereira, L., et. al. (2019a) 'Designing Transformative Spaces for Sustainability in Socio-ecological Systems', *Ecology and Society*, 23/4: 32.
- Pereira, L. et. al. (2019b) 'Transformative Space in the Making: Key lessons from nine cases in the Global South', *Sustainability Science*, 15, 161-178.
- Pleasants, R. et al. (2004) 'Incorporating Service Learning into Leadership Education: Duke Tip's Leadership Institute', *Gifted Child Today*, 27(1), 16-21.
- Public Health, Office of the Director of Public Health, Plymouth City Council (2019) 'Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 – Plymouth Summary Analysis'. Available online at: <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/IMD%202019%20report%20Final%200.1.pdf>.
- Rapoport, A. (1995) 'A Different View of Design', in N. Wilkinson (Ed.) *33 Papers in Environment Behaviour Research*, Pune: Sangram Press, 457-469.
- Rich, A. (1979) *On Lies, Secrets and Silence – Selected Prose*, W. W. Norton.

- Riché, P. (1978) *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West: From the Sixth through the Eighth Century*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Rowe, Peter (1996) 'Design in an Increasingly Small World', in W. Saunders (Ed.), *Reflections on Architectural Practices in the Nineties*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 220-230.
- Schuman, A. (2014) 'Community Engagement: The Evolution of Architecture's Social Vocation in Schools of Architecture'. Available at: Community engagement – https://arch3711.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/schuman_community-engagement.pdf.
- Sennett, R. (1996) *The Uses of Disorder – Personal Identity and City Life*, London: Faber and Faber.
- Shields, R. (2013) *Spatial Questions – Cultural topologies and social spatialisations*, Los Angeles: Sage.
- Sicart, M. (2014) *Play Matters*, Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Siza, R. (2019) 'The sociologist: a profession without a community', *International Review of Sociology*, 29(3), 378-389.
- Smith, N. and Low, S. (2006) 'Introduction: The Imperative of Public Space', in S. Low and N. Smith (Eds.) *The Politics of Public Space*. New York: Routledge, 1 – 17.
- Sperlinger, T., McLellan, J., and Pettigrew, T. (2018) *Who Are Universities For? Re-making higher education*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1991) *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Toncar, M. F. et al. (2006) 'Uniform Assessment of the Benefits of Service Learning: The Development, Evaluation, and Implementation of the Seleb Scale', *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 14(3), 223-238.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu (1974) *Topophilia – A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Turner, J. (1976) *Housing By People – Towards Autonomy in Building Environments*, London: Marion Boyars.
- UNESCO (2014) 'Roadmap for Implementing the Global Action Programme on Education Development', Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform. Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=1674&menu=1515>.
- UPP Foundation Civic University Commission (2018) 'Truly Civic: Strengthening the connection between universities and their places', UPP Foundation.

- Walker, M. and McLean, M. (2013) *Professional Education, Capabilities and the Public Good – The role of universities in promoting human development*, London: Routledge.
- Warwick, P., Morgan, A. & Miller, W. (2019) 'The pursuit of compassionate hope – repurposing the University through the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda' in P. Gibbs and A. Peterson (Eds.), *Higher Education and Hope*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 113-134.
- Westoby, P. (2014) 'Theorising Dialogue for Community Development Practice – An Exploration of Crucial Thinkers', *Journal of Dialogue Studies*, 2(1), 69-87.

Exploring the Potential of Cross-Regional Dialogue Platforms in Protracted Conflict Settings

Marko Lehti, Élise Féron, Vadim Romashov & Sebastian Relitz¹

¹ Dr Marko Lehti is a senior research fellow at and a deputy director of Tampere Peace Research Institute (TAPRI) and an academic director of master's degree programme in Peace, Mediation and Conflict Research (PEACE) both at Tampere University. His research in the field of peace and conflict research particularly focusses on peace mediation and dialogues, crises of liberal peace and liberal order, transformation of identities and the idea of Nordic peace. His latest book are "Contestations of Liberal Order. The West in Crisis?" (Palgrave 2020) that assesses the narratives about the crisis of western liberal order and "The Era of Private Peacemakers. A New Dialogic Approach to Mediation" (Palgrave 2019) that deals the turbulent change of international peacemaking field and the growing role of international NGOs.

Dr Élise Féron is a Docent and a senior research fellow at the Tampere Peace Research Institute (Finland). She is also a invited professor at the University of Louvain (Belgium), the University of Turin (Italy), and the University of Coimbra (Portugal). Her main research interests include conflict-generated diaspora politics, conflict prevention, masculinities and conflicts, sexual violence in conflict settings, as well as post-colonial interstate relations. Her latest publications include *Handbook of Feminist Peace Research*. Routledge, 2021 (edited with Tarja Väyrynen, Swati Parashar, and Catia Confortini); "Towards an intersectional approach to populism: Comparative perspectives from Finland and India" (with Shweta Singh), *Contemporary Politics*, 2021; "Embracing Complexity: Diaspora Politics as a Co-Construction." *Migration Letters*, 2020; "National populism and gendered vigilantism: The case of the Soldiers of Odin in Finland." (with Sarai Aharoni), *Cooperation and Conflict*, 2020; "Reinventing conflict prevention? Women and the prevention of the reemergence of conflict in Burundi." *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 2020.

Vadim Romashov is currently finalising his doctoral research on the everyday co-existence of Armenians and Azerbaijanis in rural settlements of Georgia. Since 2012, he has been affiliated with Tampere Peace Research Institute (TAPRI), Tampere University, and has participated in TAPRI-led research projects focusing on conflict-affected areas of the former Soviet Union. His recent publications have dealt mostly with the Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and the conflict over Nagorny Karabakh. Since 2016, he has been continuously involved in international research-based conflict transformation initiatives in the South Caucasus and Moldova.

Dr Sebastian Relitz is a research associate at Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena and director of the NGO Corridors – Dialogue through Cooperation. In his academic work, he focusses on the specifics of conflict transformation efforts in protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe. His monograph "Conflict Resolution in De Facto States: The Practice of Engagement without Recognition" will be published with Routledge in 2022. In his practical work, he develops and implements peacebuilding and dialogue processes with a special focus on cross-regional frameworks and consults international organisations on this matter.

Abstract: Protracted conflicts like those in the South Caucasus and Moldova stand as examples of the limits of international peace-building practices in addressing conflict transformation in various ethnic-marked conflicts, and in promoting reconciliation across the deep divides that these long-standing conflicts have generated within and among societies. A major challenge to supporting the transformation of protracted conflicts is that the conflict settings have been solidified as a new normality, and the polarised division between neighbours and within societies has been institutionalised. To address these challenges, we conceptualise cross-regional dialogue as a third-party facilitated process that brings together actors from various protracted conflict settings thus ensuring a greater diversity of opinions and societal standings. Cross-regional formats of dialogue, in our view, provide a space for suspending the dominant mutual antagonisms and for creative thinking about new horizons for the shared future. They enable participants and organisers to break away from the problem-solving paradigm as well as from the bilateral format of dialogues concentrated on one conflict, and thus they can be seen to provide safe spaces for dialogue in the midst of protracted conflicts.

Keywords: Agonistic peacebuilding, Cross-regional dialogue, Post-Soviet regional conflicts, Protracted conflict

Introduction

Protracted conflicts like those in the South Caucasus and Moldova stand as examples of the limits of international peace-building practices in addressing conflict transformation in various ethnic-marked conflicts, and in promoting reconciliation across the deep divides that these long-standing conflicts have generated within and among societies. Conflicts over Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria date back to the collapse of the Soviet Union more than three decades ago. Even if they are often described as ‘frozen’ and violence is escalating there only sporadically, the affected societies are hostages of a ‘no war, no peace’ situation. The August war in South Ossetia in 2008, the four-day warfare around Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2016 and the full-scale war over Nagorno-Karabakh in September–October 2020 have shown that large-scale violence in these conflict settings can still happen. These conflicts also raise significant humanitarian concerns and restrain the economic development of the concerned areas.

The fear of escalation of violence remains omnipresent particularly in border areas and in the disputed regions, but even beyond them, the presence of these conflicts affects the everyday lives of hundreds of thousands of people because of mutually antagonist identifications, the forms of which are often institutionalised, delineate invisible mental borders and narrow down horizons for peace. Societies affected by protracted conflicts and long-standing dominance of antagonist identities are characterised by their limited ability to tolerate the narration of alternative interpretations of the past that contradict prevailing discourses without a fear of re-escalating the conflict or violence (Praeger 2008). This sets significant limitations for pluralistic

politics, dialogue as well as human security. Conventional problem-solving approaches to peace-building as well as reconciliation models emphasising forgiveness face difficulties when coping with deep-rooted antagonism. Their major challenge is how to support conflict transformation in the framework of protracted conflicts in which the conflict setting is solidified as a new normality, and antagonism prevails.

For international mediators, protracted conflicts are the ‘most resistant cases’ (Bercovitch 2005) in which ‘the track record of third parties is not good’ (Crocker *et al.* 2005, 21) and there is a grim forecast that ‘there may, in fact, be no room and no role for mediation at all’ (Zartman 2005, 53). The solution for protracted conflict settings has been sought in manifold studies, and practitioners have developed various approaches to solve ‘unsolvable’ conflicts (see, e.g., Coleman 2003; 2004). Instead of prioritising the geopolitical level and top-down approaches, the way out from stalled state-level processes seems to lie in bottom-up initiatives and different kinds of civil society dialogues that can support the inclusion and legitimacy of peace processes and facilitate as well as enhance new peace initiatives, and outline perspectives for a shared future. However, in protracted conflicts, unofficial dialogue initiatives are also often stalled, restricted or politicised for various reasons, one of them being that mutual antagonism also hinders civil society dialogues.

If an overall resolution of the conflict appears as an illusion for the dialogue participants, then approaches oriented towards problem solving may not be the best format. Therefore, if we agree that there is no easy and straightforward solution for protracted conflicts, more emphasis should be put on transformative dialogues. Indeed, in protracted conflict settings, novel ideas and initiatives to organise transformative dialogues are needed to break away from dominant experiences of intractability and to engage and support local civil society actors. There is an urgent need for rethinking how dialogue formats could better address complex conflict settings like those in the post-Soviet area. From this perspective, recent scholarly discussion on agonistic peace-building opens up promising alternatives to address deep-rooted antagonism. Agonistic peace-building is not ‘primarily geared to achieving harmonious consensus’ (Suransky and Alma 2018, 36) or ‘finding the “truth” or some form of consensus about the history of the conflict’ (Maddison 2015, 1019). Agonistic peace-building is not about solving antagonism altogether but diluting it, and therefore, it may make a conflict ‘more liveable’ thus enabling transformative moments and processes.

The cross-regional format explored in this article is one option to break away from the problem-solving paradigm as well as from the bilateral format of dialogues concentrated on one conflict, and to enable transformative dialogue. At the level of official international negotiations, for political reasons, it is often not possible to com-

bine different conflict resolution processes or to launch initiatives that can be viewed as untested and therefore potentially risky. In addition, informal dialogues supported by the international community have also often been focused on a specific conflict. Civil society dialogues, however, offer an opportunity to look beyond national or conflict frames, and to launch unconventional dialogue formats, for instance those that are organised cross-regionally. Although there are some scattered examples of this kind of cross-regional platforms of dialogue, there is no systematised knowledge of their benefits to peace processes. For that reason, in this article, we intend to discuss the idea of cross-regional dialogues which bring together actors from various protracted conflict settings and which thus include a diversity of opinions and societal standings. Cross-regional platforms of dialogue have, in our view, the potential to suspend dominant antagonisms and to encourage innovative thinking in order to open new horizons for the future.

This article is based on research conducted within the framework of the OSCE Network project, ‘Cross-Regional Corridors of Dialogue: Developing a Complementing Track for Transforming Longstanding Conflicts’ (2018–2019). The project’s particular objective was to develop, redesign and test a format called the ‘cross-regional corridor of dialogue’². The research material collected from this project constitutes the empirical basis for our discussions of the potential of the cross-regional approach, and of how to better address the expectations of local civil societies and peace activists and thus invest in locally owned process designing. As detailed at the end of the article, our empirical material was collected during four data collection trips in 2018 and 2019 to Armenia, Georgia and Moldova, as well as during two experimental cross-regional dialogue forums held in Stuttgart and Vienna in 2018 and 2019. In total, we have engaged with 61 local peace-builders and international experts and held countless informal conversations with them. In order to ensure confidentiality, however, in this article, we refrain from naming them and from attributing quotes.

Based on this empirical data, and after reviewing the specific challenges related to the transformation of conflicts in the South Caucasus and in Moldova, we present a model of a cross-regional platform of dialogues and explain how it is particularly suited to protracted settings, and we discuss its application in the concerned conflict settings. In the last section of the article, we explore the potential of cross-regional

² The idea of a ‘Cross-Regional Corridors of Dialogue’ was initially developed in 2016 by scholars from the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS) whose aim was to bypass major obstacles for innovative dialogue and confidence-building in protracted conflict settings. Since 2016, the original concept has been applied in several dialogue workshops by the IOS and the INGO Corridors—Dialogue through Cooperation. For more details, see Tamminen et al. (2016); and Lehti et al. (2019).

platforms of dialogue for fostering agonistic dialogue and conflict transformation in protracted conflict settings on the basis of our empirical material.

From Conflict Management to Dialogic Approaches in Protracted Conflicts

When dealing with protracted conflicts, conflict management approaches have been historically dominant (Coleman 2003; 2004). This paradigm approaches intractable conflicts from the perspectives of rational choice and state-centrism and sees them as an outcome of complex strategic and tactical calculations, and of a struggle over power and interests. Therefore, the dominating Realist school has primarily focused on the political and technical incapability of international intervention and mediation to support conflict resolution, and on the importance of the geopolitical context and of power relations. These studies search mainly for a rational solution to highly complex conflict puzzles.

An alternative peace-building perspective has emphasised the role of civil society (Pouligny 2005). As part of the liberal peace-building paradigm, the often-repeated argument by the tenants of this perspective is that civil society dialogues are required for bringing legitimacy to peace processes (see, e.g., Arnault 2014; de Waal 2014). Inclusivity and local ownership currently constitute an internationally agreed dogma in all peace processes which is difficult to bypass. However, even if inclusivity is widely recognised as essential for any peace-building and dialogue initiative, it has been challenging to implement in practice. The recent debate on peace-building has concentrated on the question of local, subaltern agency, giving rise to calls for localised practices of ‘peace formation’ (Richmond 2013; Roberts 2011; MacGinty 2010). The question that is most challenging in this regard is how in practice a third-party intervention is able (or not) to support locally owned, locally driven, and self-sufficient dialogues, and to enhance the inclusivity of a peace process. In these circumstances, de Coning (2018) calls for ‘adaptive peacebuilding’, meaning that peace-builders should be able to work with the uncertainty of the complexity of conflicts and not think about peace processes in terms of failure or success. Thus, their task should be to support ‘the ability of communities to cope with and manage this process of change in such a way that they can avoid violent conflict’ (*Ibid.*, 215).

During the past two decades, the conflict transformation approach has contested the previously dominating rationalistic beliefs of conflict management and conflict resolution. Since the transformation approaches regard conflict as a natural and important part of social and political life, the aim is not to eliminate it, but to transform destructive, violent forms of conflict into non-violent ones. In order to do this, transforming relationships, discourses, attitudes and interests has been prioritised.

The conflict transformation approach seeks to alter the underlying structures that lead to the expression of conflict in violent terms. Rather than trying to adjust the positions of the parties and find a compromise between their differing interests, the conflict transformation approach attempts to transmute the forms and functions of violence (see, e.g., Kriesberg 2011; Buckley-Zistel 2008; Miall 2004).

From a conflict transformation perspective, the distinction between peace mediation and dialogues can be blurry, and both can be understood more comprehensively as a third-party activity that can help to change the prevailing mutually antagonising perceptions or violent behaviour of conflicting parties by the confronting parties themselves. Peace mediation and dialogues can be then defined primarily as a peace-seeking exercise that ‘includes different forms of third-party intervention in order to support the peaceful transformation of violent conflict by sustaining dialogic interaction among conflict parties’ (Lehti 2019, 97). Thus, internationally promoted peace cannot be the outcome of rational third-party intervention but is something that emerges as the result of ‘hearing, centring and responding to everyday needs enunciated locally as part of the peacebuilding process, which is then enabled by global actors with congruent interests in stable peace’ (Roberts 2011, 2543).

In this article, our main research interest is to understand what kind of peace dialogues can open new horizons for peace in a situation where ‘paradoxical structure, depth of meaning, emotionality, complexity [of intractable conflicts], and trauma are often experienced as overwhelming to the parties and to third parties alike’ (Coleman 2003, 31). Following Feller and Ryan (2012), ‘dialogue is a movement aimed at generating coexistence and does so through encountering the “other” to share experiences’. But within protracted conflict settings, this can be difficult because when conflict escalates and is prolonged, ‘the opposing groups become increasingly polarised through in-group discourse and out-group hostilities, resulting in the development of polarised collective identities constructed around a negation and disparagement of the out-group’ (Coleman 2003, 22). This experience of polarisation and antagonism is hardly negotiable since all efforts to find a compromise would require renegotiating one’s own identification, which in turn could generate anxiety and feelings of insecurity (Rumelili 2015).

In order to enable dialogues that would be otherwise impossible, to gain public acceptance for peace processes, to prevent the escalation of antagonism into open violence and to create a condition for long-term transformation towards peace, it is necessary to address antagonistic relationships with different formats of civil society dialogue, but, as Chantal Mouffe (2013) writes, dilution of antagonism altogether and an all-encompassing solution are just an illusion and the best that can be achieved is the transformation of antagonism into an agonistic relationship. Agon-

istic peace-building refers to this kind of transformation and thus opens new paths to recognise and understand dialogue within the complex settings of protracted conflicts and to evade the dichotomy of the 'divine outside' and 'local victim to be helped'. Maddison (2015, 1015) argues that:

at best, groups in divided societies can aspire to an agonistic engagement, in which conflict across and about their deep, identity-based differences continues to define the relationship. While other modes of engagement based on, for example, deliberation may be beneficial in assisting elite decision-making, agonistic approaches also have a role to play in smaller-scale civil society contexts aimed at relational transformation.

The agonistic dialogue approach does not follow a conventional problem-solving method: it is a discussion which does not aim to eradicate antagonism through finding a consensus. Though no rational agreement or tangible results may be reached, nor even sought in agonistic peace-building, dialogue could be better conceptualised along the so-called Bakhtinian dialogic approach that emphasises problem-finding and continuity instead of closure. Through the process of dialogic exchange, 'people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another' (Sennett 2012, 19). Can the cross-regional model introduce one model to apply a dialogic approach within the context of the prolonged conflicts in the South Caucasus and in Moldova? Can cross-regional dialogue platforms constitute a pragmatic model for agonistic dialogue among local civil society peace-builders and peace activists?

The Challenges of Transforming Conflict in the South Caucasus and Moldova

The protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus and Moldova have been objects for international conflict management and peace-building for more than a quarter century. Nowadays, it is obvious that official and internationally-led peace processes have not sufficiently progressed and have not triggered any breakthrough or decisive move towards conflict resolution. Furthermore, in the South Caucasus, these processes even failed to prevent two major wars in 2008 in South Ossetia and in 2020 in Karabakh. Engaging and supporting civil society dialogues can offer opportunities to support transformation, but international organisations like the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) face difficulties when they engage in cooperation with non-governmental organisation (NGO) actors. The field of civil society actors is always diverse and thus external actors need to deal with problems of representativeness, inclusiveness and ownership. Still, even though local actors often

have the best experience of the situation on the ground, they may need some form of support. International actors, however, have been criticised for continuously ignoring and sidelining actual local needs, often because of deficient knowledge and lack of methods for engaging with local agency in the context of protracted conflicts (e.g., Millar 2011; Viktorova Milne 2010; Vitalis Pemunta 2012; Bleiker 2011; Newman 2013). Another difficulty is that any dialogue and negotiation format in the post-Soviet space that connects official and non-official actors would effectively mean engaging in dialogue with non-recognised or partly recognised state entities or actors from these entities (Ker-Lindsay and Berg 2018). At the same time, the exclusion and, eventually, isolation of non-recognised or partially recognised entities do not bear any sustainable potential for conflict transformation either. Hence, dialogue formats addressing post-Soviet protracted conflicts should be rebuilt upon the principle of inclusion and be locally driven.

In Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria, the room for dialogue and cooperation over the political and cultural divides is limited, and the turbulent international and domestic political environments affect the dialogue activities. In many cases, public and political discourses on conflict-related issues are severely constrained by perceived red lines. Influential political and societal spoilers often condemn meetings with the opposing side as an action against 'the national interest'. Moreover, policies and tendencies of isolation and self-isolation constrain the possibilities for direct people-to-people contact. Consequently, the number of working relations over the divide and information flows between the sides are limited. Given this lack of room for encounter and exchange for three decades after the violent escalations, a whole generation in Georgia/Abkhazia/South Ossetia, Azerbaijan/Armenia/Nagorno-Karabakh and, to a much lesser degree, Moldova/Transnistria has grown up without the experience of mutual exchange with the other side. Thus, it is crucial to (re-)create and support spaces for such an exchange, especially between representatives of the young generation.

Although the international involvement and commitment has changed considerably over the past 25 years, the facilitation of dialogue over the divide has been an ever-present part of these efforts (Hasanov and Ishkanian 2005; Sotieva 2014; Zemskov-Züge 2015; Conciliation Resources 2019; International Alert 2012). While conducting the research within the framework of the OSCE Network project, 'Cross-Regional Corridors of Dialogue', however, we have witnessed not only limited progress in conflict resolution terms, but also an increasing sense of frustration with the lack of tangible results. In many cases, we have identified a growing dialogue fatigue as well as a sense of dialogue cynicism among civil society stakeholders and international organisations. Statements such as 'those people talk and talk with each other while they are travelling the world without any positive effect for their communities'

can be heard in most cases. This scepticism is particularly widespread in the break-away regions. To be sustainable, to overcome the growing fatigue and cynicism, to enlist public support and to incentivise wider societal involvement, dialogue must produce tangible outputs that have a broader added value for societies on all sides of the conflict divide. Otherwise, the peace dialogues and, even more importantly, the dialogue participants lose credibility and public support in their home communities. But because of cementing antagonism between the societies affected by the protracted conflicts, dialogues on conflict resolution are unlikely to produce such results. From a conflict transformation perspective, it becomes necessary to identify the similar needs and joint interests of the local communities who are the main beneficiaries of the peace processes. From the perspective of local ownership, the dialogue process should be developed more on the basis of local needs than on the objectives of international stakeholders. And this is a great challenge for all peace processes as the still existent friction between the different international and local agendas produces severe frustrations about international peace initiatives, especially within the populations of disputed territories.

International organisations like the OSCE have limited capacity to open spaces for dialogue in the South Caucasus and Moldova, but there are also some ongoing initiatives led by international peace-building organisations (e.g., Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation, Conciliation Resources, International Alert, Berghof Foundation, and CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation) that actively try to keep dialogic processes running between and among divided societies despite a challenging environment. Many of these initiatives have delivered valuable contributions over a long period of time. However, often the very same stakeholders, experts and civil society representatives take part in these various dialogues. Thus, even though continuity and stable relations between participants in dialogue formats are crucial, the issue of the ‘usual suspects’ becomes apparent in protracted conflicts: the same people meet repeatedly in different frameworks. Three main reasons can be identified for this. First, most international donors and stakeholders trust well established domestic civil society actors to implement their projects successfully, and they take a cautious approach towards new actors. Second, working with identified key civil society representatives may ensure a certain degree of acceptance of their activities within the host society and political system, as such actors potentially have a strong position within their communities and are perceived as proven multipliers. Third, there are many civil society representatives who are not willing to engage in dialogue with the other side; after three decades of protracted conflict and separation, people have lost interest in and hope for conflict transformation. To extend the circle of engaged participants and include a wide range of various groups on all sides of the divide, it is crucial to diversify dialogue processes.

The limited spaces for dialogue can also be explained by the restricted local ownership of peace-building initiatives. Aid dependency and the hidden agendas of external funders may also introduce negative dynamics to the conflict areas (Woodward 2013). To increase the chances of the success of peace interventions, international engagement should become more needs-driven and inclusive, for example, by identifying fields of mutual interest over the divide, by developing tailor-made approaches to tackle those issues, and by engaging in close cooperation with local communities. Our cross-regional model proposes to revisit the dialogue format to enable and empower local civil society actors, and to ensure their ownership over the dialogue processes in which they are involved. It targets conflict-affected communities in order to identify or to become more knowledgeable about joint needs over dividing lines.

The specific challenges for dialogue initiatives in protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus and Moldova demonstrate the need for alternative approaches and concepts of dialogue to supplement and in some cases replace the established dialogue processes. These approaches must develop a mechanism to include and empower various actors in bypassing structural political obstacles for dialogue. Strengthening local ownership in agenda-setting and during the implementation of dialogue activities is vital in overcoming the friction between international and local stakeholders. Accordingly, alternative approaches to dialogue must be based on the interests and needs of the dialogue participants and aim to facilitate meaningful positive change within their communities on the ground. In the next section, we explore how cross-regional dialogue platforms could respond to these challenges.

Cross-Regional Dialogue Platforms

Our empirical study focuses on the ways in which cross-regional platforms can support and become meaningful for local peace-builders in situations where dialogue fatigue prevails and trust in international mediation is low. At the theoretical level, we are asking whether cross-regional dialogue platforms can be useful in an agonistic peace-building approach. In internationally as well as locally organised peace dialogues, the common framework is a conflict-specific and often bilateral setting, in which participants of two opposing sides come together under international facilitation. This conventional approach implies that only conflict-specific problems can be addressed efficiently and are meaningful in 'serious' peace talks which are necessarily bilateral. We suggest complementing this approach by setting up platforms of meetings and interactions without the omnipresent necessity to reach compromises and solutions on concrete issues between the two sides. Such dialogues that provide an escape from bilateral antagonised positions may, for example, enable new perspect-

ives to envision the (shared) future that may, in a longer perspective, be crucial for generating confidence and trust, and eventually conflict transformation.

The proposed cross-regional platforms of dialogue are designed as processes that can bypass existing structural limitations in bilateral and monothematic frameworks, but not as a dialogue that would focus on or solve deep-rooted antagonism. A cross-regional approach to peace dialogues implies that individuals from various conflict-affected areas in different regions participate in the dialogue, and participation in the dialogue is designed in a way that there is no opposition of one conflict side to another side or to several sides. For example, even though a peace dialogue involving Georgian, Ossetian and Abkhaz participants could be seen as representing several conflict-affected areas, a Georgian participant could be viewed as representing one conflict side opposed to both Ossetian and Abkhaz, and therefore we do not consider this format as cross-regional. Considering how to define a region is necessarily a context-based exercise. For example, even if the conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh on the one hand, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the other hand, are separate and have their own dynamics, the South Caucasus also constitutes a well-integrated region from the perspective of peace and conflict processes. Furthermore, within the South Caucasus, intra-regional politics affected by divergent geopolitical preferences, views on a shared regional history, other territorial disputes, and often mutually opposing ethnonational identifications create their own complex regional ecosystem. Therefore, in this case, the proposed cross-regional framework should include participants from different 'conflict zones' of two or more regions. We thus also included in our scope the case of Moldova/Transnistria. And, correspondingly, this cross-regional 'combination' was useful also for escaping the conventional bilateral format of dialogues between the two banks of the Dniester River. In a cross-regional format, it is important to ensure that participants have similar historical experiences or common frames of reference, which was ensured in our project by a shared Soviet past and similar political, economic and ethnonationalist tendencies that resulted in the wars during the early 1990s, and by the issue of the so-called *de facto* states (Broers *et al.* 2015; Berg and Vits 2018).

Based on experience-sharing among civil society actors from various regions, cross-regional dialogues are expected to strengthen the idea of multi-actor, multi-level processes that focus on problem-finding dialogue and practical cooperation. Furthermore, they can bypass existing obstacles of bilateral dialogue formats and provide new opportunities for exchange and confidence building across dividing lines within one specific region. In addition, cross-regional platforms of dialogue can open entry points for including different actors at various stages of negotiations and thus enhance dialogue potentials, as well as contribute to avoiding and/or overcoming deadlocks that are commonly faced in official negotiation formats. Nevertheless,

it might not be a model that suits every occasion, and its execution is necessarily context-based.

We started our study by learning from the experiences of various local peace-builders. We did not engage with local civil society actors as peace-builders in terms of their professional or institutional affiliations, but the attribution to the field of peace-building was primarily a matter of the participants' self-identification. Even though most of the project participants³ have worked for a long time in local NGOs, we did not aim to involve them as official representatives of their organisations, but as individuals ready to share their experiences. Our focus was on individual experiences and expectations in relation to peace processes and to international third parties like the OSCE. For that purpose, team members travelled to conflict-affected areas and met representatives of several local NGOs and other individuals with relevant experience in peace dialogues. These meetings pursued two objectives: to gain a broad understanding of local experiences of dialogue processes organised at the local, national and international levels, and to identify potential participants for the project's experimental dialogue platforms. Participants in these dialogue platforms were identified based on the interviews that had been conducted in the concerned conflict-affected areas, following various representativity criteria in terms of political and/or territorial affiliation—all 'sides to the conflicts' had to be represented—of experience in peace dialogues, of gender, and of age.

During the second phase, we organised two experimental dialogue platforms bringing together local actors as well as international peace-builders and scholars, who were invited to jointly think about how to adapt the idea of cross-regional dialogue to their often years-long experience of peace dialogues. A three-day experimental dialogue forum organised in Stuttgart, and a follow-up meeting half a year later in Vienna, brought together a total of 49 participants from the South Caucasus and Moldova, including participants from Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdniestria, as well as the research team. Participants were expected to share their experiences regarding current and past peace dialogues and processes, as well as on recurrent obstacles and best practices. Another important objective was to generate new ideas and models for future peace dialogue processes and to explore opportunities to facilitate knowledge exchange between local and regional civil society actors and international third parties. At this stage, the organising team took on the role of facilitator, and participants worked intensively in small groups with target-oriented questions. The groups had been constituted in order to ensure as great a diversity of participants as possible, notably in terms of region of origin, gender and

³ In total, during the project, we have engaged with 43 local peace-builders in the various concerned regions, and conducted 18 expert interviews additionally.

age. Time slots were dedicated to brainstorming on the needs and issues faced by local peace-builders across the different conflict settings, but also on possible solutions, ways forward and ideas for improving the quality and impact of ongoing dialogue initiatives. Facilitators in each group, usually members of the research team, wrote down the ideas that came up on sticky notes, which were then collectively organised on whiteboards and presented to the whole group afterwards. At the end of the dialogue forums, concluding discussions were organised, and the team gathered the main outputs of the small group discussions for later reporting. The final step, a guarantee that local voices were heard, was the organisation of a joint feedback session half a year after the first meeting, gathering 18 participants.

Beyond Bilateral Dialogue: Avoiding Politicisation and Securitisation

Our observations of experiences and opinions of participants during the two experimental dialogue platforms, as well as the follow-up session, support our hypothesis that cross-regional platforms can enable participation and connections that would be otherwise impossible or highly problematic. We received strong evidence that the participants' needs and interests were quite similar across conflict settings, including a need for local ownership of dialogue processes, for international support, for better access to international media, for capacity building, for exchanges of good practices and for documentation of experiences. Likewise, some obstacles were mentioned by almost all participants, such as personal security issues, peace-building fatigue, and a lack of financial incentives for participating in dialogue activities.

Cross-regional platforms were seen to have the potential to bring additional value in coping with this lack of internationally supported dialogue. It was noted that cross-regional platforms can avoid or soften the polarisation that dominates or ruins many other dialogue forums. Cross-regional formats can help avoid the politicisation and securitisation patterns that threaten bilateral dialogues among civil society representatives in protracted conflict settings because they do *not* mirror official negotiation frameworks. Furthermore, the shift from bilateral to multilateral participation sets them apart from official processes, and thus cross-regional formats appear less useful for legitimising state- and nation-building. They are therefore regarded by elites as less threatening to existing power structures.

In the case of South Caucasus and Moldova, a fundamental challenge for organising any dialogue is the disputed status of the contested territories of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh. During the last three decades, these entities have developed features and structures of statehood, although they are not recognised by most international actors as independent states. The status issue and

the recurring violence do not only affect official conflict resolution initiatives, but they also have severe consequences for the design and implementation of non-formal dialogue processes, especially within the South Caucasus. At present, it is difficult for Georgians to travel to Abkhazia and South Ossetia and vice versa. The same applies to the contacts between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Therefore, it is necessary to use 'neutral' locations outside the respective conflict settings. The problems described above often make it necessary to hold a dialogue meeting outside the region. However, due to the status issue, passports from these entities and other legal documents are not recognised by most states, which restricts opportunities for outside travel. For those living within the unrecognised or partly recognised states, this also impedes opportunities to participate in international dialogue activities. Such restrictions do not only increase the workload to organise dialogue meetings abroad, but also evoke negative experiences with travelling for such meetings, which may discourage potential participants.

In Moldova and the South Caucasus, including the so-called *de facto* states of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria, the transnational activities of NGOs are often controlled, closely observed and utilised for political means by the parties involved. In this context, bilateral civil society meetings are most vulnerable to political and social pressure, especially regarding the participation of people from disputed territories, since international contacts of civil society actors residing in these areas are easily attached to the status issue by mainstream discourses. To enable cross-divide civil society dialogues, it is necessary to launch platforms that are more resilient and that do not generate immediate suspicion among authorities. Such general geographic labels as 'Black Sea region' bypass more easily the officials' radars. For this reason, cross-regional formats of dialogues offer a good possibility to overcome these serious limitations. Since, in such settings, participants do not attend a dialogue meeting on a specific conflict, a cross-regional framework enables participants to enter into a direct exchange with each other without being exposed to accusations of collaboration with 'the enemy'. Thus, the cross-regional framework can serve as a conflict-neutral umbrella and as a safe space for dialogue, while during these meetings, private bilateral discussions usually happen too. And these bilateral meetings, according to the regional participants of our project, are still most meaningful dialogic encounters for specific conflict transformation, although they were enabled under the framework of cross-regional forums.

One vital question in the design of cross-regional dialogues is the question of regional scope. Even if there are various protracted, intractable conflicts all around the world, it is obvious that proximate regions constitute a meaningful context for cross-regional dialogues. In our case, this refers to the post-Soviet space in general, but our participants share also the experience of coping with the so-called *de facto* state is-

sue. The creation of an atmosphere of trust and the shifting of dialogues from formal to informal settings are crucial for cross-regional dialogues, and informal relationships are easier to create with participants sharing similar experiences. This is not to argue that sharing experiences with people from other regions beyond the post-Soviet space is not beneficial, but that a trusting and productive atmosphere is easier to achieve among people with a more directly shared experience of the past.

Enabling Shared Visions for the Future in a Cross-Regional Dialogue

During our meetings, participants put aside their institutional affiliations and engaged in the discussions as individuals with experience in various local peace organisations and initiatives. According to our observations within the described project, facilitators or organisers of cross-regional platforms need in each case to carefully design the participation policy and method in order to avoid misinterpretation of the political importance of the forums. In our case, we were actively selecting participants based on their willingness to participate, to share their experience of cross-divide dialogues, to learn something new, and to make new contacts. This kind of organisation requires the facilitators to play an active role.

We find it important that participants in the dialogues were not regarded as representatives of any organisation, nor of any nation or political unit, but only as individuals. There was, however, certainly no prerequisite to reject national identities and solidarities, and participants identified themselves as citizens of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova as well as of the *de facto* states. Still, most participants did not feel that they were representatives of their states but of civil societies. In a few cases, when conflict-related issues popped up in the discussions and emotions were heightened, facilitators and participants quickly managed to calm the situation and move the conversations in other directions. The informal and confidential atmosphere was a crucial factor for effectively de-escalating these tensions. It was interesting to observe that boundaries of appropriate behaviour were 'tested' by the participants at the arranged meetings as well as in leisure conversations when jokes were usually told. Such 'testing' enabled by the cross-regional setting of informal conversations increased and strengthened mutual understanding, including among participants who came from societies otherwise set in antagonistic relationships. Cooperation over divides needs strong commitment from all participants, and committed participation also requires that all involved parties find participation meaningful. Therefore, dialogue must be based on the interests and needs of participants, and participants also need to have the ability to shape the agenda even if there is some fixed framework primarily imposed by the structural settings of funding mechan-

isms. Participation needs to be experienced as meaningful for the participants personally, and for the communities to which they belong.

Cross-regional platforms, however, do not aim at solving issues and making agreements; they are organised primarily for generating new thoughts and for opening new horizons for the future. An important challenge is therefore to create motivation and inspiration without practical and straightforward outcomes for the participants' communities. Even though the immediate goal of cross-regional dialogues is to build spaces in which disagreement and communication can co-exist, and to reduce negative prejudice and (re-)build trust, eventually the meetings' agenda must include some more concrete issues for the participants. In order to prevent frustration, it is crucial that participants can influence the dialogue objectives, which increases motivation and engagement. In addition to the lack of ownership, the feeling that ideas and initiatives originating in civil societies are not listened to and are not supported significantly contributes to dialogue fatigue. For our participants, the informal presence of the OSCE staff members in both meetings—though not in all sessions—was regarded as highly valuable, and as a recognition of the civil societies' activities at the 'top-official' international level, albeit without any sign of political recognition of the *de facto* states thanks to the informal setting of the meetings. Directly sharing their knowledge and ideas with people working in international organisations was regarded by civil society participants as an empowering moment that strengthened their agency and self-esteem, which would further enable their creative thinking and action.

Such meetings also offer evidence that cross-regional platforms can enable international organisations such as the OSCE to informally engage with local peacemakers from disputed territories in their private capacity. The OSCE and the organisations alike are obviously prudent when working with non- or partly-recognised entities as their engagement should be immune to all misinterpretation as a sign of recognition. The formal support and organising of bilateral civil society dialogues can be misinterpreted as interventions in official peace processes, which would not be possible without a formal mandate. A cross-regional setting, however, is less sensitive because it is not focused on a particular conflict. Formal and informal participation in these platforms is possible without a mandate and can be included in the routine work of international organisations. Less politicised cross-regional settings thereby create new spaces to facilitate exchanges between local civil societies and formalised structures.

Organising dialogues with groups of diverse professional and personal backgrounds can also address dialogue fatigue. Including academics, businesspeople, artists, traditional community authorities, engineers and medical workers, to name a few, can

introduce new alternative perspectives, contest routinised practices, and facilitate the generation of non-trivial ideas for cooperation across conflict divides. During our project, we broadened participation from local NGOs to include also international academics and to provide a partial academic framework for the meetings. This academic and scientific extension was not difficult to arrange since many local civil society actors have a background in teaching and/or research. This move has two main benefits. First, academic or semi-academic meetings are less suspicious for the surveillance of local authorities. Second, many participants found that mixing the pragmatic experiences of local peacemakers and theoretical academic content was inspirational. The format breaks away from conventional peace dialogues and can potentially generate new thoughts and perspectives.

Interestingly, some common ideas for supporting the initiated dialogue emerged across small group discussions, as, for instance, the possibility of creating cross-regional platforms of local peace-builders as well as online networks in order to foster their work through exchanges of good practices and peer support. The role of education, and the possibility for peace-builders to educate children about the importance of dialogue were also singled out as options that have been looked at insufficiently by the international community. Also, co-authoring academic articles and books was suggested as a prospective direction for further collaboration and joint creative thinking on shared concerns and ways to address them. International support here was envisioned in the form of facilitating the publication process either by funding a local journal at best, or by helping to access international publishers and academic institutions at the very least.

In addition, the dialogue forums elicited some thoughts on how local peace-builders could further support dialogue and conflict transformation, such as producing visual content that could be distributed to local populations (for instance, cartoons and movies), working with the media to change the dominant narratives about each concerned conflict (for instance, by sharing success stories), facilitating the digitalisation of conflict memories and archives, or building the linguistic skills of the local populations in order to improve cross-cultural dialogue. Participants also came up with a series of ideas on how to better link informal and formal dialogue processes, and on how cross-regional dialogue platforms could support official initiatives, for instance by producing policy papers for international policymakers, or by compiling a list of concrete issues to be addressed in order to provide 'a clear vision and programme for the next steps'.

All in all, most of the participants considered that the cross-regional dialogue platforms had been a success and were eager for the project to continue. Their suggestions for pursuing the initiative included renewing the dialogue process on an

ongoing basis by gradually integrating new participants besides the 'core ones', and drawing and circulating the lessons learned after each dialogue phase in order not to constantly 'reinvent the wheel'. The participants acknowledged that despite the obvious dissimilarities between the different conflict-affected areas, these dialogue platforms had allowed them to identify common issues and concerns, as well as to implement peer learning through exchanges of ideas, experiences and 'tips'. They were also eager to hear from each other about the on-the-ground situation in the respective conflict-affected areas, and about the material difficulties that the others were facing in their peace-building activities.

Conclusion: Agonistic Dialogue

Cross-regional dialogues obviously display certain potential problems, limits and pitfalls that require a closer look, but, in our project, we concentrated on exploring and testing the format potentiality. What worked in our case, with our participants and in the context of the South Caucasus and Moldova, would not necessarily work in another setting. We do not aim to introduce a uniform model, but a format of dialogue that can be tested in and adapted to different contexts. Our material offers compelling evidence that cross-regional platforms of dialogue can provide a conflict-neutral umbrella and a safe space for dialogue for local peace-builders and give them opportunities to meet discretely with their counterparts from the 'other side'. In addition, other tangible outcomes for our participants materialised in peer learning and in exchanges of practices, ideas and 'tips'. The cross-regional format also provides a way to give a voice to civil society actors, especially from *de facto* states, who are often not heard at the international level because their voices are hijacked by more powerful actors or ignored altogether. Cross-regional dialogues, following the intersectionality principle, can also foster more representativity by inviting representatives of diverse sections of the concerned populations (e.g., youth, women, religious groups, etc.). The organisation of these dialogues, therefore, can favour a wider social inclusion to enlist popular acceptance.

From a theoretical perspective but with pragmatic relevance, the most interesting question is how these platforms can suspend antagonism without having any conflict-specific reconciling element. The cross-regional dialogue format can represent one pragmatic format of agonistic dialogue, as it does not aim to reconcile, solve conflicts or achieve consensual harmony, but just enable participants to accept the existence of different perspectives and gain respect for each other. This respect is expressed in informal, pragmatic and embodied terms. It happens more through jokes and banter during informal social gatherings than through formal statements. The cross-regional format thus seemingly enables a certain ease to express respect among participants. It is less likely that an issue that would force participants to seek

cover behind the presumed safety of antagonised roles would appear. Even if antagonising issues cannot be completely avoided, they can be more easily set aside or suspended without being solved and/or denied when different narratives unrelated to one specific conflict are present in the same time and space (Lehti and Romashov 2021). Cross-regional dialogues enable what Maddison (2015, 1015–1016) calls a ‘dialogical engagement across difference’, and this kind of engagement contributes in its limited capacity to ‘an expanded understanding of the other, with the aim of sustaining peace and, over time, transforming the underlying conflict—not towards agreement, but in a direction that enables greater mutual understanding’. This can be regarded as a precondition for providing safe spaces for dialogue in the midst of protracted conflicts, and as such, it is a major achievement, which also indicates the potentiality and strength of cross-regional platforms of dialogue.

One obvious issue that came up in the discussions was the need for consistency and stability. In order to be efficient, cross-regional dialogues should be designed not as one-time events but as ongoing and sustained processes. How the cross-regional dialogue format can evolve in the longer term is a question that we were not able to observe. Organising these dialogues, even on a small scale, requires considerable funding. The challenge is that donors do not always look beyond conventional formats or understand that alternative platforms do not always produce immediate and visible results. The relevance of cross-regional platforms of dialogue should not be connected to official processes as linkages that are too straightforward would contradict the whole principle on which they are based. These platforms may or may not have relevance to official processes in the long-term perspective, but that is not a criterion to evaluate the relevance of cross-regional dialogues. Therefore, there is a need for ‘strategic patience’ on the part of donors (Lehti *et al.* 2019). At the same time, it is also important that dialogue become self-sufficient even when it is no longer externally funded.

The question of how these cross-regional dialogues could address—from a short- or long-term perspective—bilateral conflict settings, support formal peace processes and provide an impetus for conflict transformation within local societies, can only be answered empirically and case by case, but even then, finding causalities would probably not be possible. Nonetheless, cross-regional formats of dialogue can disturb the hegemonic conflict setting in the long term and they can produce alternative views on what a shared future would look like. Even though the transformative power of cross-regional dialogues among local civil society actors is limited by its context and has only a partial impact on wider societies, this format of dialogue evidently provides a broader room for the participants to strengthen their communication over conflict divides.

Empirical Data

- Field trip to Armenia (May 2018): Ten interviews were conducted with people working in different local NGOs.
- Field trip to Georgia (October–November 2018): Eight different local and international NGOs were contacted, and 12 people were interviewed.
- Field trip to Moldova/Transdnistria (November 2018): 14 interviews were conducted with people working in different NGOs.
- Field trip to Moldova/Transdnistria (February 2019): Seven interviews were conducted with people working in different local and international NGOs.
- Eighteen expert interviews and consultations were conducted between September 2018 and April 2019.
- An experimental dialogue forum, ‘Cross-Regional and Inter-Sectional Dialogues: Developing New Approaches to Support Bottom-Up Peace’, was held on 15–18 April 2019 in Stuttgart, Germany. Twenty participants, including team members, a representative of the OSCE, and local peace-builders from the South Caucasus and Moldova/Transdnistria, attended.
- An experimental dialogue forum, ‘How Can Cross-Regional Dialogues Support the Transformation of Intractable Conflicts?’, was held on 29 October 2019 in Vienna, Austria. Eighteen participants, including team members, representatives of the OSCE and the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), and local peace-builders from the South Caucasus and Moldova/Transdnistria attended.

Bibliography

- Arnault, J. (2014) 'Legitimacy and peace process: from coercion to consent', *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*, 24, 21–25.
- Bercovitch, J. (2005) 'Mediation in the most resistant cases', in C.A. Crocker, F.O. Hampson and P.R. Aall (eds.), *Grasping the nettle: analyzing cases of intractable conflict*, Washington, DC: USIP Press, 99–121.
- Berg, E. and Vits, K. (2018) 'Quest for survival and recognition: insights into the foreign policy endeavours of the post-Soviet de facto states', *Ethnopolitics*, 17(4), 390–407.
- Bleiker, R. (2011) 'Conclusion—everyday struggles for a hybrid peace', in O.P.P. Richmond and A. Mitchell (eds.), *Hybrid forms of peace: from everyday agency to post-liberalism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 293–309.
- Broers, L., Iskandaryan, A. and Minasyan, S. (2015) *The unrecognized politics of de facto states in the post-Soviet space*, Yerevan: Caucasus Institute and International Association for the Study of the Caucasus.
- Buckley-Zistel, S. (2008) *Conflict transformation and social change in Uganda: remembering after violence*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Coleman, P.T. (2003) 'Characteristics of protracted, intractable conflict: toward the development of a metaframework—I', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 9(1), 1–37.
- Coleman, P.T. (2004) 'Characteristics of protracted, intractable conflict: toward the development of a metaframework—II', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 10(3), 197–235.
- Conciliation Resources (2019) 'Preparing populations for peace': implications for Armenian-Azerbaijani peacebuilding, London: Conciliation Resources.
- Crocker, C.A., Hampson, F.O. and Aall, P.R. (2005) 'Introduction: mapping the nettle field', in C.A. Crocker, F.O. Hampson and P.R. Aall (eds.), *Grasping the nettle: analyzing cases of intractable conflict*, Washington, DC: USIP Press, 3–30.
- de Coning, C. (2018) 'Adaptive peacebuilding', *International Affairs*, 94(2), 301–317.
- de Waal, A. (2014) 'Violence and peacemaking in the political marketplace', *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*, 24, 17–20.
- Feller, A.E. and Ryan, K.K. (2012) 'Definition, necessity, and Nansen: efficacy of dialogue in peacebuilding', *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 29(4), 351–380.

- Hasanov, A. and Ishkanian, A. (2005) 'Bridging divides: civil society initiatives', *Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives*, 17, 44–47.
- International Alert (2012) *Mediation and dialogue in the South Caucasus: a reflection on 15 years of conflict transformation initiatives*. London: International Alert.
- Ker-Lindsay, J. and Berg, E. (2018) 'Introduction: a conceptual framework for engagement with de facto states', *Ethnopolitics*, 17(4), 335–342.
- Kriesberg, L. (2011) 'The state of the art in conflict transformation', in M. Fischer, J. Giessmann and B. Schmelzle (eds.), *The Berghof handbook for conflict transformation*, Farmington Hills, MI: Barbara Budrich, 49–73.
- Lehti, M. (2019) *The era of private peacemakers: a new dialogic approach to mediation*, New York: Palgrave.
- Lehti, M., Féron, É., Relitz, S. and Romashov, V. (2019) 'Cross-regional dialogues: launching an informal platform of local peacebuilders', Vienna: OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions. Available at: <https://osce-network.net/file-OSCE-Network/Publications/Cross-Regional_Dialogues_fin.pdf>. (Accessed 20 October 2021).
- Lehti, M. and Romashov, V. (2021) 'Suspending the antagonism: situated agonistic peace in a border bazaar', *Third World Quarterly*, 1–19.
- MacGinty, R. (2010) 'Hybrid peace: the interaction between top-down and bottom-up peace', *Security Dialogue*, 41(4), 391–412.
- Maddison, S. (2015) 'Relational transformation and agonistic dialogue in divided societies', in *Political Studies*, 63(5), 1014–1030.
- Miall, H. (2004) 'Conflict transformation: a multi-dimensional task', in A. Austin, M. Fischer and N. Ropers (eds.), *Transforming ethno-political conflict*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 67–89.
- Millar, G. (2011) 'Local evaluations of justice through truth telling in Sierra Leone: postwar needs and transitional justice', *Human Rights Review*, 12(4), 515–535.
- Mouffe, C. (2013) *Agonistics: thinking the world politically*, London: Verso.
- Newman, E. (2013) 'The international architecture of peacebuilding', in R. MacGinty (ed.), *Routledge handbook of peacebuilding*, London: Routledge, 311–324.
- Pouliny, B. (2005) 'Civil society and post-conflict peacebuilding: ambiguities of international programmes aimed at building "new" societies', *Security Dialogue*, 36(4), 495–510.

- Praeger, J. (2008) 'Healing from history: psychoanalytic considerations on traumatic pasts and social repair', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 11(3), 405–420.
- Richmond, O.P. (2013) 'Failed statebuilding versus peace formation', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 48(3), 378–400.
- Roberts, D. (2011) 'Beyond the metropolis? Popular peace and post-conflict peacebuilding', *Review of International Studies*, 5(37), 2535–2556.
- Rumelili, B. (2015) 'Ontological (in)security and peace anxieties: a framework for conflict resolution', in B. Rumelili (ed.), *Conflict resolution and ontological security: peace anxieties*, London: Routledge, 10–29.
- Sennett, R. (2012) *Together: the rituals, pleasures and politics of cooperation*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Sotieva, L. (2014) *A reflection on 20 years of civil society initiatives on the Nagorny Karabakh conflict*, London: International Alert.
- Suransky, C. and Alma, H. (2018) 'An agonistic model of dialogue', *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 31(1), 22–38.
- Tamminen, T., Relitz, S. and Jüngling, K. (2016) 'New corridors of dialogue: strengthening durable formats for engagement across the protracted conflict zones', workshop on 'Protracted Conflicts in the OSCE Region: Building Security and Cooperation in the Conflict Zones', Regensburg: Institute for East and Southeast European Studies.
- Viktorova Milne, J. (2010) 'Method: theory and ethnography in peace and conflict studies', in O.P. Richmond (ed.), *Palgrave advances in peacebuilding: critical developments and approaches*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 74–98.
- Vitalis Pemunta, N. (2012) 'Neoliberal peace and the development deficit in post-conflict Sierra Leone', *International Journal of Development Issues*, 11(3), 192–207.
- Woodward, S.L. (2013) 'The political economy of peacebuilding and international aid', in R. MacGinty (ed.) *Routledge handbook of peacebuilding*, London: Routledge, 325–335.
- Zartman, W.I. (2005) 'Analyzing intractability', in C.A. Crocker, F.O. Hampson and P.R. Aall (eds.), *Grasping the nettle: analyzing cases of intractable conflict*, Washington, DC: USIP Press, 47–64.
- Zemskov-Züge, A. (2015) 'History dialogue between Georgians and Abkhaz: how can working with the past pave new ways?' *Politorbis*, 2, 23–30.

The Cohesion of Schools as Communities in the Management of COVID-19 Pandemic: Reflections, Narratives, Fears and Hopes from the Voices of Children in England and Italy

Federico Farini, Claudio Baraldi & Angela Scollan¹

Abstract: The classroom can be a community of dialogic practices where personal and cultural identities are constructed and negotiated and a key context for integration of children with migrant background. However, for the first time in many decades, children across Europe, and globally, have been removed from their primary contexts of socialisation in the public health scramble to contain the pandemic, primarily through extended lockdowns. The consequences of the management of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cohesion of schools as intercultural communities of learning impacted on teachers, children and families. Public health measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic affect the quality of children's learning experience and deny access to the classroom as a space of socialisation and intercultural dialogue. Developing from the analysis of 50

¹ Federico Farini is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Northampton. From 2015 and 2017 he worked as Senior Lecturer in Sociology of Early Childhood at the University of Suffolk leading the equality and inclusion strategy of the institution. Previously in his career, Federico was a founding member of the Centre for Educational Research and Scholarship (2014) at Middlesex University. Federico received a Ph.D in Sociology of Intercultural Relations from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, where he worked as a researcher in Sociology between 2008 and 2013. Federico has published books, chapters, articles and edited books in Italian, English, and Slovenian language. His research activity includes EU-funded research projects concerning inclusive education, intercultural communication, renovation of urban spaces. Federico's current interests mainly revolve around issues of inequality in access to education and social services, as well as around participatory research methods and public sociology.

Claudio Baraldi is a professor of Sociology of cultural and communicative processes at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Department of Studies on language and culture. His research concerns communication systems and forms of communication. In particular his research focuses on forms of intercultural and interlinguistic communication, and adult-children interactions in educational contexts. His most important interest is in the analysis of methods and techniques for dialogic facilitation of participation and language and cultural mediation. Claudio Baraldi has directed or co-ordinated more than 70 empirical research programmes, and he has extensively published in national and international journals. At present, he is principal investigator of a consortium of 10 partners in a Horizon 2020 research program on migrant children's integration in schools (Children Hybrid Integration: Learning Dialogue as a way of Upgrading Policies of Participation). He is also coordinating a national research programme (PRIN) in Italy, researching education and health of migrant-background children.

focus groups with children in Italian and English primary and secondary schools, this contribution discusses the perspective of children on how the management of the pandemic: 1) impacted on the learning experience, in particular the progression of children with limited access to suitable spaces and resources for home learning; 2) affected the networks of social relationships and intercultural dialogue that have the classroom as their substratum.

Keywords: School closures, Interpersonal relationships, Online schooling, Children's agency, Families, Italy, England

Introduction

This contribution engages with the voices of children in two major European countries, Italy and the United Kingdom as they were facing a dilemma whether to keep schools open to secure minimal conditions of socialisation for children or closing schools to prioritise the containment of the pandemic. This contribution gives voice to the perspective of teachers and children in super-diverse (Vertovec 2007) educational contexts, focusing on how the management of the pandemic: 1) impacted on children's learning experience, in particular the progression of children with limited access to suitable spaces and resources for home learning; 2) affected those networks of social relationships and intercultural dialogue that have the classroom as their substratum. The analysis of 50 focus groups with children (Italian and English primary schools and Italian secondary schools) supports a discussion and the comparison of children and teachers' representations of the challenges that the management of the pandemic is posing to the classroom as a dialogical community and a context of integration, hybridisation and dialogic construction of the meaning of cultural differences.

The data are drawn from CHILD-UP (Children Hybrid Integration: Learning Dialogue as a way of Upgrading Policies of Participation), a Horizon 2020 project

Angela Scollan is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies and Education Studies at Middlesex University. Previously, she has worked as Foundation Degree Coordinator in a Further Education College and as an Ofsted Inspector. Since the early 1990s, Angela has worked directly with and for children positioning her practice within a transdisciplinary approach and as a rights-based advocate. Her teaching philosophy, research and writing focus on the child first. Whilst touching on an array of themes relevant to education and care: adults-children interactions; rights-based pedagogies, leadership and management, curriculum studies for Early Years Education, critical education studies, social work with young children, services-families' partnership. As an activist against educational disadvantage, Angela has worked with many local authorities in projects to support inclusion and equality in education across England towards enhanced social mobility. Angela is currently undertaking research within an EU-funded project analysing how facilitative education can promote dialogue and children's agency in intercultural educational settings.

(Grant Agreement No 822400) which started in January 2019. CHILD-UP aims to research and promote dialogic practice of educational inclusion of children with migrant background in seven European countries (Belgium, Germany, Finland, Italy, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom). The data discussed in this contribution concerns Italy and the United Kingdom, the two national contexts where the collection of data had been completed where this contribution was written. Education in Italy and the United Kingdom was particularly disrupted during the Covid-19 pandemic; however, the response to the public health emergency in schools has been rather different between the two countries, for instance the policies on the compulsory use of face covering and social distancing, much stricter and prolonged in Italian schools. Such differences allow a comparative outlook on the effects of public health measures to contain the pandemic on schooling, in particular regarding the possibility of entertaining interpersonal interactions.

Theoretical background

In this contribution, coherently with the ethical and methodological foundations of CHILD UP, children are considered as social agents, and their agency is considered as primarily important for policies and educational interventions. The analysis of the enhancement of children's agency is a frequent topic of Childhood Studies (e.g., Baraldi 2014a; Bjerke 2011; James 2009; James & James 2008; Leonard 2016; Oswell 2013). Agency may be seen as the ability to participate in changing their social and cultural conditions. An important theoretical presupposition of this contribution is that education can improve the potential of children's agency in order to change the social conditions of their lives. The benefits of children's agency may be considered as both individual, in terms of children's empowerment, access to information and new skills, and social, in terms of improved democracy (Baraldi & Cockburn 2018; Cockburn 2013). The recognition of children as agents entails the recognition of their ability to gauge, manage and transform the contexts of their social experiences. Interventions in education may take a dialogic form, which "implies that each party makes a step in the direction of the other" (Wierbicka 2006: 692). The dialogic form is based on the positive value of active and fair participation, perspective taking, and empowerment of expressions (Baraldi 2012 2014a). It enables the equal treatment of different perspectives, opening the floor to all kinds of diversity expressed in personal trajectories.

Dialogic processes in school classrooms include interpersonal interactions, based on "mutual interdependence, recognition and respect for children and their views and experiences" (Fitzgerald et al. 2010: 300). The analysis of dialogic practices highlights the importance of interpersonal interactions that enhance children's agency. They show that "both children and adults are co-constructors of knowledge and

expertise” (Hill et al. 2004: 84), i.e., that children’s agency in schools means children’s authority in accessing and producing knowledge (Baraldi 2015b). Dialogic practices include interactions based on adults’ empowerment of children’s personal expressions and decision-making (e.g., Baraldi 2012 2014b; Baraldi & Iervese 2014; Hendry 2009; Shier 2001 2010), including empowerment of interpersonal dialogic interactions among children that include children’s personal expressions. Thus, the classroom can be a community of dialogic practices where personal identities are constructed, negotiated and reflected on (Baraldi et al. 2021).

This may also happen in conditions of superdiversity (Vertovec 2007). The concepts of agency and personal expression work in conjunction with theories of culture conceiving cultural identity as a contingent product of social negotiation in interaction (Holliday 2011; Piller 2011). This view stresses the importance of negotiation of identity in communication (Baraldi 2015a) and warns against insisting on pre-defined cultural identities which are based on cultural belonging (Byrd Clark & Dervin 2014). Identity is seen as fluid, malleable, and contingently constructed in communication (Dervin & Liddicoat 2013; Piller 2011; Tupas 2014). Since identity is always negotiated in communication processes through the manifestation of personal cultural trajectories (Holliday & Amadasí 2020), cultural identity is constructed as hybrid identity (Jackson 2014; Kramsch & Uryu 2012). Thus, the classroom can be recognised as a crucial context for the construction of hybrid identities of children based on their exercise of agency.

The CHILD-UP research in the COVID-19 pandemic

Research in CHILD-UP aims to compare different sociocultural settings, in seven countries (Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Sweden and United Kingdom), in specific local areas in these countries. The target group includes children belonging from 5 to 16 years old. The research plan has been divided into two parts. Part 1 was concluded before the pandemic, consisting of (1) background research on migrant children’s condition of integration in Europe and in the seven countries involved in the fieldwork, and (2) a survey regarding the local schools, protection services, educational and mediation agencies and families.

Part 2 was planned in the months in which the pandemic afflicted the European countries, causing the lockdown of schools. It included (1) interviews and focus groups with professionals (teachers, social workers and mediators) and children, and (2) research on dialogic practices in schools, based on the use of videorecording, audio-recording, questionnaires and focus groups. This second part of research were extended to the following school year (2020/21). However, the pandemic continued to affect the schools and the involvement of children in activities and research. The

impact of the pandemic was high in all participating countries, including long periods of schools' closure, challenges in involving children, and difficulties in admitting external educators and researchers in schools. However, most focus groups and interviews with children could be done when schools reopened (in Italy also remotely) including new questions about children's life during the times of the pandemic.

During the pandemic, an important issue has been protecting children's right to education, stressing the importance of children's need of professionals' guidance and that the pandemic is disruptive for children's learning. However, the management of the COVID-19 pandemic also impacted on the cohesion of schools as communities of dialogue. Public health measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic denied access to the classroom as a space of socialisation and dialogue. For the first time in many decades, children across Europe, and globally, have been removed from their primary contexts of socialisation in a public health scramble to contain the pandemic, primarily through extended lockdowns.

The attempt to re-establish education through distance teaching has disembodied children, dramatically disrupting their interpersonal relations, that is, a primary context of their agency. It may be noted that the voices and expressions of children were excluded from both public debate and strategy building. This shows the weakness of the political and educational agenda of children's agency. In recent years, education has progressively included methods to support children's agency (e.g., Baraldi 2012a 2014a 2014b; Hendry 2009). However, during the pandemic, the consideration of children as agents has been weakened by the widespread worry for the breakdown of school organisation and teaching. The disappearance of interest in children's agency and classroom socialisation can generate distrust in education since children may interpret their agency only when it is not institutionalised. If children do not have some opportunity of exercising agency and involving in interpersonal interactions at school, their distrust in education is likely to increase (Farini 2019). For this reason, the present contribution focuses on the voices of children, to include them in the developing reflection on the implications of the management of the pandemic for children's learning and lives.

The research activities of CHILD-UP allowed collections of children's views and experiences of the pandemic and its effects on the classroom as a space for dialogue and personal expression. In particular, the analysis that we propose in this contribution is based on 50 focus groups with children in Italian and English primary schools and in Italian secondary schools. It is important to highlight that whilst the Italian settings of the research include some secondary schools, the English settings consisted only of primary schools. In the discussion, specific comments will invite attention to the possible effects of participants' age on the data presented.

Within CHILD-UP activities, focus groups became an important opportunity to enhance children's agency as production of knowledge and personal expression during the pandemic. Focus groups could provide children with a chance to become active again in the production of personal points of view concerning their social life during the pandemic. Focus groups afforded opportunities for children to (i) share their views on the current situation with the researcher and their classmates (ii) hear how their peers felt and had reacted to a shared experience. Children were able to gain insight into the experiences of peers and the impact that COVID-19, and its management, driven by public health considerations, had on them, gauging commonalities and differences.

When asked about the consequences of the pandemic, children talked about two different aspects of the pandemic impact on their experience of schooling and personal trajectories. The first was the experience of online learning (when schools had been closed) and the second (albeit exclusively in Italy) was the experience of attending school during the pandemic. The following sections of the article will be dedicated to discuss children's perspectives regarding: online learning as a challenge for children's agency expressed in interpersonal relationships and dialogic communication; children's efforts to preserve interpersonal relationships; the implication of online learning and social distancing for family relationships; learning to cope with online schooling and the experience of attending schools during a pandemic, with a focus on the impact of public health measures. The conclusion of the article will point to possible implication of the results for policymakers and education professionals.

Online learning and the challenge for children's agency as interpersonal relationships

According to the contributions of the children to the focus groups, the most negative aspect of online learning both in Italy and England is the absence of social and emotional relationships during the lockdown periods, for instance the impossibility of getting out, meeting friends, or working together. The expression of regret for the loss of interpersonal relations shows that school is an important socialisation context for children's agency to be expressed as personal expression. Children described how they missed their classmates throughout all focus groups and across countries, as shown in the excerpts below:

It was bad because I didn't talk to anyone, that is, only with my family, but it's bad to be separated from your friends.

(IT_F25_CH_B)

It was bad to be away from your classmates because at home you don't do anything but at school you have fun with your classmates.

(IT_F25_CH_B).

M(ale)1: Honestly, me, I don't really like online meeting. Because like, I felt like I was stuck in a prison. I have my brother, but like, he's small and he doesn't even understand me. Like I try to play with him, he doesn't understand, he goes and plays with himself and watches tv. I personally don't really like playing by myself, I really like playing with my friends at school, and I feel like I was just prisoned in my own room.

Researcher: Sure. Did you miss your friends?

M1: Yes, I did.

(UK_F5_SF4)

F(emale)1: Since we've been back at school, we get to meet our friends, because when we were at home, we didn't get to meet our friends.

Researcher: Did you miss your friends?

F1: Yeah.

Researcher: What did you miss about them?

F1: They like entertain me and have fun with me.

(UK_F7_SF1)

Researcher: So, what do you all think of Covid? What's your response to Covid? Yeah, what do you think of Covid?

M1: I think, I don't like how, during lockdown, like, we got separately. got so used to being with my friends, having fun, and then Covid comes along...

Researcher: And stops it. And were you worried about it?

M1: Yeah. I was missing my friends because they have always been here for me.

Researcher: Yeah, you would miss them. And how did you feel about it? Yeah...

M1: Two thumbs down.

Researcher: Oh. Why?

M1: Because like [name removed] said, it makes me separated from my best friends.

(UK_F5_LS1)

Secondary-school children in Italy and children attending primary schools in England emphasised that engaging with friends remotely felt very different from face-to-face interactions. If they were able to meet in person, the encounters were made challenging by public health restrictions, causing negative feelings as expressed in the excerpts below:

F1: since Covid has begun, it's been really bad.

Researcher: but do you keep in touch with your friends remotely?

F1: but it's not the same thing.

F2: I do genuinely, both remotely and at home, I struggle a bit more though.

(IT_F2_CH_G)

F1: It's just so weird not being able to socialise with people. Like since they said you can't be with your family, it was very weird going to like, let's say, Brent Cross, and seeing people like social distancing everywhere. It was really weird to see.

Researcher: It's strange isn't it, not to hug people...

M1: Wearing masks...

Researcher: Yeah, and you can't see the expressions and stuff.

F2: Yeah, that's hard, because when you've got masks on and people are talking, you don't know if they are looking or listening to you, you can't tell what you would normally tell.

M1: Yep.

(UK_F17_FM4)

M1: I found it hard since Coronavirus came because there's never been something like this since we've been alive, so since we've never had anything like this, it's hard for us because we don't know what's going on and what's gonna happen.

Researcher: Sure, yeah. No, there's a lot to deal with, isn't there? A lot to deal with. I think we might have come to the end now. Yeah, what were you going to say?

F1: I think, there might be some children I love talking to. But then Coronavirus ruined everything. It's like, I don't get to get a get fresh air, even if I play with one of my favourite games, it doesn't even cheer me up. Even though my parents brought me a new game in the Easter holidays, I started playing on the PS3, but I still upset, I still have the image of before Coronavirus happened.

Researcher: What image? What do you mean?

F1: Like an image of playing with my friends, an image like that. And sometimes I just go away and stay in my dreams for five minutes, and then I just close my game and throw the controller. And my parents...

Researcher: It makes you feel a bit angry?

F1: It makes me feel a bit angry.

(UK_F10_BR1)

Most children described online learning as *very boring* because it offered very limited opportunities for interpersonal interaction. As exemplified by the excerpt below, data from focus groups in both countries suggest that the limitations of online learning are connected by children to the impossibility of the personal expressions that are only allowed by interpersonal, in-person, interactions:

I liked my school because you could see your friends and teachers there every day and you didn't have to wait long to see them.

(IT_F30_CH_G)

Researcher: were you taking classes from home?

M1: eh unfortunately.

Researcher: why do you say unfortunately?

M1: it bored me.

(IT_F25_CH_M).

It's boring to stay home.

(IT_F19_CH_B).

I like the other school because that way we can talk to each other easily, like every time C and I want to talk but every time we struggle to connect.

(IT_F28_CH_G)

Researcher: What was it about online learning that you didn't like?

F1: putting everything you did, your homework on classroom [the software], and because I missed the physical contact.

(IT_F19_CH_G).

I like the other school because when we do an online lesson, when the teacher shares the screen, she sometimes doesn't see us when we want to speak.

(IT_F28_CH_G)

For me the other school was better because here you have to charge your mobile phone and after a while it switches, and you have to wait an hour and then when you turn it back on the lesson has ended.

(IT_F28_CH_B).

You struggle a bit more in these classes because sometimes you don't hear, with the connection, you struggle a little more.

(IT_F19_CH_G)

M1: It's like weird when you get up every day knowing you don't have to get ready for school, you just have to go on your computer. Doing online school was really boring because you couldn't see your friends. You had social distance. You had to wear a mask.

F1: I got really distracted at home. At school, you can't really get distracted.

Researcher: What distracted you, then?

F1: Mostly my family and, like, they are just sitting in the background. My family is at school, basically.

Researcher: Yeah, that's a good way to say it, they are at school with you. Is it making you feel like you don't have any space from your family?

F1: Kind of, yeah.

(UK_F4_SF3)

F1: When I did online school, it's like, everyone was talking to me. It's like watching paint dry was more interesting than online school. Online school was so boring.

F2: I do prefer school, 100%, because like, there aren't any friends around to like joke and stuff. It was really boring.

F3: I have two older brothers but they are old so I have literally no-one to talk to.

Researcher: Oh right. So, yeah, it's tricky.

M1: I was having an online meeting, and I was unmuting asking Mr [teacher] a question, and my brother said 'you're not on a meeting, I'm telling Mum'.

Researcher: So you had to deal with all of that while you were trying to learn at the same time?

M1: I would get distracted...

Researcher: And then you'd forget about it? Getting distracted is hard.

F2: The thing is, I'm the youngest child and I have a room with my sister and it's very annoying. It's so annoying because my sister, she would always distract me from what I'm doing, she's like 'come and do this' or 'do that'

(UK_F22_BR5)

Working to maintain interpersonal relationships

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned disruptions to socialisation and experience of agency as personal expression, data suggest that children maintained connections during the periods of online schooling, both in breaks within lessons and outside, using video calls (sometimes hours long) or texts:

In my opinion it was great on the one hand, and awful on the other because, I mean, on the one hand it was great because once with the T1 teacher we were there in the online lesson and we talked during the breaktime, we talked, we played we did a lot of things.

(IT_F17_CH_G).

Researcher: It's nice to have friends, yeah, when you're feeling a bit. Did you stay in contact with each other? During Covid?

M1: I've got their phone numbers.

Researcher: Oh so you could ring each other up and things?

M2: During Covid, my friend [name removed], he used to do video calls all through home schooling.

Researcher: Ah, so you were calling each other through home schooling stuff?

M2: Ah my friend [name removed] who is in reception always made friends with [name removed].

Researcher: So you've got all connections and links?

F1: Yeah. And we've arranged one playdate so far, and we've been calling each other, he's been calling me on the iPad on my laptop and on my Mum's phone, and sometimes we arrange for a playdate, but we can't. I miss being home a little bit, because I like to be home a little bit as I got to have a little rest.

(UK_F2_SF2)

Researcher: Covid is tricky. Did it impact on you when you were at home, when you didn't come to school? How did you feel about that?

F1: Nothing really changed, except for the fact that we had online school, because every time I go back from school, I will always like video chat my friends and stuff anyway, so...

(UK_F12_FM2)

Although the first lockdowns came as a shock, during the focus group some children mentioned that the aftermath of the lockdown left them with stronger relationships with their friends:

After quarantine we had a closer bond because [...] I could finally see my friends again.

(IT_F10_CH_B)

I didn't like this Covid situation at all, for example when we were taught online, but I think that thanks to the online learning we had much more desire to see each other, and when we returned to school, we were closer.

(IT_F19_CH_G)

Some children (but exclusively in Italian schools) also referred to strengthened relationships and connections as a positive aspect of schooling in the pandemic. ISCED3 children often mentioned that disruptions helped them to discover which relationships were genuine and which relationships were more superficial:

F1: even with false friendships, I mean, in a moment of need, even during this pandemic, I happened to test positive for Covid in November, and as a result I really found out who was there for me, I often received messages like "how are you feeling?", "how do you feel?" "when are you taking the second swab?"; there were people who were worried, and others who didn't care at all.

F2: that's right, I had Covid in November, and as a result I understood many people, I understood the people I had by my side, and I also understood the people I didn't consider to be close friends, but now I consider them to be close because they were there for me at a time that was very difficult for me.

(IT_F2_CH_G)

Researcher: what would have been different if there had been no Covid?

F1: the relationships between people, so even friends etc. would have been different, then in the first quarantine (lockdown, translator's note) I came to understand many things about my friendships, I mean, I found out what the real friendships were, the people who were there and the people who didn't care.

(IT_F1_CH_G)

Online learning and social distancing for family relationships

For the first time in most of the children's lives, spaces shared with other members of the family and inter-generationally became the context of schooling. Online learning brought changes in family relationships, as suggested by data from the focus groups.

Online learning was negatively evaluated by younger children who felt they were losing their autonomy as they often needed their parents to assist them in the use of the computer. Losing autonomy was coupled with the difficulty in using the computer without help when parents were not in the house due to working commitments.

Participants across the two national settings converged in describing the family and the unusual sharedness of spaces during online learning as both the source of necessary support, albeit often not available and an obstacle to learning:

The fact that some children are not able to access a computer and need the help of a parent is a mess.

(IT_F2_CH_G)

I didn't like doing the lessons online either because I was annoyed when my parents weren't home and the connection was down and I didn't know what to do, and because it was a bit harder and there are older kids who are there [online] for longer.

(IT_F19_CH_G)

At first, at the first lockdown, everything was online, we didn't have online meetings like Google Meetings. So we did everything by ourselves. Even my parents didn't have time to help me, so I did everything by myself. And then, as like, sometimes I wouldn't even know what to do, so because I didn't know what to do, my parents would just tell me to teach my brothers.

(UK_24_BR5)

Researcher: And what was it, was it easier to learn at home or was it harder?

M1: It was hard.

Researcher: Why?

M1: Because it was, like, usually we have a plan at the school, like a timetable. But at home, we don't know which one and because it's a lot more harder.

F1: I think it was hard to study because I had to do it all on my own, because I have a little sibling and my parents are helping him more because he's only in reception.

Researcher: So you had to do a lot more stuff on your own? And what was hard about that? What didn't you like?

M2: Well, like [M1] said, I didn't have a timetable or a structure to follow.

Researcher: I see. And was there lots going on at home? Was it noisy and busy and stuff?

M2: yes but we didn't have much family time either.

Researcher: Oh ok. How come?

M1: Because we had to work to end, we, there was lots and lots and lots of homework and things...

(UK_F12_FM2)

Researcher: Is this when you were online?

F1: Yeah. And then I didn't get that much help. I have a little brother in year 1. Like, he's fine, it's just that he needs my mum to help him most of the time, and my dad, he can't help me either. Most of the time he's in a different country in the Netherlands, or he might be working from home being too busy.

Researcher: Oh wow. And I guess that's hard when people are in different countries.

F1: Yeah. And I have to work all by myself, and my mum can only help me a little bit. And then, during English, they make it ten times harder than at school and I have to manage to do it all on my own.

(UK_F6_SF6)

Besides the intersection between family relationships and online learning, several primary school children emphasised a need to spend time with relatives they could not see during lockdowns. Virtual meetings with relatives, particularly with grandparents were considered enough by children who live far away from them; on the contrary, separation was a source of anxiety for children who were used to meeting relatives more frequently:

M1: Coronavirus isn't only separating us from our friends but from our family. I have a cousin and they have loads of cousins and the last time I have seen any of them has been around two years now.

M2: I had cousins sometimes a few times a year, like one or three times a year they would come, like, because we have a celebration called Eid, it's the 31st day of Ramadan, that means for how long we've been fasting, fasting means we have to eat breakfast at 4 o'clock at dawn and then we can't eat or drink all day until 9 o'clock. And my cousins were supposed to come but only like a few came.

Researcher: Is that because of Covid?

M2: Yeah because they have cousins that come all the way up for it, and I have a few cousins who live a few doors down, and they came, and the year before Covid ruined everything for me, because the day before the 30th day of Ramadan, you can choose presents, and then you're meant to wrap it up and yeah, your parents wrap it up for you after you go to the toy shop and choose what you want to buy, and then it's Eid, and it's similar to like Christmas, instead your cousins buy things for you and you have no idea what it is. Two years ago, we got a fun game where there's this fishing game called 'gone fishing'. And then it ruined everything...

M3: Like [M2] pointed out, Eid last year was very disappointing last year because I didn't get to see my cousins. I was supposed to see my cousins last year too, but I have a feeling this year, Eid will be even better because we get to go to the toy shops and to get to go to the part. Eid this year is actually tomorrow.

(UK_F1_SF1)

I kept in touch with my grandparents the same amount, it has not changed much because, even now, they live very far away so I speak to them only on the phone and in the summer, I was able to go and see them for three months. So the quarantine was not that hard for me, but doing online learning was difficult.

(IT_F25_CH_B)

For me Covid did not change that much on the one hand, but on the other hand it did because with Covid when I was in quarantine last year, I always saw my paternal grandmother because she looked after me at home as my parents were not able to be at home when I was doing online learning. Instead, the other side, my maternal grandparents, and also the other part of the family, I could not see them because they were older, and therefore there was more danger that they would catch Covid and die.

(IT_F25_CH_B)

Learning to cope with online schooling

However, older children, probably less troubled by the management of technologies, on the contrary referred to positive aspects of independent, online learning as far as concerns their exercise of agency. For instance, participants to a focus group in a secondary school in Italy highlighted that online learning offered scope for greater autonomy and sense of responsibility, as in the excerpt below:

M1: in my opinion the biggest difference between digital school and face-to-face school is that the digital school, in my opinion, makes you grow, for example it makes you mature in certain areas, for example in certain lessons that are done in class, the teachers can see if you are concentrating, but at home you can switch off in different ways and relax, or you can become more mature and recognise when you should do something or not.

Researcher: so you're saying you're more empowered because it's up to you to decide if you're paying attention or not?

M1: yes.

Researcher: you can get out of control somehow so if you're paying attention, it's because you know it's important to pay attention.

M1: understand when you have to pay attention and when maybe you can relax a little bit [...]

Researcher: so in your opinion even regular school should give you that option?

M1: yes, I'd say so, allowing you to be more free

(IT_F29_CH_B)

Some children also mentioned they adopted creative strategies for instance to buy for more time for themselves outside of learning activities:

I also wanted to tell you that during online learning, you might as well wake up twenty minutes later and say that the computer was (logged in) but that you couldn't get in.

(IT_F11_CH_B)

Finally, older secondary-school children, exclusively from the Italian settings, shared the experience of online learning helping them to manage levels of stress more effectively.

Online learning helped me to manage my stress, I was no longer anxious, which was incredible, but otherwise I was a bit sad, but I was much more relaxed during online learning.

(IT_F10_CH_G)

F1: Concerning online learning, when there were questions, I had less anxiety because I was at home and not at school.

Researcher: Listen, but when you got back to school, did the anxiety come back or had you learned to manage it at that point?

F1: No I had learned to manage it

(IT_F10_CH_G)

In Italy, particularly in secondary schools, several children not only expressed the negative impact of online schooling on friendship, they also mentioned a positive aspect of online schooling: being at home and thus being more comfortable (getting up later, having breakfast slowly and wearing whatever they wanted).

During online learning I didn't like it much, but I also liked it a bit. I didn't like it a bit because I only saw my friends virtually, yet I liked it because I was in my own home.

(IT_F17_CH_B).

In my opinion online learning was both a positive and a negative thing. Positive because I was able to wake up much later, and negative because I couldn't see what was really going on in reality, and I wanted to be with my friends, chatting during the breaktime and playing outside without this online learning.

(IT_F26_CH_B).

However, this was not the case for any of the English participants. In the English focus groups, the positive aspects of online schooling in terms of personal comfort were not mentioned. This can be related to some age difference: the English participants were all primary school children, and the benefit of a more relaxed ante-meridian routine might not have been very important to them.

Nevertheless, children in both national settings of the research settings acknowledged that new learning activities were organised by teachers specifically to support learning and interpersonal relations during the first lockdown and online schooling. Across the two national settings, children expressed appreciation for such activities that were both unexpected and positive:

For example, from five to six in the afternoon we do a workshop with a teacher that involves all the third-year students, but unfortunately only a few of them participate, and we read the newspapers about this period and how children of our age or a little older are experiencing life during this difficult time. Because, you know, to distance yourself a bit from your friends at this age and at this time is quite difficult, I mean you need the moral support of your friends because being with them makes you a little bit stronger in your yourself.

(IT_F22_CH_B)

Researcher: And how did you all cope with online lessons? How did that work?

M1: Honestly, when the first wave struck, I was like 'hmmm yay, I get to do a bit of relaxing.' But then online work hit me like a truck. Because I was just thinking, I'm gonna be honest, I wasn't expecting it, I was just like 'I'm gonna sit around, maybe look at some stuff once in a while, do some work, do some spelling, keep myself educated.' But they'd already planned it.

Researcher: Oh wow. And was it planned well?

Many children: Yeah.

Researcher: And what sort of stuff did you do?

F1: Our teacher Mr [name removed], what he used to do was, he would record his lessons, he worked extra hard, he told us all about it, how he had to work after school to record the lessons and during his lunch break, he had to record the lesson for the afternoon.

Researcher: Oh wow. A lot of preparation.

(UK_F20_SF8)

M1: We were very thankful because all of our home learning books were filled with work and it was so fun. We got to draw. We got to, when we did Maths, personally I loved Maths and English because, on the documents, we could do English and then submit it onto something called Google Classroom, and if we wanted to, we could post it on the stream, and people could read it if they want.

Researcher: Oh so you could read each other's work? That's really clever.

M1:..And if, during school, if we needed help, Mr [name removed] would always help, we just would send a message and Mr [name removed] checks the stream and answers questions.

(UK_F13_FM3)

Going to school during the pandemic

Based on their contributions during the focus groups, the management of the pandemic largely affected, and still affects in most cases, the learning experience in schools. The experience of face-to-face schooling is probably the dimension where differences linked to the national contexts emerge more clearly.

The conditions of attending schools are rather different in England and Italy and this may explain the more negative outlook on schooling expressed in the Italian focus groups, where most children said that the pandemic had a negative impact on the learning experience in schools on return to face-to-face teaching. The most important difference was the policy on the compulsory use of face covering. Whilst face coverings for children were not compulsory for English primary school children, they were for their Italian counterparts. In addition to a more comprehensive face-covering policy, social distancing measures were much stricter in Italian schools.

Such differences can justify the discrepancy between data from Italy, where references to the negative effects on schooling of public health measures intended to contain the pandemic were very common, and data from England, where the emphasis was mostly on the negative experience of online schooling. Once back at school, English primary-school children, that is, the whole cohort of participants, experienced an environment that was less dramatically different from the ordinary.

Italian children generally described the school experience under strict public health restrictions as somehow sadder than before the pandemic. This is clearly related by the participants to limitations on the possibility of entertaining interpersonal interactions.

So, the school as I see it, with Covid, really is much sadder, there is a lack of contact with people, I mean, you are always spaced out and closed in your desk, and I can't think of many positive aspects [...] it's a bit sad and that's it.

(IT_F10_CH_G)

It wasn't nice because you couldn't get close to anyone, for example, we can go to the blackboard to write down a calculation only if we have our own chalk, we have to sanitise ourselves, well it's not nice to be at a distance.

(IT_F32_CH_G)

When there was no Coronavirus, I was always much happier, but now I'm always at home and I'm bored.

(IT_F13_CH_G)

Also, in primary schools, many children in the Italian contexts of the research openly claimed to prefer online learning to being at school under a regime of strict social distancing. The most important reason was the physical separation from peers, a personal distance reflected in the spatial organisation of the classroom. A few secondary-school children expressed troubles in adapting to this new situation, such as wearing masks and maintaining physical distance from one another. Children referred to their struggles to maintain some degree of genuine interpersonal interaction in situations where desks are (still at the time of the focus groups) widely separated from each other, breaks are taken separately by each class and any physical contact is strictly prohibited, even during play. This is illustrated by the excerpts below:

I don't like it [...] previously you had a desk mate, you copied in the tests [...] we exchanged snacks this was an important part of things.

(IT_F11_CH_G)

Having the desks spaced out gives me more anxiety [...] because during the lesson you can't talk as much with your classmates and maybe you have less fun too.

(IT_F19_CH_G)

In the meantime, the desks are spaced a metre apart, my God!

(IT_F19_CH_G)

We have desks spaced apart and I used to like being close to others.

(IT_F19_CH_B)

A school where you can have breaktime all together [...] T1: since we are in a Covid period they can't even meet the kids from the other classes.

(IT_F8_CH_B)

Researcher: Does the fact that you can't touch people bother you?

M1: yes, it bothers me.

(IT_F19_CH_B)

I also miss physical contact a bit.

(IT_F19_CH_G)

If we want to see each other we're still not allowed to hug.

(IT_F19_CH_G)

F1: Covid bothers me because we can't be close to each other, and we can't hold hands and we can't even hug

Researcher: so you miss the physical contact a bit

F1: yes, and because we can't get close to each other to talk.

(IT_F19_CH_G)

During a focus group with younger primary-school children in Italy, participants mentioned how the pandemic meant they were not able invite their friends home like they used to. Such piece of data can be combined with the reference to the inability to play with friends or to see young relatives, which was particularly emphasised by primary-school children in the English settings.

I don't like being away from my friends because they can't come to my place, because they usually come to my place.

(IT_F15_CH_G)

Another negative aspect for interpersonal interactions, highlighted by children in Italian schools, particularly primary-school children, was the use of masks as an impediment to seeing their classmates' faces.

Covid bothers me a lot because you have to wear a mask and it bothers me a lot.

(IT_F19_CH_B)

M1: The thing that bothers me the most is the mask, I can never keep it on [...].

Researcher: but is it the mask that bothers you or is it because you can't see your companions' faces anymore?

M1: both.

(IT_F19_CH_B)

M1:.. you have to wear a mask or you could get sick.

M2: when there was no [coronavirus], we didn't wear a mask [...].

F1: I don't like masks

(IT_F16_CH_GB)

Discussion of the main themes emerging from children's voices

Regarding online learning and the preservation of affective interpersonal relationships, participants both in Italian and English schools, point to the absence of social and emotional relationships during the lockdown periods as the most disturbing

experience. Much more emphasis is placed on disruptions to interpersonal relationships than in disruptions to learning, in line with sociological research emphasising the role of school as a primary context for children's socialisation (Baraldi and Iervese 2014). Online platform allowed preservation of interactions with other, but in a largely unsatisfactory manner, evidencing the importance of face-to-face interactions for children's socialisation. Whilst the implications of online schooling have been discussed regarding children's learning (Bubb and Jones 2020), the finding presented here invite attention on the implications of online schooling has for children's socialisation and the possibility of building affective relationship with peers based on personal expression (Baraldi 2012).

Nevertheless, children's networks of interpersonal relationships display resilience. Children's narratives indicate a continuing work to maintain relationships over the periods of forced separation. It is true that participants in both national contexts converge in describing the first lockdown as a shock. It is also true that they agree in emphasising the negative consequences of distance learning for their networks of relationships. However, participants highlight that a long, unexpected period of physical separation strengthened relationships and connections. A recurrent theme from children's narratives reminds of the result of recent research from Kluck and colleagues: a situation of crisis reinforces strong social ties, which survived the test of lockdowns, whilst crowding out weaker social ties (Kluck et al. 2021).

If compared to affectivity among peers, affectivity within families appears to have suffered the effects of public health measures. In both national contexts, online chats were considered enough to keep satisfying relationships with relatives by most children. However, a prolonged physical separation from relatives generated some anxiety in children who were used to see them very often, aligning with (LIT). Based on their narratives, children who are used to distance relationships with relatives, for instance in the case of children with migrant background, were better equipped children to cope with the disruptions to social relationships related to lockdowns.

Children in both contexts of the research cope with online learning, displaying agency in their adaptation to changing conditions (Bjerke 2011). Data suggest that the major disruption experienced by children was not related to learning but to peer-relationships, as the limitation to the possibility of cultivating affective relationships. This is suggested also by several narratives that indicate a high grade of adaptation to online schooling regarding learning activities. Children in Italian schools, who were on average slightly older than children in English schools were also able to identify some positive aspects of online schooling for their well-being, which was not the case for children in English schools. The most evident difference between the two contexts is related to children's experiences on return to face-to-face teaching. Italian

children express a more negative outlook, related the stricter face covering policy and social distancing measures. On the contrary, children in English schools did not experience a great deal of change on return to school; rather, they were vocal in their negative assessment of online schooling.

The voices of children in English and Italian schools become one in suggesting that the experience of online learning and the experience of re-establishing classroom interactions under public health measures impacted, and largely still impacts, on their opportunities of exercising agency in interpersonal interactions. The nature and importance of structures of expectations become relevant when they are disappointed (Luhmann, 1995). Children's disappointment for the social limitations imposed by lockdowns and children's disappointment for the conditions of classroom interactions in times of social distancing indicate that for children, interpersonal interactions are a primary source of dialogic communication and personal expression in schools (Baraldi, Farini and Joslyn 2021). This should not suggest that for children learning is a marginal aspect of schooling: both in Italy and in England children have shared mature preoccupations for the impact of online schooling on their learning. However, learning without socialisation, where dialogic interpersonal interactions in the classroom are a core aspect of such socialisation (Baraldi 2014a), simply does not work for children.

Conclusion, and implications for school leaders and policymakers

An important implication of this result of our research for policymakers and education professionals should be the need for reflecting on the variegated aims of schooling as face-to-face teaching resumes. Our results suggest that it would be mistaken to focus exclusively on filling possible deficits of learning and performances. '*Catching up*' is important but the voices of the participants to the focus groups invite to give due importance to the dialogic foundation of children's motivation to participate in teaching and learning (Baraldi 2014b).

The importance of enhancing and supporting dialogic interpersonal interactions in the classroom suggested by previous research (Hendry 2009; Fitzgerald et al. 2010; Baraldi 2012; 2015b; Baraldi and Cockburn 2018; Farini 2019) was confirmed by some activities facilitated by teachers and educators, promoted by the CHILD-UP project in Italian as well as in English schools on return to face-to-face teaching. In both contexts, children expressed great appreciation of the opportunity provided to re-establish interpersonal dialogue in school contexts where otherwise there was an insistent focus on 'catching up'.

It is important to highlight that participating schools' leaders have displayed a positive assessment of activities to facilitate dialogic exchanges in the classrooms. This demonstrated that teachers and school heads can be receptive towards the promotion of dialogue as part of the learning experience and supportive of educational activities that facilitate it. Further publications will aim to discuss the activities to facilitate dialogue promoted by CHILD-UP, as well as children, and teachers' evaluation of them.

As a conclusive observation, which invite further research in the future, it is important to mention that differences connected to cultural background did not emerge in the focus groups, neither in Italy nor in England, notwithstanding the conditions of *superdiversity* (Vertovec 2007) connoting schools participating in the research. The difficulties of interpersonal interactions, and the strategies to preserve them, were similar for all children, across cultural backgrounds and national contexts. When differences emerged, they were rather connected to participants' age or the effect of diverging public health measures.

Such results invite confirm the importance of hybrid identity-formation in classrooms (Baraldi 2015a; Holliday 2011; Holliday and Amadasí 2020), which leads to shared experiences between children and shared expectations across cultural backgrounds (Wierbicka 2006). The intercultural dimension of dialogue appears to be inextricably intertwined with interpersonal communication that fosters personal expressions.

Bibliography

- Baraldi, C. (2012) Participation, facilitation and mediation in educational interactions. In Baraldi, C., Iervese, V. (eds.), *Participation, Facilitation, and Mediation. Children and young people in their social contexts*. New York: Routledge, 66-86.
- Baraldi, C. (2014a) Children's participation in communication systems: a theoretical perspective to shape research. In Warehime, N. (ed.), *Soul of Society: a focus on the leaves of children and youth. Sociological studies on children and youth*, 18, 63-92.
- Baraldi, C. (2014b) Formulations in dialogic facilitation of classroom interactions. *Language and Dialogue*, 4(2), 234-260.
- Baraldi, C. (2015a) Intercultural Communication Systems and Discourses of Cultural Identity. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 6(1), 49-71.
- Baraldi, C. (2015b) Promotion of migrant children's epistemic status and authority in early school life. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 47 (1), 5-25.
- Baraldi, C., Cockburn, T. (eds.) (2018) *Theorizing Childhood. Citizenship, Rights and Participation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Baraldi, C., Farini, F. & E. Joslyn (2021) *Promoting Children's Rights in European Schools. Intercultural Dialogue and Facilitative Pedagogy*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Baraldi, C., Iervese, V. (2014) Observing children's capabilities as agency. In Stoecklin, D, Bonvin, J-M. (eds.), *Children's Rights and the Capability Approach. Challenges and prospects*. Dordrecht: Springer, 43-66
- Bjerke, H. (2011) It's the way to do it. Expressions of agency in child-adult relations at home and school. *Children & Society*, 25, 93-103.
- Bubb, S., Jones, M.A. (2020) Learning from the COVID-19 home-schooling experience: Listening to pupils, parents/carers and teachers. *Improving Schools*, 23 (3): 209-222.
- Byrd, Clark J.S., Dervin F. (eds.) (2014) *Reflexivity in language and intercultural education*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Cockburn, T. (2013). *Rethinking Children's Citizenship*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Dervin, F., Liddicoat, A.J. (eds.) (2013) *Linguistics for Intercultural Education*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Farini, F. (2019) Inclusion Through Political Participation, Trust from Shared Political Engagement: Children of Migrants and School Activism in Italy. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 20(4), 1121-1136

- Fitzgerald, R., Graham, A., Smith, A., Taylor, N. (2010) Children's participation as a struggle over recognition: exploring the promise of dialogue. In Percy-Smith, B., Thomas, N. (eds.), *A Handbook of Children's and Young People's Participation. Perspectives from Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 293-305.
- Hill, M., Davis J., Prout, A., Tisdall, K. (2004) Moving the participation agenda forward. *Children & Society*, 18, 77-96.
- Hendry, R. (2009) Building and restoring respectful relationships in schools. London: Routledge.
- Holliday, A. (2011) Intercultural communication and ideology. London: Sage.
- Holliday, A, Amadasi, S. (2020) Making Sense of the Intercultural. Finding De-Centred Threads. London: Routledge.
- Jackson, J. (2014) The process of becoming reflexive and intercultural: Navigating study abroad and re-entry experience. In Byrd Clark, J.S., Dervin, F. (eds.), *Reflexivity in language and intercultural education*. London: Routledge, 43-63.
- James, A. (2009) Agency. In Qvortrup, J., Corsaro, W., Honig, M-S. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 34-45.
- James, A., James, A.L. (2004) Constructing Childhood. Theory, Policy and Social Practice. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- James, A., James, A.L. (2008) Key Concepts in Childhood Studies. London: Sage.
- James, A., Jenks C., Prout, A. (1998) Theorizing Childhood. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Kluck, J.P., Stoyanova, F. and N.C. Krämer (2021) Putting the social back into physical distancing: The role of digital connections in a pandemic crisis. *International Journal of Psychology*, 56, 594-606.
- Kramsch, C., Uryu, M. (2012) Intercultural contact, hybridity, and third space. In Jackson, J. (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of language and intercultural communication*. London: Routledge, 211-225.
- Leonard, M. (2016) The sociology of children, childhood and generation. London: Sage.
- Luhmann, N. (1995) Social Systems. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Oswell D. (2013) The Agency of Children. From Family to Global Human Rights. London: Routledge.
- Piller, I. (2011) Intercultural Communication. A Critical Introduction. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Shier H. (2001) Pathways to participation: openings, opportunities and obligations. *Children & Society*, 15, 107-117.

- Shier, H. (2010) 'Pathways to participation' revisited. Learning from Nicaragua's child coffee workers. In Percy-Smith, B., Thomas, N. (eds.), *A Handbook of children's and young People's participation. Perspectives from theory and practice*. London: Routledge, 215-229.
- Vertovec, S. (2007) Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 1024-1054.
- Wierbicka, A. (2006) The concept of 'dialogue' in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective. *Discourse Studies*, 8(5), 675-703.

Dialogue within and among Transnational Communities of Refugee Learners and Teachers: Covid-19, Dialogic Pedagogy and Dialogue Across Research Teams

Tony Capstick¹

Abstract: As the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic intensified, displaced learners faced increasing challenges to accessing the learning online that they were attending offline before the start of the pandemic. It is these learners' and their teachers' dialogic relations which are at the core of the Covid-19, *migration* and *multilingualism* (CV19MM) project, run in partnership with stakeholders offering language lessons in Jordan. In our paper, we respond to the question 'Did the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns result in new types of community connections as refugee learners and teachers came together online?' We examine NGOs' shift to working online and the shift in data collection procedures when recording refugees' ability to navigate online spaces through the lens of New Literacy Studies which foregrounds the analysis of culture and identity in the literacy practices of migrants (Barton and Hamilton 2000). Darwin and Norton (2015) recognise that the spaces in which language socialisation takes place have become increasingly deterritorialised. We focus on the dialogic engagements which emerged from increased online interactions, the dialogic pedagogies which one NGO draws on in its work with displaced learners and teachers and the challenges faced when carrying out research with refugee communities during Covid-related restrictions. We end with discussion of how our findings shed light on working with stakeholders across borders and how this approach enhances research on language, dialogue and migration when carrying out impactful research which is of use to NGO stakeholders.

Keywords: Displacement, Dialogic teaching, Transnational refugee communities, Literacy practices

Introduction

¹ Dr Capstick is a Lecturer in TESOL and Applied Linguistics at the University of Reading. He carries out research on language use and language education in resource-low environments and his focus is multilingualism and migration, particularly in refugee settings. He was Lead Educator of the Futurelearn MOOC Migrants and Refugees in Education: A toolkit for teachers having previously co-authored the report 'Language for Resilience' for the British Council. His new textbook for Routledge Language and Migration was published in 2020. It features a range of activities and case studies for advanced undergraduate and postgraduate students and draws on real-world examples from Tony's time teaching and re-searching in the Middle East, South Asia, South East Asia and Europe with additional contributions from scholars in the Americas and New Zealand.

As the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic intensified and language learning for classes of displaced learners moved online, opportunities for dialogue within transnational communities of refugee learners and teachers arose as displaced learners met increasingly in online settings. This paper provides insights from an on-going research project which seeks to enable refugee teachers to carry out their own research in their own communities during these shifts to digital platforms and the opportunities for dialogue this affords and constrains. In the paper, the shift to researching language online is explored with attention paid to three areas: dialogue and language use, dialogic pedagogy, and dialogue in research methods. The reason for this approach is that there is an increasing acknowledgement of the need to ‘decolonise’ Dialogue Studies and a tendency to focus on dominant language varieties in research in this area. Mignolo (2002) has spoken of the ‘geopolitics of knowledge’, in which he suggests that the problem is not only a linguistic one, given his interest in the linguistic hegemony of Castilian Spanish, but also a cultural and epistemological one that goes beyond the immediate context of grammar and vocabulary. To be published in English-language journals, scholars from across the world must draw on theories and concepts originating in the Anglosphere (Ricento 2000). Mignolo and others see this as a further example of how language is always the companion of Empire; knowing as he did that “the power of a unified language, via its grammar, lay in its teaching it to the barbarians, as well as controlling barbarian languages by writing their grammars” (1995, 39). Mignolo’s critiques are also epistemological as they confront the assumption that Anglosphere knowledge is humanity’s only valid way of knowing. His decolonial critique posits that modernity and coloniality should be understood as mutually constitutive concepts. The coloniality of scholarly debates and outputs are manifested in hierarchical sociocultural and linguistic relationships between dominant and marginalized populations (Mignolo 2002, 2011; Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Pennycook suggests that in attempts to counter the coloniality of modern forms of higher education, academic outputs apply decolonial, postcolonial and indigenous theories to unequal power hierarchies of knowledge production, cultural, institutional and policy relations, curriculum and pedagogy (2019).

This paper explores attempts from within the field of Applied Linguistics to account for these modern forms of coloniality relating to language research, analysis and teaching by exploring the hierarchical linguistic and intellectual relationships between dominant and marginalised populations. It draws on the recent growth in studies of translanguaging which have created several important avenues for research and pedagogy, many of which relate to Dialogue Studies. The reason for this is that foundational studies such as Canagarajah (2013) and Garcia and Wei (2014) see translanguaging in political terms and very much as part of the challenge to the restrictive labels and practices of language education that Mignolo addresses above. Garcia and Wei (*ibid.*) argue that the concept of translanguaging be taken up in

Mignolo's (2011) decolonial terms as a challenge to the structures of the modern colonial world system while Pennycook sets out how the politics that motivate work on translanguaging are not reinscribed into the ortholinguistic labels and practices of educational normativity (Pennycook 2016; 2019). Pennycook goes further by advocating for an activist dimension to critical education projects, what he has termed 'translingual activism' (2008). This work is firmly within an agenda for the decolonisation of education and includes transformational practices which are of interest to those working in Dialogue Studies in that a core aim of this approach to language education is the development of critical language users who are able to select from a variety of linguistic resources. These linguistic resources are drawn from a repertoire that includes styles, discourses, registers and genres, and whose developing language practices aim not just at personal but also social change (Pennycook 2019). In the following section I make explicit the links between dialogue and language practices and in the conclusion draw together some of our emerging findings from taking this approach to research with refugee teachers.

Dialogue, language, and migration

To say that dialogue is always dialogic is to assert that all utterances are not only situated but are connected to previous utterances (Bakhtin 1981). This has far-reaching implications for the study of dialogue as it points to the fact that every utterance is in some way enabled and constrained by the utterance preceding. Moreover, all utterances are connected to other utterances in a complex web of discourse; that is, they respond to utterances in their immediate proximity but also utterances and conversations that may be far removed from the time and place of the speaking and writing (Jones 2012). The real source of dialogue is not the fact that language allows us to say new things in new ways, but that we must always do so in collaboration with others as all utterances are co-created. Perhaps the most important aspect of dialogism is that it helps us to see not only how speakers and listeners in particular conversations are connected to each other, but also how conversations are connected to other conversations. We inevitably construct our utterances by appropriating and mixing these voices from the past (Bakhtin 1981). All utterances are not only dialogic, but also heteroglossic, containing the traces of other people's words and the contexts in, and purposes for which, those words were used. All texts and conversations involve 'remixing' (Knobel and Lankshear 2008). We do not only remix words, we also appropriate styles and genres associated with different social practices and institutions, and when we do so, we invoke and position ourselves in relation not only to specific conversations in the past, but also to larger societal debates – what Gee (2014) calls 'capital C Conversations'.

What this means is that dialogue is less about saying something ‘new’ and more about being able to appropriate and assemble the voices of others, to mix them in strategic ways, and to adapt them to particular circumstances and particular goals. Dialogue is a matter of ‘populating the words of others with our own intentions – of speaking the words of others with our own accents’ (Bakhtin 1981, 293). Mixing voices in this way is central to the lives of all migrants, whether the forced migrants (refugees) that are taking part in this study, or voluntary migrants seeking a new life, studies, or employment: strategically deploying a range of voices to help them fit in, stay in touch with their friends and families and developing new varieties for new employment and education opportunities. However, across the world, monolingual integration policies simultaneously link proficiency in dominant languages such as English in the UK or US with social cohesion and undervalue the importance of heterogeneous minority languages in forging cohesion (Blackledge 2005). Rather than endorse this opposition between monolingualism and multilingualism, the term ‘linguistic repertoire’ is used here as it is not limited to the competence of multilinguals or distinct ‘languages’ but rather relates to the repertoires of styles, dialects, and registers of users (Kachru 1982), in our case, refugees who have been forced to migrate.

Migration takes different forms and occurs for various reasons. To migrate is to move from one place to another – whether this movement is internal, within the country’s political boundaries, or international, whereby people move across a country’s borders. As they move, refugees and migrants take their language practices and cultural resources with them (Capstick 2020). In international migration, the result of such mobility is that displacement of people’s own cultural and social practices, in which language is central, appears in the spaces of the host community. This phenomenon is often rejected, as governments of host communities fear that the displaced people’s social practices do not conform to those of the normative practices in the destination country – that different cultural and linguistic practices may jeopardise the ‘homogeneity’ of the nation. This rejection is based on governments’ long-held ideology that for a nation to be united, its individuals must speak the same language (Anderson 2006). Over time, the one-nation one-language ideology has been embedded in the political systems of global nation-states, which have legitimised various policies that have sought to minimise and limit the use of all linguistic varieties other than the standard varieties (Hornberger 2002). Hence, the status of different linguistic varieties varies dramatically in different social contexts. That is, the varieties spoken in dominant settings are encouraged and privileged in most domains over all other varieties. As well as the dominant varieties being privileged, the speakers of these varieties are also privileged. By contrast, minorities and minority languages are neglected (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). This situation can be explained in light of Bourdieu’s (1997) theory of linguistic capital. Bourdieu highlights that language

ideologies are reflected in language use when communicating, interlocutors weigh up the value of their linguistic resources while considering the field (i.e., the social context they are in at the time), and they deploy those linguistic resources that they believe carry most prestige in that setting, or alternatively, have a very good reason for not flouting these conventions. It is implicit that dominant varieties hold the most capital in most domains and are expected to be used. A salient practical example of the hierarchy of linguistic capital is that the language of instruction in mainstream education is often the official language of the country. Students, regardless of their home language varieties, will be required to use that language variety in school. In other words, learning the language of instruction gains them access to their classroom subjects, curricula and assessment which in turn leads to academic success. Such an education policy concerning language often does not benefit non-standard speakers or writers of minority languages. In the case of Jordan where Arabic is the medium of instruction in schools and English the medium of instruction in most universities, English becomes a gate-keeping device for access to a university-level qualification. The non-governmental organisation (NGO) at the centre of the study provides English-language classes to refugees from Syria and North Africa who have been displaced to Jordan and wish to continue or start their higher education studies. To do so, they need to acquire the academic genres and appropriate the academic discourse practices of these universities perpetuated by what Mignolo would describe as the geopolitics of knowledge.

In 2021, nearly 26 million displaced people are under the age of 18, and 3.8 million of these youths are Syrian migrants and refugees living in camps. The war in Syria has forced millions of Syrians to seek refuge in other countries. Though they have survived the war, the migrants and refugees still face many challenges: they are traumatised; they live in camps; and the younger ones need to continue their education and find employment afterwards (Capstick 2020). One of the challenges school-age and university-age migrants and refugees face is learning the language of the host communities' educational institutions to pursue their education. Currently, with the Covid-19 pandemic, many governments have insisted that schools shift from face-to-face to online classes to limit the spread of the virus. Thus, an additional challenge that migrants and refugees face is to teach and learn using unfamiliar online modes and methods. Nevertheless, language lessons are still being delivered to refugees and the *Covid-19, migration and multilingualism* (CV19MM) project works with NGOs to help better understand the learning that is occurring online during social restrictions. The project and research design are introduced in the following section.

Researching the language practices of displaced people in Jordan: a case study

The *CV19MM* project brings together refugee and migrant researchers and enables them to carry out research in their own communities about Covid-19. The research focuses on how migrants and refugees draw on their current networks to read, write, and share information about the Covid-19 coronavirus. The aim of the project is to identify how people use their existing language resources to do this and how they go about extending these resources by using translation, mediators and brokers when trying to understand information about the virus. An essential aspect of this mediation is the dialogue that occurs between refugees of different cultural and linguistic heritage. The research project has two aims. The first aim is to equip refugees and migrants with the skills to carry out their own research in their own communities. Through guided research training in ethnographic fieldwork online, the community researchers develop research skills in data collection and data analysis. The data range from informal social media postings to formal health information source material, as well as interview data about the talk that goes on around these texts and the social practices and networks of which they are part. At the end of the project, a team of community researchers will be equipped with the skills to carry out qualitative research drawing on ethnographic approaches. The second aim of the project is to generate a database of useful resources for migrants and refugees, and those who work with them, for understanding information about the Covid-19 coronavirus and how these resources can be used by other NGOs with an interest in dialogic pedagogy.

As we continue to experience a mass migration of research from physical to digital spaces, we see increasing opportunities for dialogic engagement across communities which provide new opportunities for dialogue among and within displaced communities. With this in mind, digitally mediated interviews on Skype and Zoom were used to facilitate social research, with peer-to-peer mentoring for relationship-building work. In the following sections two more perspectives on dialogue in the field of Applied Linguistics will be explored through examples from the case study: dialogic teaching and dialogue in data collection (i.e., dialogue in research design).

Dialogue in classroom teaching (dialogic pedagogies)

Talk-intensive pedagogies are common to English language teaching, though approaches differ in terms of how far teachers aim to cultivate inclusive classroom discourse. An assumption dominates among current practitioners in the NGO sector that learners learn best through participation in meaningful classroom discourse as well as in classrooms where all learners are encouraged to participate in classroom dialogue (Capstick 2020a; Capstick and Ateek 2021). However, this kind of dialo-

gic pedagogy raises questions about teachers' and learners' views about the appropriation of dialogic pedagogies in classes made up of displaced learners with different cultural and linguistic knowledge. The NGO in this study frames this question as: how do teachers manage the demands of dialogic pedagogies (which include cognitive challenge, inclusivity, and the fostering of supportive relationships) in cross-cultural interactions? To respond, it is important to look at how research on dialogic pedagogies has developed over the past twenty years. This section provides a brief review of this literature on these talk-intensive pedagogies. Most of this literature has grown out of a concern with sociocultural psychological theory and a dissatisfaction with traditional classroom discourse structures (Mehan 1998) and an increasing interest in the efficacy of dialogic teaching such as the work of Resnick, Asterhan and Clarke (2015). However, what is of specific interest to the education of displaced learners, many of whom have been uprooted from their homes, is the concern with learner voice and the need to help learners prepare for critical participation in deliberative democracy (Burbules and Berk 1999). The differences between critical thinking and critical pedagogy have been discussed at length elsewhere. In this respect, Burbules and Berk (1999) distinguish critical pedagogy from critical thinking, where the latter focuses on the development of learners who can make well-substantiated choices about their values and behaviour by giving evidence and identifying reasons. Educators taking this stance tend to avoid an explicit ideological orientation in their teaching, opting for pedagogy which aims to encourage thoughtful and reasonable people (Sibbett 2019). Burbules (1995) has argued that for classroom dialogue to be transformative, citizenship educators choosing a critical thinking approach align themselves with advocating for pluralism (Sibbett 2019). These educators value disagreement as well as difference in classroom talk. Indeed, pluralism here motivates learners to justify their proposals with appeals to justice, thereby contributing to social knowledge (Parker 2006). These instructional approaches therefore seek to exploit the power of talk to engage learners' thinking and learning (Alexander 2008) which is central to dialogic pedagogy. Lefstein and Snell define dialogic pedagogy as teaching and learning in which, firstly, learners and teachers address authentic problems and play an active role in the joint construction of knowledge and, secondly, as the kind of teaching and learning where learners are empowered to express their voices, thereby promoting the interaction of multiple perspectives (2018). Lefstein and Snell stress that in dialogic pedagogy, teachers and learners adopt open and critical stances toward this construction of knowledge as part of a classroom community which is characterised by supportive relationships and inclusive norms (*ibid.*). What is of concern in this paper is the extent to which these different features may be in tension with each other in a class of displaced learners and how refugee teachers go about researching these tensions in their own lessons. A critical stance on one learner's knowledge may entail the loss of face and a conflict with support and care for that learner. For these reasons, Snell and Lefstein (2018)

see dialogic pedagogy as a problem space – ‘a set of issues and concerns to attend to – rather than a ‘best practice’ prescription (Lefstein, Snell and Israeli 2015).

Dialogue in data collection

Having introduced the nature of the dialogic approach that the NGO in this study takes in its English language lessons for refugees in Jordan, this section focuses on the role of dialogue in the methodologies drawn in the *CVI9MM* project which seeks to bring together refugee teachers with academic researchers with an interest in dialogue. The approach taken in this research project is that of linguistic ethnography. The overarching aim of linguistic ethnography is to make meaning from the speech and writing of others. For the kind of team ethnography pursued by the *CVI9MM* project team, this process becomes complex as researchers engage together in the process of meaning making. These processes are rich in potential for dialogue. In this research study, we were initially (until the Covid-19-related restrictions on travel and social distancing came into force) following an approach taken by the linguistic ethnographers working in multilingual teams to investigate linguistic practices and identities of multilingual learners. Blackledge and Creese (2010) developed an approach in which they ‘demystify’ the research process for those who teach and study multilingualism in the UK and in 2012 explored the role of voice and meaning making in team ethnography by asking how teams of researchers negotiate and come to (dis)agreements in the process of making ‘meaning’ out of ‘data.’ That is, how multiple linguistic practices in and out of informal educational settings are synthesised into ‘research findings’ (Creese and Blackledge 2012). Arguing that this process of meaning making is often, at best, implicit in social research generally, this demystifying of the research process is taken up here in an attempt to explore its application to work in Dialogue Studies, in this case, the dialogue of the research team embarking on research with displaced language learners and teachers. In order to take this ethnographic approach to data collection, the NGO and academic researchers delivered training in interview methods and text collection, after which the refugee community researchers collected data from members of their own communities and networks. The community researchers save information relating to language use, language learning and Covid-19 (e.g., Facebook postings; medical information; Tweets) and ask the friends and family in their networks about the reading and writing practices related to these texts. The interviews include questions about the texts as well as questions about their wider language and literacy practices. The NGO led on the ethical procedures for working in this way and university ethical consent was obtained. As part of the texts collected and interviews carried out the community researchers ask respondents to provide demographic information on their household including age, gender and language use. In the interviews, participants were not asked for identifying details and all data is anonymised by the re-

searchers prior to uploading to the website. The following research questions were agreed by the teams of community researchers:

RQ1: What language and literacy practices do refugees and migrants draw on in their English language lessons and when sharing information about COVID-19?

RQ2: What literacy mediation and translation takes place to make texts about Covid-19 accessible to refugees and migrants and who acts as literacy mediators in these networks?

The questions are broken down into the following three main categories:

1. Current practices: What language and literacy practices do you draw on most often? What networks are you part of? What online sites do you visit? Do you visit different sites in different places (home computer, school/work computer, mobile devices)?
2. Ways of participation: How much reading and writing do you do on these sites? What are the different functions of these sites? Do you make cross reference (i.e. similar content posted on different sites, though may be written in different ways)? Do you enjoy posting on these sites? Why? Do you use different languages/scripts on different sites? Why?
3. Covid-19 information sharing practices: Do you write things about Covid-19? What do you write? Do you read things about Covid-19? What do you read? Do you share things about Covid-19? What do you share? Who do you share these items with? Do you need to translate or explain these items? Any interesting experience in posting information about Covid-19? Have you noticed any changes in your computer/mobile phone use over the years? What are they?

In the final section, we move from the collection of data to the emerging findings and the key issues that we have identified at this point in the project for taking the methodological approach described in this section.

What we are learning in the CV19MM project

In the final section, an overview of the initial findings of the CV19MM project will be discussed. The focus of this concluding section is to bring together issues relating to dialogic teaching and dialogue in data collection for those practitioners working in Dialogue Studies at this time of social distancing as we continue to adjust our ways of teaching, as well as our ways of collecting and analysing data. Linguistic ethnographers across the world continue to respond in creative ways to working in

teams of researchers which foreground the emic view in social research about refugees and migrants. Foregrounding data collection methods which re-think researcher–researched relationships was central to understanding online ethnography. For example, we worked hard to ensure that our data collection among displaced communities was sensitive to who was included and excluded and though we aimed to include a focus on working with disabled people and ensuring a gender balance, this was not always possible when recruiting community researchers. We continue to seek advice from our partners in Jordan about how to ensure inclusion and equity when working with researchers from across several countries and in different research settings. These discussions inform the research training that we deliver through the project website which is aided by an interdisciplinary approach that sees us draw from a range of disciplines in which we now include Dialogue Studies. Similarly, taking a stance towards ethics which fosters researcher resilience was essential. What we found was that resilience emerged out of the adversity faced by the community researchers and their (online) research participants and learners, teaching us that it was the capacity for dialogue among researchers which enabled them to respond to and move through the different stages of social distancing and lockdown. Research participants continue to communicate and foster relationships through these adverse conditions as they rely on their peer mentors and transnational networks. In dialogue with their peers and through the shared experiences of these challenges, the community researchers collaboratively adapt and challenge research assumptions and behaviours as they meet regularly online to respond to new and ever-changing restrictions. The outcome here has been a revised sense of community that serves both the research process as well as enabling wider transformative goals in the community researchers’ classroom teaching. These transformational goals are achieved through a reflective approach to their research design and working with their peer mentors to expand on the kinds of reflective practices which helps us to identify what works and what does not work in researching language and literacy practices online. Reflection and communication (cornerstones of dialogue) form the foundations of our work with displaced people in these challenging times.

Doing research during a global pandemic could have resulted in increased pressure on research participants and the communities of which they are part. Throughout our project we have sought to identify the potential our work holds for meaningful benefit to participants and their communities and evaluated this against the original research aims and purpose. For example, relationship-building has been essential to the dialogic approach to refugee language education work taken in the CV19MM project, but it has been particularly important during the pandemic as we work with displaced people, many of whom are vulnerable and have experienced trauma or at least adversity as part of their displacements. Our response has been focused on the needs of the community researchers and, at their request, drawing on the WhatsApp

platforms which are a regular part of their social interactions. These networks have become a catalyst for creativity, as well as building a sense of community, particularly by using these platforms for extending the peer-to-peer mentoring networks. However, while the community researchers, academics and NGO staff involved in the project are dealing with unforeseen circumstances, it has been necessary to foreground the mental and physical health challenges that are often related to gender and other identity-based stratifications, and this is often constrained by the WhatsApp platforms which deny access to many and mask many of the difficulties some of the team of community researchers are facing. What we are learning is that social media platforms constrain opportunities for dialogue for many of the most vulnerable within our communities of researchers. This finding aligns with the entrenchment of gender biases confronted in the work of Minello (2020), who suggests that widening existing inequalities is a potential outcome of poorly designed and implemented leadership practices during pandemic-related projects. An important orientation for us in this light is the work Tzanakou (2020), who provides guidance on embracing new understandings of the changing nature of inequalities.

Finally, the coordination of a completely remote research team revealed difficulties of staying connected and implementing the right digital tools for responding to the research questions outlined above. These research questions have therefore been reformulated several times. Also, the analysis of ethnographic interview data and examples of writing from across social media networks and classroom settings are proving rich but are also part of a much bigger set of the community researchers' and their participants' literacy practices. The diversity of data sets has presented challenges and forces us to be ever more vigilant about the critical stance we take in our project. For example, while the team is developing new digital skills relating to remote and online team-based ethnography, we are still only able to capture a snapshot of the digital literacies which our research participants draw on in their lives. Therefore, while we are experiencing a considerable migration of research from physical to digital spaces, the digital research approach to education research with a focus on dialogue discussed in this paper recognises that our initial findings are partial. Social research continues to be grounded in social relationships, which can only flourish by careful maintenance over time. In the past 18 months, we have found that qualitative methods such as digitally mediated interviews have enabled us to reach a variety of research participants while not always facilitating the kinds of relationship building and participant observation among researchers and within research settings that qualitatively oriented researchers regularly engage in. The consequences which arise from participants being inaccessible, particularly those who are most vulnerable or marginalised, risks quieting voices. Paradoxically, these are so often the voices of those we most need to hear when considering interventions and responses to the pandemic. Therefore, in the final stage of our CV19MM project, we are focusing our

critical consideration on whose voices are being privileged at this time and whose are not.

Bibliography

- Alexander, R. (2008) Culture, dialogue and learning: Notes on an emerging pedagogy. *Exploring talk in school*, 2008, 91-114.
- Anderson, B. (2006) Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. Verso books.
- Barton, D. & Hamilton, M. (2000) Literacy practices. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton & R. Ivanič (Eds), *Situated literacies: reading and writing in context*, 7-15. London: Routledge.
- Blackledge, A. (2005) *Discourse and power in a multilingual world* (Vol. 15). London: John Benjamins Publishers
- Blackledge, A., & Creese, A. (2010) Multilingualism: A critical perspective. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Burbules, N. C. (1995) Reasonable doubt: Toward a postmodern defense of reason as an educational aim. *Critical conversations in philosophy of education*, 82-102.
- Burbules, N. C., & Berk, R. (1999) Critical thinking and critical pedagogy: Relations, differences, and limits. *Critical theories in education: Changing terrains of knowledge and politics*, 45-65.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2013) Critical academic writing and multilingual students. Michigan: University of Michigan Press
- Capstick, T. (2020a) Language learning as psycho-social support: translanguaging space as safe space in superdiverse refugee settings. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 11(4), 701-726.
- Capstick, T. (2020b) *Language and migration*. London: Routledge
- Capstick, T., & Ateek, M. (2021) Translanguaging spaces as safe space for psycho-social support in refugee settings in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1-16.
- Creese, A., & Blackledge, A. (2012) Voice and meaning-making in team ethnography. *Anthropology & education quarterly*, 43(3), 306-324.
- Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015) Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual review of applied linguistics*, 35, 36-56.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2014) Translanguaging and education. In *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*, 63-77. Palgrave Pivot, London.
- Gee, J. P. (2014) Unified discourse analysis: Language, reality, virtual worlds, and video games. London: Routledge.

- Hornberger, N. H. (2002) Multilingual language policies and the continua of bilit-
eracy: An ecological approach. *Language policy*, 1(1), 27-51.
- Jones, R. H. (2012) Discourse analysis. Routledge: Abingdon/New York.
- Kachru, B. B. (1982) The bilingual's linguistic repertoire. In *Issues in international
bilingual education*, 25-52. Springer, Boston, MA.
- Knobel, M., & Lankshear, C. (2008) Remix: The art and craft of endless hybridiza-
tion. *Journal of adolescent & adult literacy*, 52(1), 22-33.
- Lefstein, A., Snell, J., & Israeli, M. (2015) From moves to sequences: Expanding the
unit of analysis in the study of classroom discourse. *British Educational Research
Journal*, 41(5), 866-885.
- Mehan, H. (1998) The Study of Social Interaction in Educational Settings: Accom-
plishments and Unresolved Issues1. *Human development*, 41(4), 245-269.
- Mignolo, W. (1995) Occidentalización, imperialismo, globalización: herencias co-
loniales y teorías postcoloniales. *Revista iberoamericana*, 61(170), 27-40.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2002) The geopolitics of knowledge and the colonial
difference. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101(1), 57-96.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2011) Geopolitics of sensing and knowing: on (de) coloniality,
border thinking and epistemic disobedience. *Postcolonial studies*, 14(3),
273-283.
- Minello, A. (2020) The pandemic and the female academic. *Nature*, 17, 2020.
- Parker, W. C. (2006) Public discourses in schools: Purposes, problems,
possibilities. *Educational Researcher*, 35(8), 11-18.
- Pennycook, A. (2008) English as a language always in translation. *European Journal
of English Studies*, 12(1), 33-47.
- Pennycook, A. (2016) Politics, power relationships and ELT. In *The Routledge hand-
book of English language teaching*. London: Routledge, 26-37.
- Pennycook, A. (2019) From translanguaging to translingual activism. In *Decoloniz-
ing foreign language education*. London: Routledge, 169-185.
- Resnick, L., Asterhan, C., & Clarke, S. (2015) Socializing intelligence through aca-
demic talk and dialogue. American Educational Research Association.
- Ricento, T. (2000) Historical and theoretical perspectives in language policy and
planning. *Journal of sociolinguistics*, 4(2), 196-213.
- Sibbett, L. (2019) Intersectionality in US educational research. In *Oxford Research
Encyclopedia of Education*.

- Snell, J., & Lefstein, A. (2018) "Low ability," participation, and identity in dialogic pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 55(1), 40-78.
- Tuhiwai, S. L. (1999) Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples. London: Zed Books
- Tzanakou, C. (2020) Stickiness in academic career (im)mobilities of STEM early career researchers: an insight from Greece. *Higher Education*, 1-19.

Dialogue Method: A Proposal to Foster Intra- and Inter-community Dialogic Engagement

Rafael de Araujo Arosa Monteiro, Renata Ferraz de Toledo, and Pedro Roberto Jacobi¹

Abstract: How can we learn and experience dialogue within and between communities? Inspired by the methodological ideas of David Bohm, William Isaacs and Paulo Freire, as well as by the professional experiences of the first author of this article in the field of education and the environment, our aim in the present text is to present in detail a method, which has been developed, tested, and analysed in recent years, to learn and experiment dialogue, which can be used within and between communities. The method is composed of two major interdependent cycles that alternate. The first is a reflexive one, without agenda, composed of four practices that constitute a junction and a transformation of the procedures of suspension of assumptions, by Bohm and Isaacs, and codification and decodification, by Freire, with the purpose of stimulating interpersonal understanding and connection. The second is a deliberative one, with agenda, inspired by Freire's ideas of dialogic collaboration and the principles of educative intervention for sustainability, as suggested by several authors in the field of education for sustainability and social learning, with the purpose of promoting structural changes. We recognise that there is still a long way to go to verify the efficiency of the proposed method, and that numerous research and experience reports are needed based on its application.

¹ Rafael de Araujo Arosa Monteiro is a PhD student with an MSc in Environmental Science (2018) at the University of São Paulo; specialist in Environmental Education for Sustainability in Senac (2015); researcher in the thematic project 'Environmental Governance of São Paulo's Macrometropolis in the Face of Climate Change,' financed by Fapesp (015/03804-9). E-mail: rafael.araujo.monteiro@usp.br

Renata Ferraz de Toledo holds a Master's (2002) and PhD (2006) in public health from the School of Public Health of the University of São Paulo and did a post doctorate (2013) in education at the School of Education of the University of São Paulo. She is a professor and researcher of the postgraduate program in architecture and urbanism at São Judas University, as well as researcher in the thematic project 'Environmental Governance of São Paulo's Macrometropolis in the Face of Climate Change,' financed by Fapesp (015/03804-9).

Pedro Roberto Jacobi is Senior Professor and Research Fellow at the Institute of Energy and Environment of the University of São Paulo (Brazil). Research Fellow at INCLINE/USP Interdisciplinary Climate Investigation Center and Regional Network on Climate Change and Decision Making/ Unitwin. Editor of the journal *Ambiente & Sociedade/Anppas/Brazil* since 1997. Since 2011 President of the board of Local Governments for Sustainability -ICLEI-South America. His research focuses on urban sustainability, water governance, solid waste and sanitation, socio-environmental governance, metropolitan governance and climate change, social learning, and education for sustainability.

Keywords: Dialogue, Community, Dialogue method, Dialogical practices, Reflexive dialogue Cycle, Deliberative dialogue cycle.

Introduction

Community is a concept with a wide range of definitions and the subject of much discussion. We appropriate here the ideas presented by Bauman (2003), from which we can understand the community as a space that adds an important contradiction. On the one hand, it provides security, comfort, and acceptance to the people who are part of it. On the other hand, it stimulates an internal homogenisation, suppressing the presence of diversity within the community and the contact with the different, belonging to other communities.

Such a situation seems to be confirmed by several studies (McCoy et al. 2018; McCoy and Somer 2019) on the pernicious social polarisation present between people from different communities with different values, ideas, and interests, leading to the 'us versus them' Manichaeism that fosters domination, exclusion, and, at the extreme limit, extermination of the different.

This scenario of exacerbated competition, which Greene (2018) calls tribalism, hinders the necessary capacity for cooperation between the various communities to face complex problems that affect everyone, even if in different measures (alluding to the socio-economic inequalities that mark the different capacities to face crises).

A possible way to face and overcome this scenario is dialogue, understood here as a different way of thinking, talking, learning, and acting. It is a way of thinking that seeks the re-admiration² of one's own beliefs, understood here as our convictions about the most varied subjects (Alcock 2018), based on ideas and values built throughout our experiences, instead of reaffirming them, with the purpose of pursuing criticality (Freire 1981; 1983) and coherence (Bohm 2005; 2007). It is a way of talking that aims to understand the other and to make oneself understood, instead of imposing one's own beliefs as synonyms of the absolute truth. It is a way of learning together, recognising the different life experiences that underpin the different beliefs. And it is a way of acting that recognises the legitimacy of the other, that is, recognises their humanity, despite disagreements on different values, ideas, or interests.

With this in mind, in this paper we seek to answer the following question: how can we experience and learn dialogue within and between communities? Inspired by the methodological ideas of David Bohm, William Isaacs and Paulo Freire, as well as by the professional experiences of the first author of this article in the field of education

² This concept will be explained later in the text.

and the environment, our aim in the present text is to present in detail a method, which has been developed, tested, and analysed in recent years (Monteiro 2018; Monteiro 2020; Monteiro and Sorrentino 2019; 2020; Monteiro and Jacobi, 2020; Monteiro et al. 2020), to learn and experiment dialogue, which can be used in encounters between people from the same or different communities, thus increasing our capacity for collaboration to address the various problems and crises in place.

Within such a diversity of theoretical interpretations and experiences, there is one noteworthy aspect. By appropriating the ideas of Bohm, Isaacs, and Freire, we could identify several convergences and divergences among their proposals. Among the divergences, there is one in particular that seemed to strongly oppose the perspective of Bohm and Isaacs on the one hand, and that of Freire on the other.

This divergence is in the problem of the agenda. For Bohm (1980; 2005) and Isaacs (1999), a dialogue group should not have an agenda, that is, objectives to pursue. This is because in having a goal, some assumptions (those that support the goal) will not be questioned. Therefore, the dialogue will be limited, unable to reach its deepest level of sharing of meanings. On the other hand, Freire (1981) will say that the dialogue, carried out within the culture circles, cannot take place without the hope of achieving something, that is, without objectives.

Moreover, we should take into account the recommendations made by scholars and practitioners on the respective authors' ideas, regarding the possibilities of improving and reinventing them. Gunnlaugson (2014), for example, highlights some limitations of Bohmian dialogue. An important limitation is the diminution of the personal dimension. This occurs as a possible side-effect, perhaps not foreseen by Bohm, of establishing the focus of the dialogue on the thought process. Such situation leaves open to each participating person how to carry out the contemplation of thought, which leads to two other relevant challenges.

The first is to contribute to a lack of ability to work with and transform the existing obstacles to the emergence of dialogue related to the identification of people with their ideas, feelings or experiences, given the author's failure to propose a practice for that purpose. And the second, a consequence of the previous one, is the difficulty in being able to disseminate and work the Bohmian dialogue with other people not familiar with it, since this practical clarity on how to do it is lacking (Gunnlaugson 2014).

According to Gunnlaugson (2014), Bohm resisted offering more detailed methodologies and practices to stimulate the different aspects of dialogue, such as the necessary conditions for its emergence, suspension and creativity, for example. Thus, it is

possible to deduce a structural limit of Bohmian dialogues: the methodological lack – to which we seek to offer contributions from the method proposed in this paper.

Similarly, Padilha, director of the Paulo Freire Institute, states that ‘Paulo Freire did not want to be imitated, but reinvented, always based on dialogue [...]. To be Freirean is not to be his disciple’ (Basilio 2021, n.p). Thus, we seek to contribute to Freire in the same way we seek to do with Bohm, offering methodological advances based on his proposals.

In view of all this, we seek to build a method composed of two major interdependent cycles that alternate. The first is a *reflexive* one, without agenda, composed of four practices that constitute a junction and a transformation of the procedures of suspension of assumptions, by Bohm (2005) and Isaacs (1999), and codification and decodification, by Freire (1981), with the purpose of stimulating interpersonal understanding and connection. The second is a *deliberative* one, with agenda, inspired by Freire’s (1981) ideas of dialogic collaboration and the principles of educative intervention for sustainability, as suggested by several authors in the field of education for sustainability and social learning (Jacobi 2013; Jacobi et al. 2020; Monteiro and Ribeiro 2020; Muro 2008; Oca 2016; Portugal and Sorrentino 2020; Souza et al. 2019; Souza et al. 2020), with the purpose of promoting structural changes.

It is worth emphasising that the method itself, being dialogical, creates openings for new and different stages, for the emergence of the new. In other words, it is a ‘method’ that presents itself as a possible path among several others and which is flexible enough to be rethought and readjusted by whoever is interested in working with it. In the following, we present the main characteristics of the two cycles and their possible outcomes.

Reflexive Dialogue Cycle

Recognise the principles and preconditions of dialogue

To start this cycle, it is first necessary *to know what dialogue is*, following Bohm’s (2005) suggestion of knowing the theory before practising it. Therefore, it is important to understand its definition, its principles, its practices, its possible outcomes, and its limits. Otherwise, the chances of being dominated by anti-dialogical habits during the practical exercise are quite high.

As a first precondition for this different way of thinking, talking, and relating to the other, *the willingness to dialogue* is necessary, even before the beginning of the dialogue. As obvious as it may seem, without this will, the dialogical process is harmed or even prevented.

Another important precondition is the *hope* that the other will enter into dialogue with us. Without it, our motivation, that is, our willingness to engage in dialogue, is frustrated and possibly suppressed. Furthermore, *respect* is necessary, recovering its etymological meaning, as recalled by Isaacs (1999), which means ‘to see again’, that is, to allow oneself to go beyond the first impressions one has of something or someone.

Another precondition is *genuine curiosity*, understood as a genuine interest in understanding the other and why what makes sense to them seems so different, even strange, to us.

Finally, the *momentary renunciation of the resolute posture* is also necessary, as proposed by Bohm (2005), characterised by the habit of trying to find ways to solve problems. The objective in this Reflexive Dialogue Cycle is to understand why the other thinks and acts in a certain way, leaving aside the moralising condemnation. In this sense, the resolute posture may quickly lead us to fail in this exercise, since the definition of resolute paths implies the choice and hierarchisation of ideas, therefore, the judgement between what is better and what is worse.

The four dialogical practices

Once these preconditions have been met, it is possible to start the exercise of the four practices of dialogue: *listening*, *identifying emotions and feelings*, *speaking*, and *re-admiring*. Each of these practices has specific characteristics for the promotion of dialogue.

Listening

- *Listening to pauses rather than seeing them as gaps to interrupt the other person's speech.*

We often perceive the moments of pause in someone's speech as an opportunity to say what we think. By acting this way, we do not allow the other person to finish their speech and, therefore, we are not really listening, but we want to react quickly to what has been said. This reactive listening disrupts the communication process and hinders dialogue.

To overcome this bad habit, we suggest seeing the pauses as moments of breathing for the speakers, allowing them to organise their ideas and continue telling their thoughts, and as moments of ‘digestion’ of what is being said by the listener. To help this dynamic, it is possible to define some gesture that indicates the end of the speech.

- *Listening without interrupting, regardless of whether we have an idea that seems incredible and we want to share it immediately.*

When we listen to the other person, many ideas or memories may come to our minds. Generally, when they seem to positively reinforce what the other person is saying, a desire arises in us to tell them immediately to show that we are in tune – after all, if we leave it for later, we may forget. It is almost as if we were giving them a present. However, when we act this way, we stop listening and interrupt the other so that he or she can hear us.

The proposal here is that when you realise the emergence of such a desire, you let it go the same way it came. That way you will be able to keep listening, and if that idea behind the desire still makes sense when it is your turn to speak, it will most likely resurface and you will be able to share it.

- *Listening even if we do not agree with what is said*

The purpose here is to overcome the discomfort of hearing something with which we do not agree, not giving vent to our reactions that may prevent us from listening, such as rolling our eyes, snorting, among others (we will talk in more detail about this in the next practice).

- *Listening without making assumptions*

Another habit that hinders dialogical listening is trying to assume what the other people are going to tell us before they finish speaking. By trying to complete the others' ideas with something that makes sense to us, we stop listening. Moreover, we can create misunderstandings, since our assumptions are based on our personal experiences (which are usually different from those of others) and therefore do not necessarily make sense to the other person.

The exercise here is to identify the habit of making assumptions and not let yourself be dominated by it. When you notice that you are making assumptions while listening, turn your attention back to the other person and, if necessary, ask them to repeat what they were saying.

- *Listening without judgement*

We usually hear what someone tells us and immediately make a comparison with what we already know and believe to be true; if what is said is aligned with what we think, it is very easy for us to accept the idea. On the other hand, if there is no alignment, we immediately disagree. We close ourselves off to that idea. And finally, we judge. 'You're wrong.' 'What nonsense.' 'You need to change.'

To listen without judging is to leave aside that automatic mechanism of comparison we have, from which we emit a verdict of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, immediately agreeing or disagreeing with the other, as Mariotti (n.d.) suggests.

It is worth saying that we are not condemning here the choice of what is good or not for each one of us. To make our choices, we need to judge what makes sense or not to us. However, when the goal is to understand others, what led them to think that way, what were the experiences that made them believe what they believe, we should leave aside the judgemental posture, as Bohm (2005) suggests. We should abandon the belief that ‘if I hear a different idea, I will put mine in danger’.

You will not be in danger! We can listen to different ideas without our own being threatened and without our needing to change. We can always change, but we do not need to impose the necessity of change on ourselves or on others. Therefore, we suggest replacing the idea of RIGHT and WRONG with what makes SENSE and what does NOT MAKE SENSE to you.

Identify emotions and feelings that arise when listening

- *To perceive the impulses that emerge within us while listening to what is said, without giving vent to them or suppressing them.*

These impulses are almost immediate bodily reactions (*emotions*) that arise in us, the result of our reflexes in response to what we hear (Bohm 2005; 2007), bringing out corresponding *feelings* and thoughts, as Kahneman (2012) suggests, which can hinder our understanding of what is being said.

When we listen to an idea we do not agree with, we may feel our heart race, our palms sweat, our head throb; we may wrinkle our nose, shake our head in the negative, etc. We become angry, disgusted, uncomfortable. On the other hand, when we hear an idea with which we agree we want to nod our head in the affirmative, clap our hands, give a thumbs up, among others. We get excited, happy, comfortable.

The proposal here is to try to perceive our bodily reactions and feelings as soon as possible, without giving vent to them or suppressing them, as proposed by Bohm (2005), recognising their interrelationship. This exercise will help us to identify and re-admire our beliefs, as will be explained later.

Speaking

- *Speaking in the first person singular*

It is customary to use the first-person plural when we are talking about something we believe in. ‘Gee, *we* get really nervous when we see news like that on TV, don’t we?’ or ‘It’s very annoying when *we* have to wake up before eight o’clock in the morning.’ But, ‘*we*’ who get very nervous? ‘*We*’ who find it boring to wake up before eight o’clock? When we speak this way, we are making a *generalisation*, implicitly assuming that the other (inserted in the ‘*we*’) thinks and acts the same as we do in a certain situation, which is not necessarily true.

To avoid such generalisation, in dialogue we seek to use the first person singular (I) when speaking to someone, taking, as Rosenberg (2006) suggests, responsibility for what we think and feel.

- *Sharing bodily sensations and feelings when faced with an idea*

It is talking about what we feel when we hear the idea presented by the other. In other words, it is sharing what we feel, instead of reacting automatically. If, for example, we feel anger after listening, the proposal is to talk about the anger and not with the anger. For this, it is possible to start the speech by saying: ‘When I listen to this idea you presented, I feel [complete with the feeling]’.

- *Sharing thoughts about what you are talking about*

It is sharing the idea that emerges in our minds when we hear what has been said, always taking care to wait, without interrupting, for the other people to finish their presentation. A possible way to start our talk is: ‘When I hear that idea you presented, I remember.../it comes to my mind.../I think that...’.

- *Share the sources of information you have on that particular subject*

Something that can help us think together is being honest and transparent about our sources of information. Stating them in our speech can help us avoid generalising or even adopting ideas from unreliable sources, something that can happen because of biases in our memory, as Alcock (2018) suggests.

- *Sharing personal stories*

Stories have the power to connect us and enable us to understand the various lived situations that have helped in the development of our being, guiding our way of thinking, talking, acting, and learning.

Tell your stories. Try to share your life experiences. Besides helping the other to understand you, it will make it possible for you to understand yourself better, also encouraging the practice of re-admiring.

- *Asking questions of the other*

By asking questions, we can broaden our understanding of the other, trying to understand the reasons they think and act the way they do. Some questions that may help us in this task are: Why do *you* think this way? What were the experiences *that led you* to think this way? Why does this make sense *to you*? From whom did *you* learn this?

Note that in these questions we evidence the personal direction by using ‘to you’ or another similar word/expression. This ‘to you’ at the end may bring something implicit that says: ‘I noticed that this subject is important to you; tell me more about it.’ It is an invitation for the other person to tell us how they think about a certain subject without, however, provoking them to convince us that what they say is a truth to be accepted by everyone. This helps to avoid moralising generalisations that often lead to non-dialogue.

By knowing and exercising this valuable practice, it is possible to avoid falling into traps, such as when someone asks us the question ‘why is [...matter...] important?’ without personal direction and with a universalising pretension of the idea. In such cases, we can begin the answer by saying, ‘*To me* it is important because...’ That is, as respondents, we can nurture the dialogic stance and avoid the debater.

Re-admiring

- *Looking again at what you believe you know, at what seems to be a truth for you and for others who think similarly.*

This practice helps us to identify and rethink our beliefs and the behaviours which result from them. And by doing it with other people, it helps us gain new insights from the encounter of different world views.

Once some feeling is triggered in the face of some situation (something we hear, for example), there are two steps for the realisation of the re-admiring:

1. **Finding our beliefs**

The first step is the identification of our most fundamental beliefs, those that are so obvious that they become invisible to our consciousness, although they strongly ori-

entate our life. To find these beliefs, we use emotions and feelings as indicators that something important to us is at stake, being reaffirmed or challenged in some way.

Once we have an understanding of what we are feeling, we can apply the *succession of 'Whys'*, an exercise that will help us in self-understanding. The first 'why' may be linked to the feeling: why am I feeling this way about the situation which is happening/has happened to me? The subsequent 'whys' will be directly linked to the possible causes of the feelings.

For example, imagine the boss of a small company who is used to angrily shouting orders to his employees. Faced with this situation, we could use the first 'why': why are you feeling angry? Possible answer: Because they do not do the job as *I need* it to be done. Why do you yell at your employees? Because *I need* to achieve results. And why does shouting make them help you achieve results? Because *it's the only way* to make them listen to me. Why? Because they must have learned it that way/because they are lazy... .

Here, two beliefs become clear, which are usually accompanied by words or expressions, such as 'I/We need', 'it is necessary', 'we should/shouldn't', 'this is the only way', 'it is fundamental', among others. The first belief is the need for results, to do a good job and keep the job. This makes sense. After all, without results, work fails. The second is that his employees only listen to him when he shouts. And finally, the classic behaviour of always putting the blame on the other, denying his responsibility in the process of inter-comprehension.

The proposal here is to ask yourself 'why' until you arrive at a very taxing, fundamental answer. The one that seems to be the last possible answer. That 'because yes, that's the way it is or should be'. Generally, these answers have the key words that we have pointed out. If you can get to them, you will be very close to identifying the beliefs that guide you.

2. Re-admiring our beliefs

By identifying the beliefs through the 'whys', that boss could move on to the second set of questions: Is shouting really the only way for employees to get the job done? Is there really no other way? Who did I learn this from and why does this idea make sense? What are the outcomes (desired and undesired) that I get from the actions I take? In other words, apart from making them work, are there other consequences of my behaviour that will not help achieve my goals?

It is also worth mentioning that the two steps of re-admiration can feed back on each other. When we find the belief (step 1), we can initiate its re-admiration (step

2) and, in doing so, we will most likely find other beliefs (step 1) connected to that first one, which can be re-admired (step 2).

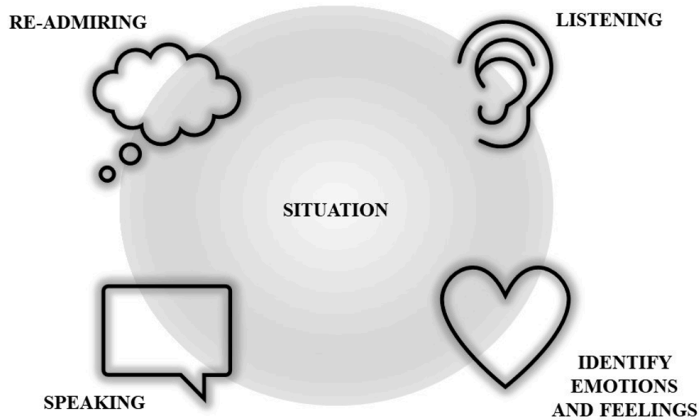
Another relevant point that we must consider in the practice of re-admiring is the need to face the *dialogical discomfort* that arises by questioning and possibly shaking our most important beliefs. If we decide to face this discomfort, we will be able to dive into the depth of the dialogical exercise. If we do not face it, we remain in the comfort of the surface and dialogue is incipient. It has its value, but it is incipient.

However, when we manage to overcome this discomfort of re-admiring, we begin to have a greater understanding of our beliefs, which brings us two benefits in terms of dialogue: 1) we manage to share more clearly with others what makes sense to us, based on our life experiences; and 2) we manage to perceive whether our actions to concretise these beliefs are coherent or incoherent. In other words, we exercise the search for critical and coherent thinking, as suggested by Freire (1981) and Bohm (2005; 2007), respectively.

The interlacing of practices

How do these practices intertwine? We suggest three possible paths. They all start with a *situation*, something that happens to us. It can be someone's speech, the observation of someone else's behaviour, a song, a memory, among other things.

Immersed in this situation, the first path begins with the practice of *listening* (which may be accompanied by the other senses: sight, touch, taste, and smell). From there, we are emotionally affected, enabling us to *identify our emotional reactions and feelings*. Next, we can share what we are feeling through *speaking* and then begin the practice of *re-admiring* (see Figure 1). In possession of our findings, we can *speak* again to others about what we have found, noticing how our feelings are maintained or transformed, just as we can listen to others' re-admirings and feelings. And so the process continues indefinitely until the moment we decide to end the dialogue.

Figure 1 – Possible links between the four dialogical practices

Source: own.

The second path has the order of the last two practices reversed. We start by *listening*, we move on to *identifying our emotional reactions and feelings*, we *re-admire* our beliefs, and then we *speak* what we find. And so, in the same way as the previous path, the process continues until we decide to end the dialogic moment.

The third path would start by *speaking*, so that we could ask, motivated by curiosity, how the other thinks about a certain subject, which would lead us to *listen*, *identify emotions and feelings*, and *re-admire*. A multiplicity of possible ways exists to start the exercise of the four practices; thus, we mention only a few here.

Looking at the practices, we can exercise them at two different but complementary moments.

‘Being with’ and ‘being alone’: alternating moments

When we begin the process of learning dialogue, it is possible to identify two moments that interchange: ‘being with’ and ‘being alone’. The moment of ‘being with’ is when there is a physical or virtual encounter with other people to establish the dialogue of the I with the other, in which we build bonds of trust by exercising the four practices of dialogue.

How many others should one ‘be with’? If the exercise of the practices aims at the *transformation of the I*, the number of people involved is of little importance. One can be with one, two, three, five, ten, or more people. It is the encounter with them that will allow the I to re-admire its beliefs and behaviours, identifying the existing inconsistencies.

On the other hand, if the exercise of the practices aims at collective transformation, the *transformation of the We*, the number of people starts to have some relevance. The more people engaged in the exercise of dialogue, the greater the chances of re-admiring collective incoherence, reorienting the course of action undertaken. However, there is a limit of people for which the adequate exercise of the practices is possible. Bohm (2005) suggests a maximum number of forty people. Thus, to encompass the totality of society, we should hold several groups concurrently, constituting dialogical communities and promoting the transit of participants between them.

It is also worth mentioning that for Bohm (2005), there is an ideal lower limit for the emergence of the *transformation of the We*, set at twenty people, since in such a scenario the creation of a cultural microcosm is stimulated, in which it is possible to recognise the collective incoherences and thus seek to re-signify them. In other words, such a quantity seems to be a way of guaranteeing the meeting of the various visions present in society. Nevertheless, the author states that in smaller numbers of people, the emergence of dialogue is also possible, although more challenging.

In this sense, we sustain that for the methodological proposal suggested here, a number below twenty people does not configure a problem. A group of seven, ten, or fifteen people can also achieve the *transformation of the We*, even if the diversity is reduced. Moreover, taking into account the current scenario of social polarisation present in many countries, especially in Brazil, where populism, Manichean discourse and the algorithms of social networks sharpen the anti-dialogicity, the idea that dialogue groups are formed by similar people, who have ‘little’ difference in their views related to basic values, seems more plausible to us, at least momentarily. The task of challenging such homogeneity falls to the facilitator, bringing the perspective of the different to the meeting. This constant exercise will allow the confrontation of polarisation, stimulating the openness and willingness of participants to connect with what is different. In other words, the conditions for the *transformation of the We* are nurtured.

It is worth emphasising that both the perspective of *transformation of the I* and the perspective of *transformation of the We* are relevant to the dialogical process, being concomitant processes that feed each other. We could even say that they are inseparable processes, since we are beings of the relationship (Buber 1979; 2014) and, therefore, there is no I alone, self-sufficient.

Where do we meet, both for the *transformation of the I and the We*? We can meet physically or virtually. In the physical environment, it is important to recognise some important characteristics to be taken into account for the emergence of dialogue, such as good acoustics and low distraction, as Isaacs (1999) suggests. Furthermore, being in an environment in which people feel safe and comfortable may facilitate the exposure of what they really think. Another important aspect, pointed out by Bohm (2005), Isaacs (1999) and Freire (1981), is the arrangement of people in a circle, the geometric arrangement that does not encourage physical hierarchisation of people, that is, does not put any individual in a prominent position and allows everyone to see each other. About this, we maintain that there are other possible geometric arrangements that do not seem to offer great resistance to the emergence of dialogue, such as a semi-circle, a rhombus, a square, or even a triangle, as long as it is possible for all people to see each other easily.

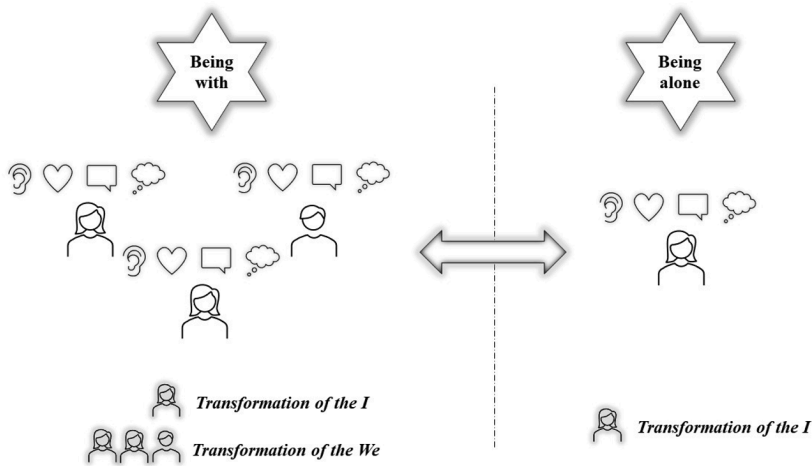
In the virtual environment, a good internet connection is crucial for the viability of the conversation. Low distraction is also necessary and quite challenging, since the notifications of programs and apps can easily steal attention. Virtuality can bring in itself a sense of security, as people are physically in familiar environments in which they feel protected (Monteiro et al. 2020). Circular layout is not possible here, so it is important that all people are able to see each other on the screen at the same time.

How often do we meet? When dealing with the *transformation of the I*, the encounters can be spontaneous, as when we meet with someone different without having anticipated it, or planned, as when we make an appointment to be together. In the *transformation of the We*, however, because it takes place in the context of a group that meets intentionally to dialogue, the meetings are planned so that their constancy is something important to stimulate the construction of affective bonds and ties of trust. Bohm (2005) suggests a weekly or fortnightly frequency to meet this objective. With this consideration, we support the idea that a more intense regularity, such as two meetings a week, or less intense, such as monthly meetings, may also be able to foster the construction of interpersonal bonds, deepening the coexistence between the people involved.

In parallel, at the end of such moments of encounters with the other, it is possible to experience the moment of 'being alone', in which there is no physical presence of another person. But how to dialogue alone? How can I re-admire my certainties if there is no other, different from me, who helps me? Here occurs the dialogue of the I with the other who dwells in me in the virtuality of thought. By recalling moments of memory about past encounters with the other, the I can carry out the exercise of identifying emotions and feelings and of re-admiration, also trying to put itself in the place of the other, in a kind of game in which it alternates roles.

The moments ‘being with’ and ‘being alone’ alternate and intertwine throughout the dialogical journey of the I and the We (see Figure 2). Hence the permanence and constancy of the learning process of dialogue that can be used in various moments of daily life, triggering different types of encounters, which we present below.

Figure 2 – ‘Being with’ and ‘being alone’



Source: own.

The dynamics of the encounters: possible outcomes of the Reflexive Dialogue Cycle

By deepening the practice and experience of dialogue, it is possible to exercise it within our communities (family, religious, work, etc.) or outside them, with people from other communities who have different customs, values, and ideas.

For an encounter to stimulate dialogue, we have already pointed out the importance of its taking place with a person who thinks differently. But how different should this person be? This question is relevant because, generally, when we talk about dialogue with people and indicate the need for such an encounter, we notice that they

usually think of a person diametrically opposed to themselves. That is, a person who thinks and lives in a totally antagonistic way, as Freire (1981) would say.

In doing so, people already assume the impossibility of dialogue or, for those who do not give up so soon, feel the discomfort of imagining themselves trying to dialogue and failing. We do not deny that such an encounter is very infertile ground for the emergence of dialogue. The encounter with people who, besides thinking very differently than we do, do not open themselves up to dialogue becomes unfeasible.

However, this is a possible representation of the difference, but not the only one. There is the different who is not so different, the one with whom we share something in common that can be an idea or an affection, as in the case of a family member, a childhood friend, or a work colleague.

Such a spectrum of difference can give rise to two types of encounters when we are spatially or virtually present in the same environment: *encounter without dialogical reciprocity* and *encounter with dialogical reciprocity*. Each of them fosters specific outcomes, as we shall see below.

Encounter without dialogical reciprocity

Here, there is a dialogical posture of the I in the encounter with other people who are even willing to talk, but with an anti-dialogical posture, closed to reflection on their own beliefs. Nevertheless, here it is possible for the I to exercise the practices of dialogue, seeking to understand why the other thinks and acts in a certain way. The courageous gesture of listening to people, for example, may stimulate them to open up to reciprocate the gesture and thus initiate a pre-dialogue. Listening in this case is configured as an act of kindness. This brings an interesting result for interpersonal coexistence, since the I does not limit the other to a category of generalising judgement (evil, prejudiced, fascist, communist, etc.). It also stimulates the learning process of identifying openness to dialogue in different daily encounters.

However, here it is only possible for the I to exercise the four practices of dialogue with the other when there is no threat to its own existence. If there is any threat, there is no possibility of exercising the practices, not even the generous gesture of listening.

Moreover, for various reasons, such an encounter may evolve in such a way that neither the I nor the other will be open and, therefore, the walls will be up. People will position themselves within their fortress of beliefs and values, preparing the weapons (communication and actions) for attack and defence. It is an encounter of struggle in which the learning of anti-dialogical values and behaviours is reinforced.

It is worth stressing that the encounter without dialogic reciprocity, in which the I is open and constantly inviting the other to enter into dialogue is important, but quite incipient in terms of dialogicity, being a previous stage to entering into encounters with reciprocity.

Encounter with dialogical reciprocity

Here, the I and the other are open to an encounter that may develop and may generate three possible outcomes, which foster different types of learning and benefits.

1. Comprehension

This result is often unrecognised or confused with that of the *encounter without dialogical reciprocity* because people confuse understanding with agreement. 'If I have spoken about what I think to the other and they have not changed their way of thinking, they have not understood me. If they had understood, they would see how obvious and true what I said is.' Here lies a trap of anti-dialogical thinking. The other may understand why a certain idea makes sense to me without, however, seeing the same sense for themselves.

Comprehension allows us *to learn about the other*, discovering aspects that we did not know about their way of thinking and acting, which promotes the dilution of judgements and stereotypes that keep us apart. As a result of this learning, a relational change arises, improving interpersonal relationships and, therefore, coexistence. In this way, the *transformation of the I* is processed by learning about the other and the *transformation of the We* by improving interpersonal relationships.

It is worth highlighting the role of conflict in this type of encounter. For this, it is necessary to mention the difference between conflict and confrontation. The first is the shock that occurs when different beliefs meet. This shock evokes emotions and feelings, from which re-admiration is possible. Thus, conflict is essential for dialogue to occur. We can see it as the fuel of the dialogic relationship. On the other hand, conflict can turn into confrontation. This occurs when the clash of different visions evokes emotions and feelings and, instead of re-admiring them, people reaffirm them, defending them as if they were in a battle.

2. Comprehension + cognitive change on the subject in dialogue

This result has one more element than the previous one. Here, learning about the other stimulates learning about oneself to the point of fostering the emergence of *insights* that provoke a change (partial or total) in the ideas and behaviours of *one* of the parties on the subject being dialogued. For example, if people are having a con-

versation about politics and there are several perspectives present, it is possible that some people will completely adopt the idea presented by someone or adopt part of such ideas, transforming their original one. Thus, in this case there is a deepening of the *transformation of the I*, when compared to the previous result, and a possible tightening of relations between people as a *transformation of the We*.

It is worth noting that changes in ideas are processed through the emergence of *insights*, as suggested by Bohm (2007). They are what allow us to perceive the inconsistencies between our intentions-actions-results. They are like 'a sudden feeling of a small awakening' (p. 38) and occur occasionally. This is interesting because it shows the non-controllability of the process.

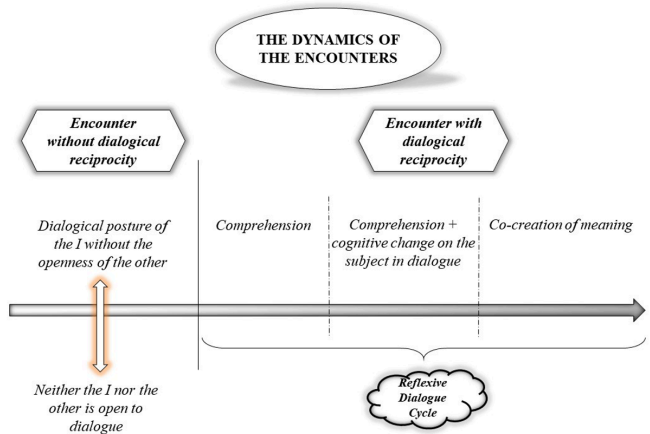
The emergence of insights is always a possibility, never a certainty or guarantee. It may happen now, it may happen tomorrow, it may happen ten years from now, or it may not happen at all.

3. Co-creation of meaning

A deeper result than the previous ones, it is characterised by the transformation of *all* the people involved and the relationships between them. The *transformation of the I and the We* occurs from the co-creation of new meanings, fruit of new understandings about the self, about the other, and about aspects of life. This collective creation is always partial because of the contingent character of truth (Bohm 2007) and the limit of people involved in the process.

In view of all of the above, it is possible to perceive a gradient of dialogic quality of the encounters between the I and the other, starting from an extremity in which dialogicity is more incipient (encounter without reciprocity), reaching an extremity in which it is deeper (encounter with reciprocity – co-creation of meanings), as illustrated by Figure 3 below. It is worth saying that such a gradient does not configure, necessarily, a temporal continuum within which the encounters may evolve. It is possible to have encounters of different qualities in the same day, for example, with different people.

Figure 3 – The dynamics of the encounters



Source: own.

It is worth highlighting, at this point in the text, that the dialogical journey taken through the constant experience of the scenarios mentioned above, promotes the development of a *dialogical sensibility*. With a better understanding of ourselves, we can better understand others. We acquire the ability to identify the opening to foster the emergence of a dialogue, pollinating it in the various spaces through which we pass.

We acquire the ability to perceive the reactions of others, especially the angry ones, not as affronts and attacks (on us or on other people), but as indicators that something very important to them is at stake. This allows us not to react automatically, entering the realm of anti-dialogicity, and to invite the people to enter into dialogue with us, once we recognise their attacks as a call for attention and a legitimate request to listen (as long as it does not threaten our existence).

Finally, we close this section affirming that as a result of the co-creation of meanings, the most profound result of the Reflexive Dialogue Cycle, there arises, in hypothesis, the desire to see them materialised, which drives people to co-create actions, starting the second great cycle.

Deliberative Dialogue Cycle

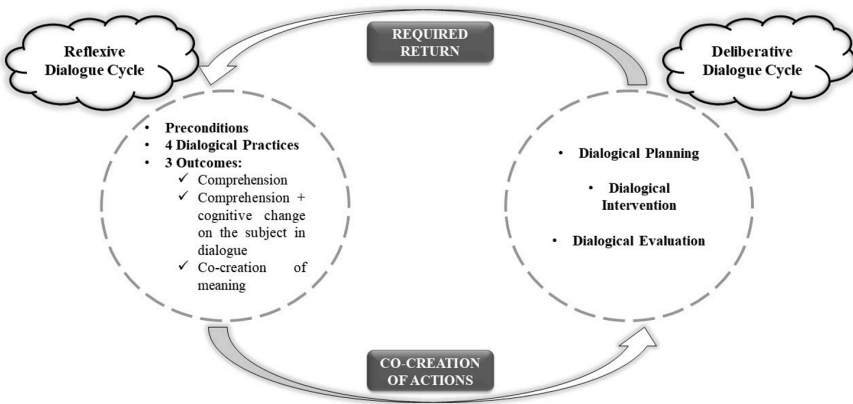
The emergence of collaborative actions initiates the Deliberative Dialogue Cycle which, unlike the previous cycle, is propositional and executive. It seeks to establish common objectives and carry out interventions to reach them.

Inspired by Freire's Theory of Dialogical Action (1981), the Oca Method of educational intervention (Oca 2016) and the precepts of Social Learning for Sustainability (Harmonicop 2005; Muro 2008; Wals et al. 2009; Wals 2011; Souza et al. 2019; Jacobi et al. 2020), we affirm that this cycle begins with a *dialogic planning* process, characterised by the construction of collective agreements and designation of responsibilities; by the mapping and diagnosis of the problems to be faced; and by the articulation with other existing initiatives, which may demand the realisation of a new Reflexive Dialogue Cycle to foster understanding among all the people involved and, thus, strengthen the Deliberative Dialogue Cycle.

Once the planning is finished, the moment arrives for the *dialogical intervention*, which can be directed to different contextual realities, different spatial scales (local, regional, global), and different levels (individual or collective). This entire process of the Deliberative Dialogue Cycle foments the learning of collaboration based on *doing things together*.

Finally, it is necessary to *dialogically evaluate* the process developed, identifying the learning, advances, and challenges found. And from there it is decided, based on the existing needs, either to continue with the Deliberative Dialogue Cycle, improving its aspects in search of the proposed objectives, or to initiate a new Reflexive Dialogue Cycle, searching to deepen the collective understanding of the new situations triggered by the results of the interventions or even to confront possible conflicts that may have emerged during the deliberative process. In this way, the *alternating movement of the cycles* is formed, which reinforce and feed each other (see Figure 4), fostering the Freirean praxis.

Figure 4 – Dialogue Cycles Alternation



Source: own.

Thus, it is possible to perceive that the methodological path proposed here is long, continuous, and permanent. It requires will and courage to re-signify. But the results are worth the effort, since they can lead us to a state of better interpersonal coexistence and social well-being, nurturing the construction of new possible worlds where recognition of the existence of others and recognition that our survival and prosperity depend on the quality of our relationships prevail.

Finally, someone might ask what actions are possible as a result of the first two outcomes (comprehension; comprehension + cognitive change on the subject in dialogue), given that we have presented the one referring to co-creation above. In these two cases, what we have in terms of action is a little different. In these cases, it is possible that, despite the understanding between people and the improvement in relationships, they still do not see any sense in the ideas of those who think differently and do not want to adopt them in their lives. Thus, the possibility of dialogic action as we proposed above is still very incipient, leaving at least three possibilities: non-negotiation, in which there is no action to be performed jointly; traditional negotiation, in which the people involved need to give up something important to them in order to gain another (Bohm 2005), with prevailing feelings of gain and loss; and dialogic negotiation, in which the feeling of loss-gain does not arise, but something approaching a gain-gain does. With the understanding of the other, fruit of the dia-

logue, we are able to understand and feel that what we give up will be for the sake of something very important to the other and, therefore, we choose to assume a welcoming posture, which is perceived and felt by the other, making a climate of co-operation emerge among us, instead of competition (as is the case of traditional negotiation). This does not mean that we stop feeling part of the frustration of giving up something that is important to us, but that it hurts less to know that we do it in the name of making coexistence better for us (the people involved).

Final considerations

In this paper, we seek to present in detail a method for learning and experiencing dialogue between people from the same community and between people from different communities, based on the ideas of David Bohm, William Isaacs, and Paulo Freire, as well as the professional and personal experiences of the first author of this paper.

Some preliminary tests have already been performed and discussed, in the Brazilian context, and can be found in Monteiro et al. (2020) and Lopes et al. (2020). Furthermore, the method is being tested with a diverse group of researchers from the environmental field in Brazil, belonging to the thematic project *Environmental Governance of the Macrometropolis of São Paulo in the Face of Climate Variability*, funded by the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP), nº 15/03804-9, as part of the first author's PhD research, under the supervision of the second and third authors.

We recognise that there is still a long way to go to verify the efficiency of the proposed method, and that numerous research and experience reports are needed based on its application. We therefore invite academics, facilitators, and dialogue practitioners who work with communities (and in other contexts) to implement the method as a possible alternative to face the diverse challenges (social, political, economic, environmental, etc.) that confront us at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Bibliography

- Alcock, J. (2018) *Belief*: what it means to believe and why our convictions are so compelling. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books.
- Bauman, Z. (2003) *Comunidade*: a busca por segurança no mundo atual. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar.
- Basilio, A. L. (2021) 'Paulo Freire não queria ser imitado, mas reinventado'. *Carta Capital*. Disponível em: <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/educacao/paulo-freire-nao-queria-ser-imitado-mas-reinventado/> Acesso em: 4 out. 2021.
- Bohm, D. (1980) *A totalidade e a ordem implicada*. São Paulo: Cultrix.
- Bohm, D. (2005) *Diálogo*: comunicação e redes de convivência. São Paulo: Palas Athena.
- Bohm, D. (2007) *O pensamento como um sistema*. São Paulo: Madras.
- Buber, M. (1979) *Eu e Tu*. 2ª ed. São Paulo: Cortez & Moraes.
- Buber, M. (2014) *Do diálogo e do dialógico*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- Freire, P. (1983) *Extensão ou comunicação?* 8ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.
- Freire, P. (1981) *Pedagogia do Oprimido*. 10ª ed. Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra.
- Greene, J. (2018) *Tribos morais*: A tragédia da moralidade do senso comum. Rio de Janeiro: Record.
- Gunnlaugson, O. (2014) Bohmian Dialogue: a Critical Retrospective of Bohm's Approach to Dialogue as a Practice of Collective Communication. *Journal of Dialogue Studies*, 2 (1), 25-34.
- Harmonicop. (2005) *Learning together to manage together* – improving participation in water management. University of Osnabruck: Osnabruck, Germany.
- Isaacs, W. (1999) *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*: a pioneering approach to communicating in business and in life. New York: Doubleday.
- Jacobi, P. R. (2013) Aprendizagem social e a formação de professores em educação para a sustentabilidade socioambiental. *Geologia USP*, Publicação especial, São Paulo, 6, 5-10.
- Jacobi, P. R., Monteiro, R. A. A., Souza, D. T. P. (2020) Caminhos para um novaética em tempos pós COVID-19: o desafio de ampliar diálogos e fortalecer aprendizagem social, in Sobrinho, L. L. P., Calgáro, C., Rocha, L. S. (Org.) *COVID-19: direitos humanos e educação*. Itajaí: UNIVALI.
- Kahneman, D. (2012) *Rápido e Devagar*: duas formas de pensar. Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva.

- Lopes, T. C., Sant'Ana, B. C. C., Cardoso, L. G., Rodrigues, M. S., Almeida, M. M., Cardoso, R. S., Ribeiro, V. V., Saracho, Y. D., Monteiro, R. A. A. (2020) COVID-19 e questões estruturais: a transformação por meio do diálogo e da colaboração. *Revista Brasileira de Educação Ambiental*, 15 (4), 440-455.
- Mariotti, H. (n.d.) *O automatismo concordo-discordo e as armadilhas do reducionismo*. Available at: <http://escoladedialogo.com.br/escoladedialogo/index.php/biblioteca/artigos/concdisc/> (Accessed 15 December 2020).
- McCoy, J., Rahman, T., Somer, M. (2018) Polarization and the Global Crisis of Democracy: Common Patterns, Dynamics, and Pernicious Consequences for Democratic Politics, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62 (1), 16-42.
- McCoy, J., Somer, M. (2019) Toward a Theory of Pernicious Polarization and How It Harms Democracies: Comparative Evidence and Possible Remedies, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 681 (1), 234-271.
- Monteiro, R. A. A. (2018) O diálogo em processos de educação ambiental: análise das relações existentes entre uma ONG e pescadores artesanais marítimos do litoral paulista. Dissertação (Mestrado em Ciência Ambiental) – Universidade de São Paulo.
- Monteiro, R. A. A. (2020) Dialogue Practices for Times of Isolation and Crisis.
- Monteiro, R. A. A., Jacobi, P. R. (2020) Diálogo: uma jornada de aprendizagem e polinização para educadoras(es), in Lamim-Guedes, V. (Org.). *A educação na Covid-19: a voz docente*. 1ed. São Paulo: Editora Na Raiz, 14-24.
- Monteiro, R. A. A., Toledo, R. F., Jacobi, P. R. (2020) Virtual Dialogues: A Method to Deal with Polarisation in a Time of Social Isolation Caused by COVID-19, *Journal of Dialogue Studies*, 8, 113-133.
- Monteiro, R. A. A., Ribeiro, V. V. (2020) Diálogo e formação de jovens ambientalistas: uma experiência do Coletivo Jovem Albatroz in Monteiro, R. A. A., Sorrentino, M., Jacobi, P. R. (Orgs.). *Diálogo e Transição Educadora para Sociedades Sustentáveis*. São Paulo: IEE-USP : Editora Na Raiz.
- Monteiro, R. A. A., Sorrentino, M. (2020) Educação Ambiental Dialógica: uma proposta a partir de Martin Buber, David Bohm, William Isaacs e Paulo Freire, in Monteiro, R. A. A., Sorrentino, M., Jacobi, P. R. (Orgs.). *Diálogo e Transição Educadora para Sociedades Sustentáveis*. São Paulo: IEE-USP : Editora Na Raiz.
- Monteiro, R. A. A., Sorrentino, M. (2019) O Diálogo na Educação Ambiental: uma Síntese A Partir de Martin Buber, David Bohm, William Isaacs e Paulo Freire, *Pesquisa em Educação Ambiental*, São Carlos-SP/Rio Claro-SP/ Ribeirão Preto-SP, 14 (1), 10-31.

- Muro, M. (2008) The role of social learning in participatory planning & management on water resoucers. PhD Thesis. Cranfield University.
- Oca. (2016) O “Método Oca” de Educação Ambiental: fundamentos e estrutura incremental, *AMBIENTE & EDUCAÇÃO*, 21 (1), 75-93.
- Portugal, S., Sorrentino, M. (2020) Método Oca: diálogo como princípio na formação de educadoras e educadores ambientais, in Monteiro, R. A. A., Sorrentino, M., Jacobi, P. R. (Orgs.). *Diálogo e Transição Educadora para Sociedades Sustentáveis*. São Paulo: IEE-USP : Editora Na Raiz.
- Rosenberg, M. (2006) *Comunicação não-violenta: técnicas para aprimorar relacionamentos pessoais e profissionais*. São Paulo: Ágora.
- Souza, D. T. P., Jacobi, P. R., Wals, A. E. J. (2020) A aprendizagem social como prática dialógica: o caso da recuperação socioambiental do Arroio Taquara, em Porto Alegre, in Monteiro, R. A. A., Sorrentino, M., Jacobi, P. R. (Orgs.). *Diálogo e Transição Educadora para Sociedades Sustentáveis*. São Paulo: IEE-USP : Editora Na Raiz.
- Souza, D. T., Wals, A. E. J., Jacobi, P. R. (2019) Learning-based transformations towards sustainability: a relational approach based on Humberto Maturana and Paulo Freire, *Environmental Education Research*, 25 (11), 1605-1619.
- Wals, A. E. J., Hoeven, N., Blanken, H. (2009) *The acoustics of social learning: Design learning processes that contribute to a more sustainable world*. Wageningen Academic Publishers, The Netherlands.
- Wals, A. E. J. (2011) Learning Our Way to Sustainability. *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development*, 5(2), 177-186.

Dialogue: A Promising Vehicle to Steer Transformative Local Change towards More Sustainable Communities?

Nora Ratzmann, Anna Hüncke, and Julia Plessing¹

Abstract: This paper engages in a reflection on how, and under what conditions, dialogue can contribute to local transformative change towards climate neutrality, based on the case of the German city of Marburg which has engaged in a collaborative governance process to steer climate mitigation since 2019. The research findings are drawn from the work of the 2020-created Franco-German Forum for the Future. The project seeks to increase dialogue among states, citizens, and the economy to foster learning, mutual understanding and ultimately collaboration for an inclusive socio-ecological transition. Hence, dialogue plays a central role in both objectives and the methodology in our work with the city of Marburg, based on a collaborative action-research approach. Central to the Forum's approach are different forms of tailored dialogic engagements, including reflection sessions with our research partners, interviews and theme-based peer-to-peer dialogues between various local initiatives to create space for experience-sharing and knowledge

¹ Nora Ratzmann is Research Associate at the “French-German Forum for the Future”, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS). Her work focuses on socio-economic and ecological transition, migration politics, social protection and policy implementation. Nora completed her Ph.D at the Department for Social Policy, London School of Economics. Previously, she held research positions at the think tank RAND Europe, UNESCO, and the Expert Council of German Foundations for Migration and Integration.

Anna Hüncke is a Research Associate with a focus on fieldwork and action research at the French- German Forum for the Future. She studied African Studies at the University of Leiden (Research Master) and International and Cultural Business Studies with a regional focus on Southeast Asia at the University of Passau (BA). She has submitted a Ph.D dissertation in anthropology at the University of Konstanz. Her research interests include migration, border studies, crisis resilience, socio-ecological transition, human rights, grassroots. She has conducted extensive empirical research in Southern Africa. Prior to joining the Forum, she worked in the educational sector and in development cooperation.

Julia Plessing is Project Lead for Research at the French-German Forum for the Future, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS). She studied International Relations at the University of Sussex (BA, Hons) and the University of Amsterdam (MA, Hons). She holds a Ph.D in Political Science from the University of Johannesburg. Her research interests include democracy and the role of media, citizen participation in unequal contexts and post-colonial views on North-South relations. Previously, Julia held positions with various NGOs counter-acting discrimination and far-right extremism, with GIZ (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) in South Africa and as an independent research consultant.

transfer. In this paper, we show how dialogue can create space for self-reflection among stakeholders to recognise some of the structural barriers of designing and implementing local climate policy. Findings offer insights into how multi-stakeholder exchanges can ease conflict in working relationships, by making divergent role understandings and institutional constraints more explicit. We also reflect on the framework conditions dialogue requires to enable collaborative implementation of local policies.

Keywords: Dialogic spaces, Collaborative governance, Climate mitigation, Societal transformation

Introduction

Our societies today are facing ‘wicked’ problems such as climate change, pandemics and rising social and economic inequality. These problems can only be solved by massive collaborative and co-creative efforts of governments, citizens, economic actors, and knowledge institutions (Mazzucato 2021; Roberts 2004). Yet, so far, collaboration has been stifled by traditional forms of knowledge creation, a culture of thinking in ‘silos’ of the respective sectors, and a lack of dialogue. Secondly, socio-ecological transformation does not happen in board rooms at the national level (alone). Local territories, cities, and rural areas are at the forefront of social change. Local municipalities and their citizens experience the consequences of these wicked problems, such as local flooding or healthcare challenges in times of Covid-19. They are also key actors in leading social transformation.

The Franco-German Forum for the Future (the Forum hereafter), which the research findings this article reflects upon are drawn from, seeks to address some of the problems above and to catalyse just ecological and social transitions ‘around a bottom-up approach focusing on local/regional initiatives’ (Article 22, of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle), to then transmit the learnings from the ground to national policymakers. One of the centrepieces of the Forum’s approach is transformative research. Transformative research seeks to generate new ways of thinking and doing from the bottom up. The approach adopted to generate insights into what works in practice focuses on collaborative efforts with civil society and local governments as research partners.

This article serves as a moment of reflection on the transformative research agenda’s potential to strengthen local governance processes towards socio-ecological transition, with a specific focus on our collaborative action-research partnership with the city of Marburg. Marburg was one of the first cities in Germany to declare a ‘climate emergency’ in 2019 and has developed, with the participation of its citizenry, a local climate action plan. Therefore, the small university city in Western Germany, not far from Frankfurt/Main, can be considered an interesting case study of climate-policy

activism to achieve climate neutrality by 2030. Our project has engaged with the city of Marburg since December 2020 in terms of both collaborative action research and curated peer-to-peer dialogues (see Methodology for details).

The paper illustrates how, and under what conditions, dialogue can support transformative change towards local climate neutrality. To do so, the first part introduces the conceptual discussions around participation, power, and dialogue. The second part spells out more explicitly the collaborative action research methodology of the Forum, which also formed the basis for data collection and analysis for this article. The third part focuses on an analysis of existing dialogic spaces in Marburg. We show how the government-citizen dialogue has been both impactful and extremely challenging thus far, and explore the underlying reasons, of how initial dialogic engagements created enormous expectations that could not be followed up by local government. This led to a sense of voicelessness and disengagement among civil society actors. The final part analyses how creating dialogic space, as part of our work, can harness potential to overcome some of the described shortcomings, allowing stakeholders in Marburg to step out of their own bubble.

Considering that research on dialogue to date has mostly focused on the realm of education, such as classroom interactions (see Lambirth 2015), the findings on dialogue presented here widen the scope to scholarship on dialogue in public administration and governance. Our research speaks to the underexplored link between authentic dialogue and functional collaborative governance models in steering social transformation at local level.

Conceptual backdrop: participation, power, and the role of dialogue

A growing body of literature focuses on how participatory and collaborative modes of governance can improve environmental outcomes of public decision-making. Outcomes are likely to be more innovative and sustainable, if they are based on broader support of citizens and the private sector (Lindner et al. 2021; Mazzucato 2021). Innovation commonly happens through a change of perspective, which may spark new ways of thinking (Newig et al. 2018, 270). Interactions with actors outside one's own network can facilitate such a process (Hawkins et al. 2018). The former provides stakeholders, defined as people or institutions with shared interests in solving a problem (Künkel et al. 2019), with external sources and extensive knowledge, thereby alleviating resource dependency and transaction costs.

However, critical observers have noted that there still exists a gap 'between normative positions promoting citizen engagement and the empirical evidence and understanding of what difference citizen engagement makes (or not) to achieving stated

goals' (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010, 9). Similarly, other research has found that institutionalised participatory spaces could be experienced by citizens as silencing, where their voices were recorded, but 'not forming or impacting the foundation upon which the vision for the future was built' (Vainio 2020, 11). Thus, structured participation in local policymaking and implementation can lead to a sense of voicelessness among civil society members when political commitment to involvement and co-creation is not followed up by action (Bianchi et al. 2021; Cornwall 2008; Lima 2020; Rowe et al. 2005, Quick 2021). Schultz et al. (2008, 684) noted in this regard that 'dialogues may become a hollow pretext for inclusion and participants might feel hijacked and manipulated unless they feel there have been genuine attempts of inclusive process and to challenging governance and power relations'. One of the standing explanations for this potentially silencing effect of deliberative or participatory spaces is that they are embedded in a policymaking process which is characterised by unequal power relations (Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Brady, 1999; Mansbridge 1986). As we will show in section three of this article, the respective context of power circumscribes the possibilities of deliberation of actors within those spaces. Thus, even those regarded as the more powerful, such as municipal officials, are constrained by the institutional set-up, competencies and mandates they have or may not have. As such, government officials can be described as people 'through whom power is passed or who are important in the fields of power relations' (Foucault and Rabinow, 1984, 247). Yet, they do not always hold the presumed power within that specific participatory space, that is frequently ascribed to them by civil society.

That is why the Forum is interested in the concrete experiences of participatory and collaborative practices and the challenges encountered by both, municipal and civil society actors. It gathers perspectives from the field, supporting processes of reflection of actors' respective positions, of double loop learning, of revising decisions in light of new experience, and identifying hindering and facilitating factors for social innovation and ecological transition across local initiatives.

Central to the Forum's approach, from which the research findings presented here are drawn, is dialogic engagement with our research partners, considering the two facets of dialogue commonly discussed in the literature (see Escobar 2009): (i) dialogue as a form of collaborative, non-polarised discourse, that focuses on social learning, through unpacking assumptions, fostering of deep inquiry and inclusion of different perspectives, (ii) as a relational and safe space, which allows stakeholders to develop a common ground for action. The approach builds on the assumption that such dialogic engagement fosters the development of communities of mutual learning and practice, defined as groups of actors who share a common concern, and de-

velop a shared repertoire of resources, or tools to address a problem through joint activities, information sharing and regular discussion (Wenger 1998).

As such, dialogue allows for exploring alternative problem framings and discussing experiences, values, and worldviews underlying different perspectives (Garard et al. 2018) to create a common ground for action (McCoy and Sully 2002). In that sense, dialogue has the potential to improve policy implementation, as the latter often remains challenged by inadequate representation of diverse perspectives, entrenched conflicts among stakeholders, a lack of legitimacy of decisions, or technically and politically unworkable outcomes (Quick 2021), when implicit assumptions of action are not rendered transparent. As noted by Innes and Booher (2003, 41) ‘failure to recognize and explore interdependence’ of stakeholders can be ‘a central obstacle to collaboration’, as the former constitutes ‘the glue for their continuing work’ (ibid, 42). We consider dialogue a mediating force in this context. Dialogue is conceptualised herein as ‘an open-ended conversation in which participants strive to understand their experiences, languages, and ways of thinking or arguing’ (Escobar 2009, 61). All in all, dialogue can be seen as a catalyst to engage in social learning processes, especially on complex and disputed issues such as environmental governance, where best policy solutions are not obvious. As Jager et al. (2019) argued, environmental governance outcomes are mediated by social learning processes within networks, as a form of capacity-building.

How, and under what conditions, the dialogic method can enhance mutually beneficial exchange between stakeholders of different sectors involved in local climate action is the subject of our analysis. We show how dialogue, if curated, can be central to local climate governance by bringing actors together, and by bridging conflicts of interest through transparency and trust between all parties involved. As a safe place for interaction, genuine dialogue can be seen as a pre-condition for collaborative policy development and implementation to emerge.

Our approach follows the premise that dialogic spaces are opened and driven by creative tension between different viewpoints and perspectives. Dialogue enables ‘possibility thinking’ (see Wegerif 2007) and problem structuring (Schultz et al. 2018) when conducted under certain framework conditions. Space here can be understood not only as a physical space of encounter, but also as the freedom and flexibility in how processes are conducted (see Rabadjieva and Terstriep 2021). Our methodological approach of collaborative action research, including the peer dialogues, thus follows the idea Wegerif (2013) described in his work on dialogic spaces, which serve to (i) *open*, or to enable shared spaces of exchange, to *widen*, or to bring in new voices with multiple perspectives, and *deepen*, thus to invite shared reflection and to challenge participants’ assumptions.

Methodology

The findings presented here are drawn from the collaborative action research of the Forum, which, given its mandate, follows an explicitly normative and interventionist agenda (cf. Fazey 2018; Meisch 2020). The project design is based on three pillars of action. Firstly, through collaborative action research with selected local initiatives, it seeks to find inspirational examples of co-creation and collaboration at the local level to address pressing ecological and social problems. It thus learns from already existing examples or ‘real laboratories of social innovation’ about enabling and hindering factors in practice. Secondly, through curated, tailored, and theme-based peer-to-peer dialogues between French and German local initiatives it seeks to create space for experience sharing, inspiration, and knowledge transfer between regions and countries. Thirdly, in a so-called ‘French-German Resonance Room’ the Forum seeks to bring the analysis, inspiration, and lessons learned of the local level to the attention of a mix of local and national level experts and policy makers, such that they can, informed and inspired by local-level experience, formulate recommendations for national decision makers.

The Forum’s collaborative action-research approach allows for the development of research questions together with local partners and for mirroring and jointly discussing research findings in regular meetings. We also developed, in collaboration with the city, a study on the challenges and opportunities of climate governance in Marburg which subsequently has been discussed widely with stakeholders in the city ranging from the mayor, politicians, and members of civil society.

Dialogue, as practice and an opportunity to learn from, is embedded in the Forum’s methodology in a three-fold manner: 1) in the form of reflection sessions as part of the collaborative action-research process; 2) in the form of the curated peer-to-peer dialogues; and 3) in the form of catalysing dialogue at national level on local solutions, and challenges. The empirical data we collected in this first phase of the project relies on the first two areas of intervention. It lends itself to an analysis of how dialogue, as a method to create safe space for exchange, can foster cross-sector collaboration between local authorities and civil society to enhance local climate action.

Within this framework our empirical data collection also relied on classic qualitative and ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and informal conversations from field research on site and partly digitally, semi-structured interviews, expert interviews, review of published primary sources (e.g., press articles, minutes and reports of the city of Marburg, position papers of civil society voices, practical examples from other German and French municipalities, and legal documents) and secondary literature (peer-reviewed and grey literature), as well as collaborative

methods of action research. A full-time field researcher has been dedicated to the process as well as a part-time local coordinator, who is embedded in the social fabric of Marburg city and acts as connector to local actors.

The findings of this article are based on 29 stakeholder interviews with representatives of local politics, public administration, especially those developing policies on climate action and citizen participation, and civil society from a diversity of climate protection initiatives based in Marburg and its surroundings (ranging from local mobility-sharing projects to national advocacy work on zero emissions), and 12 collaborative digital (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) and on-site working sessions between the Forum and Marburg's local government responsible for the local climate action plan. We selected them based on their expertise, primarily following a snowball sampling approach. For the voices presented here, we aimed at maintaining a balance between municipal staff and civil society, taking into account the diversity of voices within civil society itself. Considering the focus of our study, we did not include interviews with local economic actors.

We also analysed material from participation in a moderation training hosted by the Forum, which came about because local actors in Marburg (civil society, public administration, local political actors) expressed interest in learning about innovative forms of facilitating dialogic exchanges within a multi-stakeholder setting. Additionally, the transcript of three curated peer dialogues with other initiatives, aiming at introducing new ways of thinking from comparable local contexts, were analysed: two peer dialogues with municipal and civil society representatives from the city of Konstanz in Southern Germany, as well as the cities of Erlangen and Lindau, and one dialogue with the French city of La Rochelle. Such two-hour sessions engaged different local initiatives with one another, based on participants' feedback during preliminary interviews on what issues they would like to focus on in the exchanges.

We consider collaborative action methods as particularly adapted to understanding complex policy problems and to developing practical solutions together with local actors (Renn 2021). Indeed, the newly formed government of Marburg took up many of the outcomes of our joint reflection sessions and embedded them in their coalition agreement, published in November 2021. However, as with any involved research, our transformative approach comes with methodological challenges of keeping a necessary analytical distance (Gürtler and Rivera 2019). Our mixing of roles as actively engaged sparring partners and distanced researchers can create both confusion and unrealistic expectations among research participants and called for a continuous re-negotiating and clarifying of our position in the field. For instance, a member of the local government perceived the Forum as responsible for evaluation and accompanying research of the climate action plan and exchange formats with

climate activists, which we did not conceive as part of our mandate. We constantly saw ourselves confronted with the limitations of our role, regarding questions around how much activism our action research should entail (also see Fazey 2018).

A further challenge was constituted by the fact that most formats of intervention happened online due to the unfolding COVID pandemic. This proved to be a challenge on the research side, as it was difficult to establish trust and a collaborative working relationship and it proved harder to recruit research participants. Virtual onboarding of initiatives led to longer time-lags and some potential blind spots regarding the diversity of stakeholders to consider. However, online formats offered interesting opportunities, especially for the peer-to-peer dialogues. As time investments proved to be lower and geography no limit to participation, a bigger variety of actors was enabled to participate. The reliance of technological tools such as breakout sessions also allowed for more intimate and in-depth formats for dialogue than plenary sessions. A mix of formats, between small- and large-group discussions, allowed more participants to speak (also see Garard et al. 2018).

Government-citizen dialogue in Marburg: Lessons from the ground

This part of the paper delves into our local case study, illustrating the structural barriers and enablers of dialogic engagement, including a reflection on some of the conditions needed for genuine exchange and collaboration to happen. Less explored in public administration scholarship, our findings reveal how authentic dialogue on a level playing field can be considered key in making collaborative governance models work, as it can, for instance, reduce coordination problems and communication deadlocks.

Dialogue, as instrument to foster cross-sectorial collaboration on local climate mitigation, has been at the heart of Marburg's project since its outset. The development and implementation of local climate policies have been characterised by strong 'bottom-up' civil society activism, on the one hand, and a subsequent political commitment from the top to reach climate neutrality by 2030, and in collaboration with civil society, on the other. This stands in contrast to other German municipalities which mandated research institutes to develop policy initiatives and to support them in their implementation.

Nevertheless, despite firm commitment by all stakeholders, Marburg's government-citizen dialogue has been challenging thus far. Aspirations of inclusiveness and intentional collaboration did not always transpire into practice. As we explore in the following, (i) formal spaces of participation curated by the municipal administration

aggravated conflict and expectations rather than promoting collaboration; and (ii) such conflict was harnessed by the institutional framework in which dialogic processes were embedded. It was therefore not, as is commonly presumed by actors in the field, a conflict of interest between civil society and administration. In many ways we found that civil society, politicians and administrative staff shared similar goals. Yet, conflict was triggered by procedural and structural factors. Synergies of interest did not transform into productive formalised working relationships so far. How can this be explained?

First, Marburg's local climate policy could be characterised by a 'strong coalition of the willing' which committed to collaborative governance to reach local climate neutrality by 2030, repeatedly expressed by all sides. As a Marburg-based participant highlighted in a peer-to-peer dialogue we organised:

We all want climate protection. (...) We are not here to somehow slow one another down, but we want to work together.

Yet, despite their mutual commitment, joint action could not be followed through; dialogue engagement stopped after an initial phase of co-creation. In more detail, the process of declaring a state of 'climate emergency' in 2019 was initiated bottom-up by civil society, including the local Fridays for Future movement, and subsequently endorsed top-down, by the Lord Mayor and (the majority of) the city council. In the following, local administration organised several workshops with and for civil society representatives to jointly develop a local climate action plan (CAP), as an operational tool defining specific climate mitigation measures. In line with descriptions elsewhere in the literature (Yalçın and Lefèvre 2012), such a co-creative, dialogue-based approach initially mobilised civil society. The participatory workshops were perceived as 'highlights' by all parties, the mayor, administrative staff and civil society.

However, the civil society's initial 'euphoria' turned into severe disappointment when the co-creatively designed process suddenly came to a halt. While civil society representatives had compiled an overview of about 600 ideas for action following the joint workshop in late 2019, and transmitted them to the dedicated administrative unit, they felt cut off from all communication and left in the dark for the following months. Partially due to the Covid pandemic, the respective working unit shielded itself off to write up the local CAP. But this was not the only reason. Administrators felt that any further participation of civil society was 'unrealistic' due to time constraints. Interestingly, the time constraints had been imposed by civil society itself in their push for a speedy formulation of the CAP over 6 months, as part of the declaration of the climate emergency. Municipal officials did not have the administrative capacity required for long-term implementation of participatory methods (see

Emerson et al. 2012 for similar argument). This stifled the development of a structured follow-up for collaboration and exchange. Therefore, structured dialogue with the interested public on developing the CAP remained a one-off event in form of two workshops.

Nevertheless, city administrators expressed commitment to continue some form of dialogue by requesting to be part of civil society's organised gathering, the meetings of the so-called 'Klimabündnis', the local climate alliance. Monthly exchanges developed but tended to remain void of genuine exchange on a 'level playing field'. This was partially due to the fact that civil society members mainly asked questions and the city was in an answering role. The time for exchange was also limited, as administrators could only be present for the first 30 minutes of the meeting 'as guests'. This all happened in a digital format.

Due to this format of exchange, we could observe that despite mutual commitment, dialogic spaces remained conflictual and confrontational and did not allow for the development of a mutually balanced exchange. Representatives from both sides described their relations as 'competing' and 'playing against each other', while at the same time emphasising their respective will to collaborate. On the one hand, administrators felt misunderstood in terms of their respective scope of action. As a local government representative explained:

This is something that is often difficult to understand within civil society: which levels in the political system actually have what competences. Cities are often expected to do a lot of things that we unfortunately cannot necessarily regulate by law.

Administrators perceived local activists as always asking for more than they could realistically deliver 'and pointing the finger' instead of 'taking responsibility in implementing' the plan. On the other, civil society interviewees described how they felt 'not heard' and 'excluded'. They alluded to feelings of being consulted but not involved, as their ideas were not taken forward. As a result, civil society representatives perceived the local CAP as belonging 'to the municipality', rather than it being of joint ownership. The former expressed how they had lost interest in the 'city's project'.

Moreover, actors only realised over the course of our fieldwork that they may have different understandings of their roles within the policy implementation process but were not aware of their diverging views at the outset of their formal cooperation. While the municipality wanted to invite civil society to contribute at specific moments, being offered to express their views on well-delineated questions, the latter

perceived this as an ‘alibi role’ and asked for a co-constitute role instead. As one of our interviewees expressed:

The work is currently done by the city alone.... Even when events take place: It is then 2h [...] That is not enough.

Considering their divergent expectations, the observed formats of participation engendered frustrations, a loss of credibility and trust among parts of civil society, who subsequently disengaged from the process. As discussed in the first section, civil society members felt a sense of voicelessness since the expressed political commitment was not followed up by action (see Schultz et al., 2008).

But what civil society perceived as a lack of ambition could be traced back to a wide range of administrative constraints. While members of civil society saw municipal actions as being ‘characterised by wishes rather than by actual action’, and the CAP itself as ‘technical’ and ‘lacking vision’, the working unit responsible for its implementation felt ‘overburdened’ and ‘overworked’. As noted by Quick (2021), stakeholders may interpret the same events or processes differently according to their own world views and internal working logics. In Marburg, only one single administrative unit, composed of four staff and without any transversal competence, was charged with the implementation of local climate policy and the coordination of the multi-actor process. A governance structure operating in silos and vertically, each in their own specialised field, rather than a transversal steering unit, as well as a lack of mandate at the municipal level further obstructed effective process management. As one member of the local administration explained in one of the peer dialogues:

People expect so much from the cities and municipalities, which however is by law not even within our regulatory mandate.

What civil society perceived as ‘passivity’, could be traced back to lack of time, human resources and mandate on the administrators’ side. Unable to continue the exchange with external actors due to capacity constraints, municipal actors kept processes closed to ‘protect themselves from unrealistic expectations’ and to limit their already ‘unrealistic’ workload. Or, as expressed by one of the city officials: ‘We do not really want to, but we ought to do this.’ Maintaining momentum in implementing a local CAP effectively requires administrative capacities to act (see Yalçın and Lefèvre 2012).

Interestingly, however, while stakeholders seemed insufficiently equipped to create and maintain formal dialogue spaces, informal dialogue appeared to lead to functional working relations. As interviewees alluded to, local government and civil soci-

ety representatives continued to ‘meet in the street’, exchanging ideas over a ‘pint of beer’. As one interviewee vividly described:

The Marburg climate scene is super-well networked. Everyone knows one another, it’s a bit like a small village; there is a lot of overlap between the different groups of people. [...] Formal organigrams are one thing, but it is a lot about who knows how. That’s also a reality to consider.

Such informal cooperation may constitute an opportunity to harness mutual understanding. As Engels (2008) noted, less structured and rigid modes of participation allow for flexible and problem-centred interactions, which are focused on tangible results when negotiating different positions. Such informal conversations allow for room for participants to vent their frustrations about an issue, to tell personal stories that illustrate how they feel and why, which McCoy and Sully (2002) consider key in creating authentic dialogue.

In sum, we could observe how dialogic formats could become disempowering and disconnect actors if not embedded in a long-term strategy of participation within a collaborative governance structure (see Ansell and Gash 2007). While willingness and commitment did not lack, maintenance of genuine, participatory dialogue became obstructed by lack of administrative resources and skills to foster transparency and openness on processes and roles which manifested itself in perceptions of conflicting interests (also see Rabadjieva and Terstriep 2021). Structurally induced lack of resources and ultimately power, prevented actors ‘sharing information and demonstrating competency, good intentions, and follow-through’ (Chen 2010). In short, similar what McCoy and Sully (2002) noted in their research, the format of isolated events, not giving equal voice to all stakeholders involved, aggravated conflict rather than creating mutual understanding.

The role of dialogic engagement in catalysing transformative change

Considering the challenges described above, this second part reflects on the role dialogue itself can play in catalysing transformative change, helping actors to shift perspective. To do so, it engages with our research methodology applied in Marburg, which aims at creating a safe space for mutual learning and self-reflection.

Part of what our transformative research approach aimed to achieve was to overcome a methodological individualist lens, and to encourage actors to think beyond their individual motivations and actions towards a more systematic lens of what shapes their joint efforts in the policy implementation process. Here, dialogic engagement

could be seen as an opportunity to challenge implicit assumptions through our intervention as external partners. For instance, our reflection sessions with stakeholders contributed to making the described diverging perceptions of roles and responsibilities explicit. As briefly alluded to earlier, our field researchers, working with Marburg's local administration through methods of collaborative action research, engaged in continuous informal dialogue with diverse stakeholders, which could be considered as *opening dialogic spaces*. Once we established collaborative working relationships with city administrators, dialogue was *deepened* by promoting a joint reflection on different perspectives and voices (see Wegerif 2013). This included regular working sessions with the dedicated unit working on climate mitigation within the city administration as well as with local political representatives, to reflect together on our learnings from the interviews we conducted.

We mirrored our observations of the shortcomings of the city's current climate governance structure *to open dialogic spaces*, helping them to render their own implicit assumptions and biases transparent. An interesting example in this regard concerns perceptions of civil society in their role in local climate activism. While local administrators tended to refer to different climate activist groups as *one* civil society, considering the Climate Alliance as their 'representative' which can speak with one voice, interviewees from civil society repeatedly pointed out their internal divisions. They highlighted the heterogeneity in positions, between the older and '*less radical*' generation of climate activists engaged in local policymaking, and the younger activists, turning to alternative forms of protest, to 'exert political pressure on the administration and politics'. This constituted a new insight for city officials, who recognised that 'there are different ideas and proposals and views, and so on *within* the group' (italics added by authors). As noted by Newig et al. (2018, 281), intensive face-to-face dialogues can help participants to discover their different perspectives, capability, needs, and preferences.

Additionally, peer dialogues, as curated exchanges between local initiatives from different parts of Germany and France can be conceptualised as means to *widen dialogic spaces*. Focus of the curated conversations with actors of comparable local contexts were different models of collaborative climate governance connecting administrations and civil society. The dialogues built on one another: the first curated exchange brought together stakeholders from local government and civil society in Marburg and in Konstanz. It revealed diverging understandings of institutional mandates and roles but also the expressed willingness for cooperation between the different parties. The second dialogue, which brought in external actors from additional municipalities in Germany, sought to address concrete cases of collaboration between civil society and local administrations, allowing an exploration of how an enabling institutional framework of collaborative governance could look. Lastly, the

third dialogue the Forum organised brought in the view of the French city of La Rochelle, which had already created a model of collaborative governance. How can the potential impact of creating such dialogic spaces for a diverse range of perspectives and voices on strengthening collaborative climate governance be described?

A mirror perspective from outside their own setting gained during these dialogues allowed Marburg-based actors to question their ways of thinking and interacting with one another, helping them to recognise the structural dimensions of their conflictual working relationships. In other words, we noted a change in attitude among stakeholders throughout our observational fieldwork period, moving away from talking of interpersonal relations as primary source of conflict. For instance, at the end of one of our peer-to-peer dialogues between Marburg and another German city of similar size, actors reflected on the need for a transparent conflict culture where ‘we can poke at each other’ to ‘get to the critical points, and then we can also manage the work [together]’.

However, dialogue requires negotiation and facilitation skills, to mediate potential conflict and stimulate discussion and equal participation (Garard et al. 2018; Sippel and Jenssen 2009). As Innes and Booher (2003) noted, a facilitator role enables participants to feel safe and comfortable. To date, the Climate Alliance plenaries in Marburg, as one of the only existent collaborative working formats, have been described as ‘chaotic’, ‘confusing’ and ‘unstructured’, and often remained without a chair leading the session. As a result, sessions tended to take an antagonistic character, and did not allow for explicating diverging assumptions on roles and responsibilities, which, in turn, led to their conflictual understandings as ‘polar opposites’ (also see Schultz et al. 2018). While a joint implementation process of the local climate action tool can act as a tool to develop shared knowledge and mutual trust (Yalçın and Lefèvre 2012), it needs certain framework conditions. Such include clear rules, and transparency on roles and processes (Gunton 2003; Lima 2020), which, as described have been partially lacking so far.

This is something that stakeholders in Marburg became aware of and started to reflect critically during our fieldwork period, the phase of *deepening dialogic engagement*. Firstly, they started raising questions on ‘how’ to design dialogic exchanges within our peer dialogues. Here, a municipal representative pointed to the existing ‘methodological blindness’ and a ‘lack of creativity’ in formats. They identified their need to get training in methods of facilitation and moderation to strengthen their collaboration towards reaching carbon neutrality in the municipality. The Forum thus organised training on facilitation techniques (based on ideas of the ‘Art-of-Hosting’ method) with representatives from Marburg and other partners. In this context, a participant from the city’s local administration noted that through the

training ‘our awareness of lack of communication and overheard messages has increased.’ Secondly, the unit responsible for climate has begun to rethink its strategy for engaging with civil society and other stakeholders and is developing at the time of writing models, such as a citizen convention for a consistent dialogue and participation. As one of the municipal representatives stated, ‘without collaborating with you we would not have prioritised the theme of climate governance’.

In sum, we have observed that what at the outset of fieldwork appeared to be lip service turned into concrete attempts to collaborate more consistently. City administrators became outspoken on inviting civil society representations to actively participate in shaping local climate governance. In the words of a city official at a Climate Alliance plenary:

I would like to invite you to reach out to me, so we can have a lively exchange.

Subsequently, Marburg-based stakeholders started working on a new framework for exchange ‘to find a common language’ as basis for inclusive dialogues (see Innes and Booher 2004). Such common understandings, even of key notions, appeared to have been missing thus far. For instance, in interviews city administrators had tended to focus on technical, small-scale solutions to reduce CO₂ emissions, while local climate activists urged a socio-ecological transformation towards a global ‘post-fossil society’, taking a more encompassing view. City officials have now realised that it takes both technical work on the ground and continued negotiations about joint understandings of climate neutrality.

The city administration also started collaborating with citizens on specific issues rather than lamenting a lack of communication and the need to join forces in abstract terms. One example is civil society representatives’ and municipal administrators’ joint engagement in a city-wide competition to incentivise business and homeowners to install solar panels on their roofs. Their changing thinking on engaging with one another comes through in how they referred to their collaboration as ‘teamwork’ or ‘Team Marburg’. Their close collaboration impacted their overall collaborative working relations insofar as they gained trust in each other and an understanding for each other’s perspectives.

Our case study confirms other research findings (Littleton and Mercer 2013, Wegerif 2013), on how reflective dialogue can only be functional in developing a shared working culture if it leads to a mutual understanding and trust, while also raising acceptance of decisions. To do so, it requires continuity, multiple forms of engagement on concrete actionable issues, active listening and genuine, content-fo-

cused exchange (see McCoy and Sully 2002; Newig et al. 2018). In other words, verbal commitment should not be undermined by action.

Concluding reflections

Implementing local policies on complex problems, such as tackling climate change locally, requires joint learning, experimentation and reflection on how to address the different issues associated with delivering them. This is increasingly being considered a central building block of innovation-oriented policymaking (Lindner et al. 2021). Dialogue can serve as a catalyst of reflection and ease situations of perceived conflict of interest between the stakeholders involved in shaping local ecological transitions; by making divergent role understandings and institutional constraints on capacities or mandates explicit. However, collaborative dialogue, as applied to controversial public issues, and including many stakeholders with different knowledge, skills and capacities, still remains at an experimental stage (Innes and Booher 2003).

Considering its potential, this article explored when dialogue can support collaborative governance arrangements, and under what conditions it turns dysfunctional. As the Marburg example illustrated, being involved is not equivalent to having a voice (also Cornwall 2018; Marzuki 2017 et al.). Institutional power structures, mandates, resources and capabilities (or the lack thereof) can determine whether participatory dialogue allows citizens to have a voice or not. It is crucial that these structures are known and reflected, which in turn requires building long-term investment, time and resource capacities and certain soft skills, including knowledge of facilitation and conflict settlement. If these are lacking, we commonly observe a disjuncture between words and action, and a breakdown of any formal dialogic engagement.

Yet, there is no one, clear recipe for authenticity in dialogue. As Escobar (2009, 56) notes, creating space for dialogic communication ‘is an evolving craft rather than a fixed technique’. Certain framework conditions are necessary nevertheless, including equal participation, transparent roles and processes, and continuity. Our case study also pointed to the significant role of informal dialogue. Based primarily on personal connection and empathy, it can support actors in developing a mutual understanding for their roles and constraints. A multiplicity of voices, including from other localities, can further deepen such a reflective exchange, allowing for a mirror perspective on one’s own setting.

Overall, dialogue can help municipal officials to see structural commonalities between their cities and contributed to shifting their focus from ‘personalities’ to structural issues. The case of local climate governance in Marburg allows conclusions to be drawn into how dialogue, once curated and embedded into collaborative gov-

ernance structure, can enhance mutual learning within communities of practice. Over the course of our fieldwork, we not only noted changes in individual behaviour and attitudes, but also new networks and working collaborations forming – which supported institutional changes towards a new local climate governance structure. Ultimately, dialogic spaces may allow for a shared understanding of local experiences and knowledge of all involved stakeholders to emerge from the bottom-up. The latter has potential to reshape policy implementation, by impacting the ways in which policy practitioners understand their role within the institutional environment they operate in.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank both the French and German governments for funding this first cycle of the Franco-German Forum for the Future. Furthermore, special thanks go to our local initiatives, especially those actively engaged in local climate protection in the city of Marburg. We would also like to extend our recognition to our scientific director, Prof. Patrizia Nanz, and our acting director, Anne-Gaelle Javelle, without whom the whole project would not have seen the light, as well as to all those from our team who organised, in their endless efforts, the dialogues and working sessions with and in Marburg. Finally, we are grateful to the participants of the workshop organised by the Journal of Dialogue Studies for their valuable feedback in the lead-up to preparing this Special Issue.

Bibliography

- Ansell, C. and Gash, A. (2007) Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(4), 543-571.
- Arnstein, S.R. (1969) A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216-224.
- Bianchi, C.; Nasi, G. and Rivenbark, W.C. (2021) Implementing collaborative governance: models, experiences, and challenges. *Public Management Review*, 1-9.
- Chen B. (2010) Antecedents or Processes? Determinants of Perceived Effectiveness of Interorganizational Collaborations for Public Service Delivery. *International Public Management Journal*, 13, 381-407.
- Cornwall, A. (2008) Unpacking 'Participation': models, meanings and practices. *Community Development Journal*, 43(3), 269-283.
- Emerson, K.; Nabatchi, T. and Balogh, S. (2012) An Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 22 (1), 1-29.
- Engels, A. (2018) Local climate governance in a multi-level system: formal and informal forms of regulation. *Hamburg Climate Report-Knowledge on Climate, Climate Change and Impacts in Hamburg and Northern Germany*. Springer Spektrum, Berlin, Heidelberg, 265-282.
- Escobar, O. (2009) The dialogic turn: dialogue for deliberation. *InSpire Journal of Law, Politics and Societies*, 4(2), 42-70.
- Fazey, I.; Schöpke, N.; Caniglia, G.; Patterson, J.; Hultman, J. and van Mierlo, B. (2018) Ten essentials for action-oriented and second order energy transitions, transformations and climate change research. *Energy Research & Social Science* 40, 54-70.
- Foucault, M. and Rabinow, P. (1984) The Foucault Reader. An Introduction to Foucault's Thought. Penguin Books.
- Gaventa, J., and Barrett, G. (2010) So what difference does it make? Mapping the outcomes of citizen engagement. *IDS Working Papers*, 2010.347.
- Gürtler, K. and Rivera, M. (2019) New Departures-Or a Spanner in the Works? Exploring Narratives of Impact-Driven Sustainability Research. *Sustainability*, 11, 1-17.
- Hawkins, C. V., Krause, R., Feiock, R. C. and Curley, C. (2018) The administration and management of environmental sustainability initiatives: a collaborative

perspective. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 61(11), 2015–2031.

- Jager, Nicolas W., Newig, Jens, Challies, Edward and Kochskämper, Elisa (2020) Pathways to Implementation: Evidence on How Participation in Environmental Governance Impacts on Environmental Outcomes. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 30(3), 383–399.
- Innes, J. E., and Booher, D. E. (2003) Collaborative policymaking: governance through dialogue. In: Wagenaar, H.; Hajer, Maarten A., *Deliberative policy analysis: Understanding governance in the network society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 33–59.
- Innes, J. E. and Booher, D. E. (2004) Reframing public participation: strategies for the 21st century. In: *Planning Theory & Practice*, 5(4), 419–436.
- Künkel, P.; Gerlach, S. and Frieg, V. (2019) Stakeholder-Dialoge erfolgreich gestalten. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.
- Lambirth, A. (2015) Dialog Space Theory. In: The Routledge International Handbook of Philosophies and Theories of Early Childhood Education and Care. Routledge.
- Littleton, K. and Mercer, N. (2013) *Interthinking: Putting Talk to Work*, Routledge, Abingdon.
- Lima, V. (2020) Collaborative Governance for Sustainable Development. In: Leal Filho, W., Azul, M., Brandli, L., Lange Salvia, A., Gökcin Özüyar, P. and Wall, T.: *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Cham: Springer International Publishing (Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals)*, 1–11.
- Lindner, R., Edler, J., Hufnagl, M., Kimpeler, S., Kroll, H., Roth, F., Wittmann F., and Yorulmaz, M. (2021) Missionsorientierte Innovationspolitik: Von der Ambition zur erfolgreichen Umsetzung. No. 02/2021 (DE). Perspektiven-Policy Brief, Fraunhofer-Institut ISI.
- Garard, J.; Koch, L. and Kowarsch, M. (2018) Elements of success in multi-stakeholder deliberation platforms. In: *Palgrave Commun*, 4(1).
- Gunton T. and Day J. (2003) The theory and practice of collaborative planning in resource and environmental management. *Environments*, 2, 5–20.
- Mansbridge, J. (1983) *Beyond adversary democracy*. University of Chicago Press.
- Marzouki, A., Mellouli, S. & Daniel, S. (2017) Towards a Context-based Citizen Participation Approach: a Literature Review of Citizen Participation Issues and a Conceptual Framework. In: *Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance*.

- McCoy, M. and Scully, P. (2002) Deliberative Dialogue to Expand Civic Engagement: What Kind of Talk Does Democracy Need? *National Civic Review*, 91 (2), 117-135.
- Mazzucato, M. (2021) Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism. Haper Business.
- Meisch, S. (2020) Transformative Research. The IASS Approach. *IASS Discussion Paper*. Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies. IASS. Potsdam.
- Newig, J.; Challies, E.; Jager, N. W.; Kochskaemper, E. and Adzersen, A. (2018) The Environmental Performance of Participatory and Collaborative Governance: A Framework of Causal Mechanisms. *Policy studies journal: the journal of the Policy Studies Organization*, 46(2), 269–297.
- Quick, K.S. (2021) The Narrative Production of Stakeholder Engagement Processes. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 41(3), 326-341.
- Rabadjieva, M. and Terstriep, J. (2021) Ambition Meets Reality: Mission-Oriented Innovation Policy as a Driver for Participative Governance. *Sustainability* 13 (1), 231.
- Roberts, N. (2004) Public Deliberation in an Age of Direct Citizen Participation. In: *The American Review of Public Administration*, 34(4), 315-353
- Rowe, G. and Frewer, L.J. (2005) A Typology of Public Engagement Mechanisms. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 30(2), 251-290.
- Schlozman, K.L., Verba, S. and Brady, H.E. (1999) *Civic participation and the equality problem*. Vol. 528. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Schultz, M., Hahn, T., Ituarte-Lima, C. and Hällström, N. (2018) Deliberative multi-actor dialogues as opportunities for transformative social learning and conflict resolution in international environmental negotiations. In: *International Environmental Agreements*, 18(5), 671-688.
- Sippel, M. and Jenssen, T. (2009) What about local climate governance? A review of promise and problems. *MPRA Paper No. 20987*. IER - Institute of Energy Economics and Rational Energy Use. University of Stuttgart. Stuttgart.
- Vaino, A. (2020) Designated Spaces for Designated Imaginaries: The Cruel Optimism of Citizen Participation in Post-disaster State-citizen Dialogues, *Dialogue Studies*, 8, 9-31.
- Wegerif, R. (2007) Dialogic Education and Technology: Expanding the Space of Learning (Vol. 7), Springer Science and Business Media, New York, NY.
- Wegerif, R. (2013) Dialogic: Education for the Internet Age, Routledge, Abingdon.

- Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice* Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Yalçın, M. and Lefèvre, B. (2012) Local Climate Action Plans in France: Emergence, Limitations and Conditions for Success. *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 22(2), 104–115.

REFLECTION: Connected or Separated? Transformation of Muslim Student Community in Japanese University under the COVID-19

Hiroko Kinoshita¹

Introduction

In February 2020, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university activities in Japan started to become evident.

In late February 2020, the Japanese government requested that all public elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools throughout Japan be temporarily closed from March 2 until the spring break². The decision on when to reopen schools was left to the prefectural governments.

Most public and private elementary, junior high, and high schools reopened by mid-May, while schools in some prefectures remained closed until the end of May as the rate of infection did not decrease in their prefectures (MEXT 2020a).

In addition to primary and secondary education, COVID-19 greatly affected university education. When schools were temporarily closed, the university had just finished its winter semester (second semester) and was in the midst of a long vacation; therefore, there was no impact on teaching activities. However, universities were thrown into chaos as short-term study abroad programmes during the spring break were suddenly cancelled. Japanese students on long-term study abroad programmes were forced to return to their home country, and international students staying in Japan had to return to their home countries.

The confusion intensified with the beginning of the new academic year. According to data compiled by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Tech-

¹ Hiroko Kinoshita is Associate Professor at the International Student Center, Kyushu University. She graduated from Kyoto University (Ph.D.), majoring in Area Studies. Her current research interest is to elucidate transnational migration in the Islamic world and the social networks formed by mobile people using quantitative and qualitative methods.

² In all educational institutions, including preschools, kindergartens, elementary, middle and high schools, and universities, the academic year in Japan starts in April and ends the following March.

nology (MEXT), of the 894 higher education institutions including technical colleges (both national and private) that responded to the survey, 772, or more than 85% had either decided to postpone the initiation of on-campus teaching at the start of the new academic year or were considering it (MEXT 2020b).

Due to cancellation of in-person classes, faculty members and lecturers were forced to hastily prepare for online classes. There were instances of university authorities asking faculty to use on-demand lectures instead of live lectures, since the latter required a large amount of data transmission and a fair number of students did not have access to high-speed internet at home or in dormitories³. Consequently, the lecture content and syllabus had to be drastically revised and both students and faculty members voiced concerns about the effectiveness and quality of learning opportunities at the university.

However, by the end of May 2020, lectures, either in-person or online had resumed at 864 institutions, that is, over 80% of the 890 higher education institutions nationwide that responded to the survey by MEXT⁴. Concerning the lecture formats in these institutions, only 27 (3.1%) had resumed face-to-face lectures (all private universities or colleges of technology), 59 (6.8%) used a combination of face-to-face and online lectures, and 778 (90%) were still teaching only online classes (MEXT 2020c).

At the beginning of the new academic year in 2020, national universities formulated their own action guidelines based on the guidelines issued by MEXT. Stringent restrictions were applied to universities in seven prefectures—Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama, Chiba, Osaka, Hyogo, and Fukuoka – where emergency declarations had been issued as of April 2020. These restrictions included shutting down of sports facilities such as playing fields, indoor gyms, and tennis courts. Consequently, intercollegiate exchange games and social gatherings were also cancelled, effectively banning all extracurricular activities by students.

Additionally, there was also a complete ban on informal student gatherings. Cafeterias were closed, and even in some of the open cafeterias, partitions had been placed on tables to prevent students from eating together.

The restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic led to absence of students or staff at universities. At universities in the Tokyo metropolitan area and other regions

³ Personal correspondence with the lecturers in private universities in Fukuoka prefecture on 20 April 2020.

⁴ The total number of higher education institutions in Japan is 86 national universities, 104 public universities, 828 private universities, and 57 colleges of technology.

where a state of emergency was declared, universities were closed and no one was allowed to enter the campus without special permission.

Thus, by the first half of 2020, most universities in Japan were not holding face-to-face lectures, and student access was greatly restricted, severely reducing their ability to function as universities.

Since then, emergency declarations and equivalent measures (Focused Anti-infection Measures) have been issued intermittently in the Tokyo metropolitan area and major regional cities. University-specific guidelines have been applied in response to these measures, and lectures are conducted online, resulting in continued confusion.

Muslim students, the target population of this paper, were similarly at the mercy of decisions made by their home universities. In addition to the ban on extracurricular activities, they were also asked to refrain from Friday prayers, which are important gatherings for Muslim students, and even from daily prayers that involved multiple people.

Additionally, most notices and information related to COVID-19 issued by universities are not multilingual, and the English version is delivered two to three days after the original Japanese version. This hinders the accurate communication of information not only to Muslim students but also to the international student community.

As mentioned earlier, mass prayers on Fridays, which denote the most important aspect of their daily worship, as well as *Iftar*, the first light meal taken after sunset that works to strengthen the bonds between Muslim students during the fasting month, were banned. As a result, they were deprived of the only opportunity to meet other Muslim students and their families on campus.

Academic research on the Muslim community in Japan is limited. Much of it has focused on the demographic trends and social integration of Muslim immigrants in Japan (Onishi and Shigematsu 2003; Kojima 2006; Onishi 2008; Sakurai 2008; Biygautane 2015; Sugibayashi and Samsou 2017; Yamashita 2021). For example, studies by Tanada Hirofumi, a leading scholar of Muslim community studies in Japan, focus on the social activities of Muslims as minorities in the Japanese society, the education of Muslim children, and the identities of naturalised Muslims. Based on careful field research, these studies are extremely beneficial for understanding the actual living conditions of Muslims living in Japan (Tanada 2010, 2015, 2019).

There are limited studies focusing on Muslim university students. Kinoshita focuses on Muslim students in Japanese universities and clarifies how Muslim students solve

the difficulties of their daily lives using students' personal networks (Kinoshita 2019). Other studies focus on the difficulties of Muslim students in Japanese universities based on the survey results from the perspective of social psychology (Nakano et al. 2013; Nakano and Tanaka 2019). There is also a unique study based on an experiment that discusses the mental representation that different facial expressions of Muslim men give to Japanese people (Moriya 2021). Other recent research discusses surveillance against Muslims in Japan as part of the state's counter-terrorism efforts (Takahashi 2018). These studies are very valuable in understanding the actual situation of Muslims living in Japan as minorities.

Needless to say, there are not only Muslim students but also students of various faiths and religious backgrounds studying in Japanese universities. As for Christians, there are 6,480 Catholic, Protestant, and other churches and related institutions in Japan (MEXT 2020d). There are both Catholic and Protestant churches in the vicinity of the university where this author works, and Christian international students use these churches. However, Islam is lumped into the category of 'other religions' in Japan's statistical surveys on religions. According to a survey by Okai and Tanada, a leading authority on Muslim studies in Japan, there were only 80 mosques in Japan as of 2014 (Okai and Tanada 2014). It is clear from these figures that Muslim international students cannot easily access mosques unless they live nearby, making it difficult for them to use facilities outside the university in terms of their religious activities. This paper will focus on Muslim international students as a minority, while the religious practices and activities of Christian international students will be investigated on another occasion.

This paper focuses on the Muslim international student community at Kyushu University, a national Japanese university. Through this, the authors attempt to answer questions such as how Muslim international students work to maintain their connections with each other during the pandemic and the subsequent ban on gatherings and what methods they use for communication when face-to-face communication is not possible. By adopting the perspective of participant observation and interviews, this paper seeks to clarify the transformation of the Muslim international student community in the era of the pandemic. This is an experimental attempt but has been depicted ethnographically from their narratives and dialogue.

The survey was conducted among the Muslim international student community at the university where the author works, between April 2020 and July 2021. As mentioned above, the state of emergency and focused anti-infection measures were issued intermittently during this period; therefore, face-to-face interviews were conducted during the period when these restrictions were relaxed. In addition, informants were asked to state their preferences in advance, and if they wished, interviews

were conducted using online meeting tools such as Zoom. The information obtained from the interviews was stripped of identifying information such as the names of individuals to ensure anonymity, since the survey was conducted at the university where the author worked. The author and the informants are the researcher and the international students, respectively, both belonging to the same institution, and the purpose of stripping identifying information is to avoid the risk of conflict of interest. Subjects were informed that the content of the interviews, conversations, and indirect conversations such as email and dialogues would be used only for academic purposes, such as writing and citing in research papers and academic presentations. The dialogues and interviews between the author and informants were conducted in English, Arabic, or Indonesian, based on the informants' first language or the language they shared with the author. When quoting dialogue between the author and an informant, the informant's name is initialled. In this paper, the author will quote directly from the dialogues he had with informants in interviews and personal exchanges.

Religious practices on campus: Kyushu University Muslim Student Association (KUMSA) and the Friday congregational prayer before COVID-19

As mentioned in the previous section, religious practices of Muslim students on campus are important acts of fostering ties that transcend nationality. I believe that we can clarify how religious practice functions when we focus not only on the practice itself, but also on the mutual interactions that take place before and after the practice, that is, when people gather in groups to greet, talk, and converse with each other. In this section, we focus on the case of Friday congregational prayers by Muslim students to examine how COVID-19 impacted them.

Prayer (*salāt*) is one of the five pillars of Islam. The Friday noon congregational prayer (*salāt al-jumu'a*), the second prayer in a day, is commonly known as Friday prayer and is recommended to be performed in groups of men based on the *al-Qur'ān*⁵. In a general Friday congregational prayer, people follow the Imam, who leads the prayer. Unlike the noon prayers on the other days of the week, Friday prayer is preceded by a sermon by the Imam, followed by a congregational prayer. After the prayers, each person goes back to work or, in countries and regions where Friday is a holiday goes straight home.

⁵ It is mentioned in Chapter 62 *al-Jumu'a*. The number of prayers per day differs among school of law (*madhhab*).

Friday prayer among the Muslim students on the university campus follows the general manner of the prayer. The prayer is mainly operated by the Kyushu University Muslim Student Association (KUMSA). KUMSA was founded in 1998 with the increase in the number of Muslim students at the university to spread the proper knowledge of Islam and provide services for its members (KUMSA n.d.)⁶. It is important to mention KUMSA before discussing Friday prayer because knowing about this organisation helps to better understand the activities of Muslim students on university campuses.

KUMSA is an organisation parallel to the International Student Association, which aims to unite all international students, and the other student organisations, which are organised by students from the same home country. KUMSA focuses mainly on issues related to Islam. Thus, many students participate in the activities of the organisation in overlapping ways. In other words, they could be members of the international student association, the Egyptian student association, and KUMSA simultaneously.

KUMSA has a wide range of activities. As stated in their organisational vision, they support Muslim international students and their families, while, before COVID-19, they were also working to make themselves known to non-Muslim students, especially Japanese students and people living in campus neighbourhoods.

KUMSA's particular focus was to dispel the stereotypical and monolithic images of Muslims. During the month of Ramadan in the Islamic calendar, all adult men and women who are in good health should fast, and KUMSA holds a large *Iftar* event on campus during one day of the month.

The event is open to Japanese students, non-Muslim international students, their advisers, and senior and junior students in their labs. The venue is a multi-purpose hall adjacent to the cafeteria every year, where invited students and faculty members enjoy end-of-refreshments while conversing with Muslim students. During the dialogue with the representative of KUMSA⁷:

The author: 'What is the purpose of Iftar?'

A: 'Through the Iftar event, we hope that people will deepen their understanding of Islam and Muslims by having a small celebration of the end of the fast in a large group, regardless of religion.'

⁶ The website is no longer being updated. Currently, the main source of information and exchanges is on the Facebook page.

⁷ Interview with the representative of KUMSA on 18 April 2020.

The author: 'Any religions?'

A: 'Yes, any. Buddhist, Christian...any religion is OK.'

KUMSA also played a leading role in negotiating with the university to secure a Friday congregational prayer location on campus. Many of the Muslim students enrolled in the university where the author works are graduate students in the fields of science, engineering, and agriculture.

Since the graduate school buildings are located close by, KUMSA searched for a place to hold a collective prayer in or near these buildings.

Purification (*wudū*) is necessary before each prayer. Specifically, this is the act of washing one's hands, rinsing one's mouth, and purifying one's body with water, including the head, arms, parts of the legs, face, and hair. The same purification is necessary for a congregational prayer. On campus, the number of Muslim students attending prayers was large. In the past, some Muslim students used washbasins in restrooms for purification, but there were many complaints from other non-Muslim students and cleaners that the washbasins, surrounding areas, and floors were soaked with water, making them slippery and dangerous. This led KUMSA to issue a notice to Muslim students not to use washbasins for purification. This event triggered the need to secure a water source that could be used for purification and a place for congregational prayers officially recognised by the university.

A request was submitted to the university by KUMSA to provide a place for congregational prayers, and discussions were held with the administrative department that manages the university facilities. KUMSA had to produce a significant amount of material and paperwork to convince the university administrative staff that a place for congregational prayer was necessary. It took a great deal of time and effort to get an official response from the university. Although they were not able to get a private room or hall, it was finally decided that the wide aisle in the faculty of engineering buildings could be used for congregational prayers and that new washbasins for purification would be installed in the outdoor space next to the aisle.

This official provision of a place for prayer by the university has led to a large number of Muslim students coming to Friday congregational prayers. Not only students of science, engineering, and agriculture, but also graduate students of humanities and social sciences, and Muslim students who have their laboratory in other research buildings or in distant places on the campus and usually practise their prayer by themselves began to gather in the engineering building on Fridays for the congregational prayer.

The availability of space for congregational prayers has given many Muslim students on campus the opportunity to meet at least once a week on Fridays. A Muslim graduate student explained the significance of participating in Friday's congregational prayer during the dialogue with the author as follows⁸:

The author: 'What does it mean to you to attend a Friday prayer?'

M: 'You know, this university has many Muslim students from Asia and the Middle East, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Egypt. The sermons during the Friday prayers are delivered by people from each country in turn, and I think it is inspiring and I learn a lot from them because I can hear many interesting stories every time. And I can meet Muslim students studying at different faculties. Besides, it is very important for us to worship together.'

The author: 'Is it better to worship with many than with few?'

M: 'Absolutely, yes! Sensei⁹, you know what I mean.'

The author: 'Yeah, exactly.'

As mentioned above, based on the author's participant observation and the narratives of Muslim students, KUMSA's activities before the COVID-19 pandemic promoted mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims in the university. Furthermore, it is evident that the activities of KUMSA helped to strengthen the bonds of Muslim students regardless of their country or origin.

Religious practices on campus: Friday congregational prayer and struggle of KUMSA during COVID-19

In the early stages of COVID-19's impact on student life in Japan, around March 2020, the university issued a notice to KUMSA prohibiting the use of the aisles in the engineering building, not only for Friday congregational prayers, but also for regular prayers.

When KUMSA initially asked about the possibility of continuing collective worship on Fridays, the university authorities responded that there were no rules prohibiting or discouraging congregational prayers on Fridays, and that individuals should take

⁸ Interview with the graduate students on 4 August 2021.

⁹ Japanese word meaning 'teacher'. It is used not only to refer to school teachers, but also to address professors.

infection prevention measures at their own discretion, such as wearing masks and sanitising their hands and fingers, if they were to gather for congregational prayers. Therefore, KUMSA posted on Facebook for students to wear masks when they gathered in the aisle of the Engineering building for Friday prayer (KUMSA 2020). The next day, however, the situation changed: the university authorities forbade KUMSA to hold daily prayers using the aisle other than Friday prayers as a group, and decided to close the aisle of the engineering building. The closure of the place in the engineering building was essentially indefinite, pending an update from the university authorities (KUMSA 2020).

This decision was applied not only to KUMSA, but also to the athletic department and other student clubs. All facilities related to extracurricular activities were closed, including the playground, swimming pool, baseball field, as well as the instrumental performance rooms where the brass band and music clubs held practice. Although communication with the university authorities is done in English, there was no inconvenience or miscommunication. They thought the notification from the university authority was unavoidable.

However, many Muslim students were unhappy with this decision of the university. This was because the month of Ramadan was about to begin in late April 2020. As mentioned earlier, Muslim students feel proud to invite non-Muslim students and faculty advisers to hold Iftar during the month of Ramadan. In addition, spending the month of Ramadan in a foreign country, where the seasons and environment are very different, is a struggle for research and study. To overcome this situation, Muslim students had a strong desire to gather with other students as much as possible to perform daily prayers during the month of Ramadan.

In addition, since all extracurricular activities in the university were banned, not only Iftar events, but also Taraweeh prayers (*salāt al-tarāwīh*), a spontaneous prayer held after the fifth daily prayer in the month of Ramadan, which many Muslim students perform every year with others, could not be held. Many Muslim students were disappointed with this decision. One Muslim student mentioned¹⁰:

I: ‘Taraweeh prayers are very sacred prayers that we do during the month of Ramadan. It is really wonderful that Muslims from different countries come together to share fasting and praying together. I wish they had let me do Taraweeh because I would have worn a mask and I promised to leave right after the service.’

The author: “‘Them” means the university?’

¹⁰ Based on interview with Muslim student on 20 April 2020.

I: 'Yes, the admin man we talk to.'

The author: 'Well, it's a difficult problem. I understand the importance of it, but I can't tell you that it's okay to do Taraweeh...'

I: 'I know, sensei. It's OK.'

Thus, Muslim students were frustrated by the fact that they could no longer conduct Iftar and Taraweeh prayers, which are two of the largest and most important events in the KUMSA annual calendar. However, KUMSA made various appeals on Facebook and continued lobbying with university authorities to continue its activities to support Muslim students.

One example of this is the securing of a new place of congregational prayer on campus. As mentioned, there was only one university-approved place of congregational prayer on the campus where the author works. However, some Muslim students whose faculty buildings were far away from the engineering building and who wanted to have an authorised place for congregational prayers near their faculty voiced their opinion. Thus, KUMSA started to negotiate with the university authority to approve another place for the prayer on the campus, especially in the faculties of social science and humanities. This new place of prayer, which KUMSA members call East Masjid, differs from the existing aisle of the engineering building¹¹, which was used only by men, in that there is also a partitioned and separate space for women so that they can also join and perform congregational prayer collectively¹².

Another example of KUMSA's activities for Muslim students was planning street demonstrations against airstrikes on Palestine. In late May, after the second Ramadan month under COVID-19 and the end of Eid, KUMSA organised a march to show solidarity with Palestine against Israeli airstrikes on Palestine.

The march was a large-scale demonstration that went along the main street in the centre of Fukuoka City and ended at the U.S. Consulate. It was a peaceful demonstration that was reported to and approved by the security authorities and the police in advance. Muslim students, their families, and children marched down the main street with placards and chants. This march was the first mass activity to be conduc-

¹¹ Since the Engineering building is located on the west side of the campus, Muslim students have been calling it West Masjid since the East Masjid was prepared. Certainly, the masjid was not actually built, and Muslim students call it Masjid as a place for people to gather, not merely a place of congregational prayer.

¹² The new place of prayer was approved by the university in July 2020, but as of August 2021, the time of writing this paper, it has never been approved for use.

ted as KUMSA during COVID-19. Even though the march was held outdoors, great care was taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and participants were informed that they must wear masks, disinfect their hands, and disperse promptly after the march.

When the march was originally planned, the final point of the march was to be in front of the U.S. Consulate, but the police authorities informed them that they were forced to change the final point to the entrance gate of the park adjacent to the Consulate.

What is more noteworthy is that not only Muslim students but also non-Muslim students and citizens participated in this march. The marchers, regardless of religion, raised their voices for the Palestinian people to lead a healthy and peaceful life. According to the KUMSA representative during our dialogue¹³:

The author: 'Was the bombing of Palestine a hot topic among your friends?'

A: 'Yeah, very much. The current situation in Palestine could not be overlooked. As fellow Muslims, we wondered what we could do to help. And then as a result, we planned a peaceful march to protest the airstrikes and to express our hope that a peaceful life would return to Palestine.'

The author: 'I see. I am sure it was a lot of preparation.'

A: 'We had to get permission from the police, and there were many things we didn't know. But the members of KUMSA helped me.'

As discussed above, during COVID-19, Muslim students were not allowed to conduct congregational prayers or even other organisational activities of KUMSA. As one Muslim student mentioned, his request to be allowed to perform Taraweeh prayers during the month of Ramadan did not go through, and the university's unified COVID-19 policy regarded religious activities as general activities like athletic activities and prohibited them. However, to support Muslim international students, which is the origin of its activities as KUMSA, they made efforts to secure a new place of prayer on campus and planned and organised a Palestine peace march to express their ties as Muslims. Thus, Muslim international students are struggling to manage to continue their activities due to the restrictions imposed as a result of COVID-19.

¹³ Based on an interview conducted on 4 August 2021.

Communication among Muslim Students during the COVID-19 pandemic

In the previous section, the author discussed the activities of Muslim students during COVID-19 in the case of congregational prayer and KUMSA activities. In this section, we will discuss how Muslim students, as individuals, view living in a foreign country under COVID-19 and what kind of dialogue they have with other Muslim students.

Since March 2020, congregational prayers have been banned, and there are no KUMSA-sponsored events on campus. Furthermore, to prevent students from eating in groups, plastic partitions have been installed on cafeteria tables, and pop-up notices have been placed to prohibit conversation while eating and to remind students to wear masks immediately after eating. These over-zealous reminders create a cramped situation for all students.

As mentioned in the introduction, elementary and junior high schools were closed, which continued to be a challenge for Muslim students staying with their families in Japan. A Muslim student living with his wife and two elementary school-going children described the current situation as follows:

Even during school vacations, my wife would take care of my children so that I could do my research activities. However, my wife's Japanese is not very good, so she did not want to go out with the two children when I was not around, and the children were so energetic that we sometimes received complaints from their neighbours. My wife was stressed out, my children were also stressed out, and I knew it, so I could not concentrate much while I was at the university, and I began to feel the need to go home early and take care of my children¹⁴.

As he described above, there were students who were themselves stressed by the stress felt by their wives and children. Muslim students staying with their wives and children volunteered to teach children the Qur'an and basic Islamic education on how to grow up as a good Muslim as part of KUMSA's activities. However, since public places such as community halls have been closed and the local government has called for refraining from holding activities where multiple people gather indoors again, there is no place to hold these study sessions, and the families of Muslim students have lost their relationships and interactions with each other.

¹⁴ Based on an online survey and additional interview with a Muslim student. Interview was conducted on 4 August 2021.

Because of the lack of family interaction among Muslim students, especially women with children, whether they are housewives or attending graduate school like their husbands, they feel that they have no one to talk to and no one close to whom they can turn for advice. One student, who has three children, two in elementary school and one in preschool, and is enrolled in a doctoral programme in the same field as her husband, mentioned:

It was so hard that I don't remember anything during the time the elementary school was closed. Now that both the elementary and nursery schools are open, I do not have to think about taking care of the children and feeding them during the day. However, if I have any questions about child care or what I need at the elementary school, there is no one I can easily ask. I have been living in Japan for more than three years now, and for the past one year, I had just got acquainted with Muslim families, but no family that I can call friends¹⁵.

When a new Muslim family arrives in Japan, KUMSA takes the lead in organising an exchange event to connect the family with Muslim families already living in Japan. However, as shown in the woman's narrative above, under COVID-19, no family events are held, and relationships with surrounding Muslim families are only established to the extent that they know each other's faces or know of each other's existence. As a result, there is no one to whom one can ask about trivial matters of daily life without hesitation.

Meanwhile, the responses to the dialogue of Muslim students who came to Japan alone without their families can be roughly divided into two aspects.

A male graduate student who came to Japan in 2015 and has lived in Japan for more than six years said that his life had not undergone any significant changes worth mentioning before or after COVID-19. He went back and forth between his laboratory and home, and came to the university on weekends where he conducted experiments. All the events conducted by the Fukuoka Mosque are now online, and although there is a time difference, he is happy to be able to listen to live lectures by prominent Islamic intellectuals from around the world. However, he points out that since he is not at the venue where the lectures are held, it is 'just like watching the news on TV'.

In the past, he casually invited other single Muslim students to eat out or gather at someone's house for dinner. However, even among Muslim students, people have

¹⁵ Based on an online survey conducted during 8 August to 13 August 2021.

different attitudes toward COVID-19, so he feels that he can no longer casually ask others as he has in the past.

Instead, he frequently exchanges text messages with students from their home country, but it is only a superficial conversation of greetings. He describes that if they went out together often, they would probably have a good conversation over text message, but since they have not actually met, they do not have much to talk about.

A Muslim student whose family was planning to come to Japan as soon as the 2020 academic year started was facing difficulties in his personal life as there was no prospect of his family coming to Japan, and the situation of COVID-19 in his home country showed no signs of improvement. He describes himself as 'being alone in Japan'¹⁶. He was looking forward to the arrival of his family, but had no idea when they would be able to come to Japan. He has been trying to have frequent conversations via videocall with his family, but the internet connection in his home country is poor, and the calls often freeze up. In the beginning, he tried to call back several times, but sometimes he could only hear his family voice, and with the time difference, it seemed difficult to keep the conversation going. He added during our dialogue that¹⁷:

N: 'If I can see the goal, I can work hard until then, but maybe I won't be able to see my family even when I am in the final year of my doctoral programme. I don't know.'

The author: 'Do you feel anxious?'

N: 'Yes. All I could do was feel anxious. I would feel better if I could pray with other Muslim students or have dinner with them afterwards, but I cannot do that right now.'

The author: 'Do you ever hang out with your friends?'

N: 'Of course, going out to eat is not prohibited in any way, but I am afraid that just because there are a few foreigners in the group, people might over-react.'

The author: 'Like...people say something bad to you?'

¹⁶ Based on a personal correspondence on 8 August 2021.

¹⁷ Based on a personal correspondence 19 September 2020.

N: 'It is not that people will say anything directly or act in a discriminatory manner to me, but I feel very nervous when I go to the supermarket alone or wherever I go.'

What we can point out from the narratives of these Muslim students who have come to Japan alone is that during COVID-19, direct communication opportunities have decreased, and indirect communication has also become extremely difficult.

In this section, we discussed how Muslim students engage in individual dialogue. This study focused on students who were accompanied by their families, those who raised their children while pursuing research, and those who came to Japan without their families. What they all have in common is that their relationships with each other are becoming weaker. Face-to-face communication has decreased, and personal distance has widened. In other words, as face-to-face communication has decreased, so does non-face-to-face communication, such as texting and video calls.

Conclusion

In this paper, the author discussed how Muslim international students in Japan maintain their connections with each other during the COVID-19 pandemic where face-to-face gatherings are no longer possible.

Prior to the pandemic, KUMSA, a mutual support organisation for international students who adhere to the religion of Islam, took the lead in promoting the well-being of Muslim students by providing support for their daily lives and organising exchange events with non-Muslim students, faculty members, and neighbours. In addition, the acquisition of a congregational prayer space approved by the university authorities had created an opportunity for Muslim students to meet at least once a week on Friday prayers, albeit only for men. The Friday prayers not only enabled congregational prayers, but also served as a place to strengthen the bonds and ties of Muslim students.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has stalled most activities organised by KUMSA. The university authorities closed the corridors for mass prayers and banned mass Friday prayers in accordance with the university rules and regulations, without giving any special treatment to any religious activity. In addition, KUMSA was advised to cancel its activities and events on campus as well, so that Iftar and Taraweeh prayers in the month of Ramadan could not be held. With these bonding activities among Muslim students no longer possible, KUMSA seemed to have ceased to function as a mutual aid organisation.

On the other hand, KUMSA aimed to maintain bonds among Muslim students even in situations where there were more things that could not be achieved. Securing a new congregational prayer space in the eastern area of the campus was a big step forward, as was the creation of a women's prayer space, even though it was unclear when a congregational prayer would resume.

Furthermore, the planning of a peaceful march against the Israeli airstrikes on Palestine was made possible by the outdoor location of the activity. The expression of solidarity with Palestine had the effect of creating a bond that transcended national and regional boundaries as Muslims.

No matter how much effort KUMSA put in as an organisation, dialogue on a personal level was extremely difficult. Relationships between families and individuals have become tenuous, and dialogue among Muslim students has become minimal and superficial.

In this study, we focus on dialogue exchanged by Muslim students. The author conducted dialogues with Muslim students through interviews and participant observations. However, most of them were online, and there were very few opportunities to have face-to-face conversations with them. One year after the survey began, a variant of the COVID-19 pandemic began in Japan, and the number of people who became infected increased even after completing vaccinations. At the time of writing, a state of emergency has been declared, and the situation continues to be unpredictable.

Through this research, it has become clear that direct dialogue is extremely important and essential to the lives of the Muslim international student community, and that online and non-face-to-face dialogue are no substitute for direct dialogue.

Bibliography

- Biygautne, M. (2015) 'Immigration and Religion: Muslim Immigrants in Japan- Their History, Demographics, and Challenges', in Stephen Robert Nagy (ed.), *Japan's Demographic Revival-Rethinking Migration, Identity and Sociocultural Norms*, Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 113-144.
- Kinoshita, H. (2019) 'Being Muslim in non-Muslim country: The case of Egyptian Student', poster presentation at 2nd Diversity Symposium on March 18 2019, Kyushu University, Japan.
- Kojima, H. (2006) 'Variations in Demographic Characteristics of Foreign "Muslim" Population in Japan: A Preliminary Estimation', *The Japanese Journal of Population*, 4 (1), 115-130.
- KUMSA. (n.d.) *Kyushu University Muslim Student Association*. Available at: <https://sites.google.com/site/kumsafukuoka/>. (Accessed on 15 July 2021).
- KUMSA. (2020) *Facebook post*. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/Kyushu-UniversityMSA>. (Last accessed on 10 July 2021).
- MEXT. (2020a) *Statistics*. Available at: https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20200603-mxt_kouhou01-000004520_4.pdf. (Accessed 10 June 2021).
- MEXT. (2020b) *Statistics*. Available at: https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20200413-mxt_kouhou01-000004520_2.pdf. (Accessed on 10 June 2021).
- MEXT. (2020c) *Statistics*. Available at: https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20200527-mxt_kouhou01-000004520_3.pdf. (Accessed on 13 June 2021).
- MEXT. (2020d) *Survey of Religious Statistics*. Available at: https://www.e-stat.go.jp/stat-search/files?page=1&layout=datalist&toukei=00401101&tstat=000001018471&cycle=0&month=0&tclass1=000001148006&cycle_facet=cycle&tclass2val=0. (Accessed on 29 October 2021).
- Moriya, J. (2021) 'Mental Representations and Facial Impressions of Muslim Men in Japan From 2015 to 2017', *SAGE Open Journal*, 11(1), 1-9.
- Nakano, S., Okunishi, Y., and Tanaka, T. (2013) Interpersonal Behavioral Difficulties of Muslim Students in Japan During Intercultural Contact Situation: proceedings of the *10th Asian Association of Social Psychology Biennial Conference: Enhancing Quality of Life through Community Integrity and Cultural Diversity: Promoting Indigenous, Social and Cultural Psychology*, University of Gadjah Mada, Indonesia, 20 to 23 August. Available at: https://asiansocialpsych.org/wp-content/uploads/Proceedings_of_the_10th_Asian_Association_of_Social_Psychology_Biennial_Conference_2013.pdf.

ation of Social Psychology Biennial Conference.pdf. (Accessed 5 May 2021).

- Nakan, S., & Tanaka, T. (2019) 'For Interaction with Muslim International Students: From View Point of Japanese Commonality on Case and Practical Studies', *Ryugaku Koryu*, 100, 32-43. (in Japanese)
- Okai, H. & Tanada, H. (2014) *Zenkoku Masjid List 2014 nendoban*. Available at: <https://imemgs.com/> (Accessed 28 October 2021).
- Onishi, A. & Shigematsu, S. (2003) 'Identity Narratives of Muslim Foreign Workers in Japan', *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 13, 224-239. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.715>
- Onishi, A. (2008) 'Becoming a better Muslim': Identity narratives of Muslim foreign workers in Japan', in David Blake Willis and Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu (eds.), *Transcultural Japan: At the borderlands of race, gender, and identity*, New York: Routledge, 217-236.
- Sakurai, K. (2008) 'Muslims in Contemporary Japan', *Asia Policy*, 5, 68-88.
- Sugibayashi, T., & Samsou, S. (2017) 'Living in Japan as a Muslim: Current Situations and Problems', *Journal of Islamic Studies, Prince of Songkla University*, 8(2), 93-102.
- Takahashi, Saul J. (2018) 'Muslim Surveillance in Japan: A Narrative Aimed at Trivialization', *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 4(2), 195-209.
- Tanada, H. (2010) 'Survey on education for Muslim Children in Japan', *Ningen Kagaku Kenkyuu*, 23(2), 249-255. (in Japanese)
- (2015) *Nihon no Mosque: Tainichi Muslim no Shakaiteki Katsudou*. Japan: Yamakawa Shuppan. (in Japanese).
- (2019) 'Tainichi Muslim no Seikatsu, Identity, Shukyou Jissen: Nihon ni Kika shita Muslim wo Jirei to Shite', *Annals of Japan association for Middle East Studies*, 35(2), 153-175.
- Yamashita, Y. (2021) 'Islam and Muslims in "non-religious" Japan: caught in between prejudice against Islam and performative tolerance', *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 18(1), 1-17.

REFLECTION: Rethinking the Possibility and Meaning of Dialogue in a Globalised and Religiously Diverse World: A Mid-Covid Perspective from Southeast Asia¹

Paul Hedges²

The title I have given myself is perhaps rather grandiose in how it starts: ‘Rethinking the Possibility and Meaning of Dialogue,’ which is a huge task, but I hope that my subtitle frames this in a somewhat humbler and more manageable way, in providing what I have termed: ‘A Mid-Covid Perspective from Southeast Asia.’ Certainly, I do not hope to tear down and reformulate the many and varied things that dialogue may mean within the course of this short paper, but at least to offer some thoughts on directions that we might move in from one perspective and at one point in time.

To this end, I will begin by reflecting briefly on a Master’s course that I teach here in Singapore, entitled ‘Dialogue: Interreligious Encounters and Peacebuilding.’ Recently, I finished my annual modifications to it in preparation for the new teaching year. I noted around twenty key theorists who we would engage with during the course, and many will be familiar names such as Buber, Levinas, Gadamer, Bohm, and Habermas. They may be expected in any course on dialogue. But this brief list is one of white, Western, men, notwithstanding that by bringing insights from their Jewish heritage, Buber and Levinas certainly disrupt in some ways the mainstream discourse.

¹ This paper is adapted from my Keynote Lecture of the same title delivered on 16 June 2021 in the Dialogue Society (London) workshop ‘Academic Workshop: Dialogue with and among the Existing, Transforming and Emerging Communities’ (delivered online).

² Paul Hedges is Associate Professor in Interreligious Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU, Singapore. Previously he was Reader in Interreligious Studies at the University of Winchester, UK, and had worked for other British, Canadian, and Chinese universities before that. He has worked with a range of stakeholder groups outside academia, including the Anglican Communion Network for Interfaith Concerns (NIFCON), the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, the Babaji Yogi Sangam, the Dialogue Society, the World Congress of Faiths, and the BBC. He is on the Editorial Board of both the *Journal of Religious History and Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*. He publishes widely in interreligious studies, religious studies, and theology. Current research projects include interreligious relations in Singapore and the East and South-East Asian region, as well as interreligious and intercultural hermeneutics.

The theorists engaged in the course are not all white, Western, or male by any means, and, having taught the course for five years, I have sought to find ways to embed it more fully within an Asian context. Nevertheless, this is difficult as virtually all the mainstream literature on dialogue, including the interreligious dialogue which is the primary focus of the course, rests upon a basis of the normativity of the Western canon. Indeed, in thinking of dialogue as a form, it is hard to get beyond accounts that begin with Plato and then take us through a mainly European set of texts, while in terms of such things as ethics and hermeneutics the thinkers I have mentioned predominate in surveys and studies.

Yet, this limits us, and limits our vision. The Buddhist sutras, for instance, also predominantly take the form of dialogues, with Shakyamuni in conversation with his disciples or other thinkers, and dialogue is a well-known Asian literary form as much as it is in the Western world. Again, when we look at important figures in dialogue on the global stage today, we must also acknowledge the work of such figures as Fethullah Gülen and Daisaku Ikeda, Turkish and Japanese respectively.³ Yet, it must be said that beyond the sterling work of the Dialogue Society here, there are few studies of these figures within what may be termed dialogue studies as a wider field. Certainly, in academic terms, that Gülen and Daisaku are both more practitioners than scholars, means that their style of writing and speaking of dialogue may be seen to lack the depth and rigour needed for them to be objects of serious study, or capable of being considered as theorists, and as such their ideas have not been so widely taken up into the literature.

We see, here, a recurring issue that scholars in decolonial studies have long noted, that due to the embedded nature of the supposed canon within the parameters of Western scholarship, to become what is seen as properly educated in a field means essentially studying the Western norms and classics, and then, once educated in this way, it is both hard to see other alternatives, while one is also invested in maintaining this status quo, for it is the long learning and study of these classics that gains one a certain pedigree of respectability as a scholar, and to make other scholars one must be seen to teach and perpetuate the same canon of knowledge and norms. This is a

³ For a discussion on Gülen and Ikeda's thought in relation to dialogue, see, respectively, Frances Sleep and Omer Senner, ed. Paul Weller, *Dialogue Theories* (London: Dialogue Society, 2013), 83–100, and Olivier Urbain, 'Daisaku Ikeda,' in Omer Sener, Francis Sleep, and Paul Weller, eds, *Dialogue Theories II* (London: Dialogue Society, 2016), 173–88.

process which also pushes out those who do not fit within these norms and expectations⁴.

Here, I would like to bring in Walter Mignolo (Mignolo 2005), particularly as he draws upon ideas from Indian historian Partha Chatterjee and his concept of 'colonial difference', decolonial scholar Frantz Fanon and his concept 'the wretched of the earth', and the Peruvian sociologist Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa's conception of the 'colonial wound'. I will briefly unpack these ideas⁵.

Chatterjee noted that, in ruling India, the British saw their own understandings as being a universal template which could be applied anywhere. So, to fit it to India, it was necessary for India to be trained and taught to think like the British. Chatterjee suggested that this was a general rule applied by colonial rulers everywhere, which he termed 'the rule of the colonial difference.' As a principle, the colonial difference is the fact that the colonised are forced to accept ideas, concepts, and ways of thinking which are not their own but which are the dominant paradigms they must fit into.

Meanwhile, Anzaldúa speaks about the cultural trauma of those who are colonised and so always live within a world where their language, culture, ways of life, etc. are subservient or inferior to the dominant modes of knowledge, speaking, and power production. Combining these with Fanon's 'wretched of the earth', Mignolo describes the matrix:

So it is the colonial subaltern that carries on its shoulders the global colonial difference, the racialized colonial wound. They are what Frantz Fanon identified as 'les damnés de la terre' ('the wretched of the earth'). What is the colonial difference and the colonial wound? To put it simply, it is the authority and legitimacy of Euro-centered epistemology, from the left to the right, assuming or explicitly declaring the

⁴ Disquisitions on decolonisation and scholarship are manifold, but some key texts, including some particularly pertinent ones for the study of dialogue and religion, would include Morny Joy, 'Revisiting Postcolonialism and Religion,' *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 25.2 (2012): 102–22, Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'Religion, Modernity, and Coloniality,' in Richard King, ed., *Religion, Theory, Critique* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017), Leon Moosavi, 'The Decolonial Bandwagon and the Dangers of intellectual Decolonization,' *International Review of Sociology* (2020), DOI: 10.1080/03906701.2020.1776919, and Paul Hedges, *Understanding Religion: Theories and Methods for studying Religiously Diverse Societies* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021), 163–87.

⁵ For a discussion around these thinkers and this issue from which I draw here in my commentary on Mignolo's text, see Hedges, *Understanding Religion*, 422–23.

inferiority of non-Christian, colored skin, of those not born speaking modern European languages or who were born speaking a surrogate version of a European language, like in British India, Spanish America, the French Caribbean, etc. (Mignolo 2005, 386)

So, the issue raised here for us by Mignolo, which I think has been lurking behind much of what I have said so far, is the colonial difference that is implicit for any subaltern group where the language, terms, and theory of the centre takes pride of place as the canon.

I might suggest that if a field such as dialogue studies were to consider its place in such a context, it may be one that seeks to overcome such fissures and differences. Bridge building, to cross over to where the Other stands, and to understand them on their own terms, to give one rough and ready way of thinking about what dialogue may entail, may therefore be a way to move from the centre to the margins and also from the margins to the centre. After all, one cannot dialogue with another simply upon one's own terms, and so must engage the thought world of the Other in the process.

The norms and canon of dialogue studies must, of necessity, entail that we can move beyond a white, Western, male core to one that embraces wider diversity. This is not, of course, to decry or obliterate what has been given to us by the likes of Buber, Levinas, or Gadamer; indeed, we may certainly argue that the opening of horizons from the centre to the margins seems inherent in their thinking, for our work of understanding must be an ongoing project, and I believe that the conception of dialogue advanced by the educationalist theorist Paulo Freire would give further support to what I argue⁶.

Within the space left to me, I cannot hope to develop what a theory or practice of dialogue would look like within a Southeast Asian perspective, but I will sketch some thoughts in three steps looking at how some of the traditions that meet in South East Asia may assist us in drawing out new paradigms: first, to return to the notion of our present mid-Covid context and community thinking in Asia with an eye to Confucian thought; second, to discuss how Buddhist thought may give us a new angle on thinking ethics for dialogue; finally, how an Islamic view on imagination may bring new insights in terms of hermeneutics. These will be more cameos of figures and ideas than fully developed arguments, and so more suggestive than prescriptive.

⁶ On Freire's notion of dialogue, see in particular Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1972), 87–124.

Firstly, I have put in my title ‘A Mid-Covid Perspective,’ and this speaks both to the Workshop theme, but also to the situation that everyone on the globe currently finds themselves in. While vaccine rollout is happening quite rapidly in some places, at a slower pace in others, and not at all in some countries, the fact remains that until we find a way to provide mass vaccination across the planet we will expect to see Covid remain a reality present in all our societies (and one that may continue with us even after this to some degree).

One potent issue that arises is the intersection of Covid with prejudice, and we can think back to Susan Sontag’s classic work on illness as metaphor (Sontag 2001). The rise of anti-Asian prejudice, or we may better say the heightened visibility of anti-Asian prejudice, in many countries has highlighted the levels of misunderstanding and distrust between communities (Noor 2020). But, also, we will undoubtedly see ongoing effects in areas such as economic disparity, often hitting at interstices of gender, race, and socio-economic deprivation that already often mark undue hardship.

Dialogue may not seem the most pressing need for those affected, yet unless we improve communications and understanding, and find better ways of living together, then further prejudice, hatred, and misunderstanding will fester⁷. Within a South East Asian context, this may draw upon Confucian social perspectives, meaning that we place the focus on communitarian thinking rather than on isolated individuals. This suggests that dialogue across our various group identities remains an imperative, and as the philosopher Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee has suggested, a hybrid feminist-Confucian care ethic gives us a different way of thinking about political analysis, in which we extend filial care to all, even those distant from us (Rosenlee 2014).

Secondly, and drawing out from my previous point, how can we rethink the ethics of dialogue? Buber and Levinas have provided the classic texts here⁸, but if we look at aspects of Asian thought we will also see things differently. While I can only give some indications here, the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh has

⁷ This may raise the issue of social cohesion and for some perspectives, globally but again taking particular note of Southeast Asia on this, see Paul Hedges, ‘Conceptualising Social Cohesion in Relation to Religious Diversity: Sketching a Pathway in a Globalised World,’ *Interreligious Relations* 16, available at <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/IRR-Issue-16-May-2020.pdf>.

⁸ Foundational here is, of course, Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Touchstone Books, 1970), but for a discussion on how these two thinkers may mutually combine in this regard, see Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies: A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 21–8.

stressed, by rethinking and reenvisaging the traditional Buddhist principle of Dependent Origination, what he terms Interbeing, the way that we all, humans and non-human beings including our environment, exist only and always within complex webs of relationality⁹. While Buber stressed our relationship to a Thou rather than an It, and Levinas focused upon the Other as our absolute ethical imperative, stressing especially the otherness of the Other, we see a different emphasis from Hanh's thought.

As such, rather than stress the alterity of the Other that we find with Levinas, Hanh asks us to see our interconnectedness to them. Both visions stress the ethical imperative of being before the Face of the Other, in Levinasian terms. But instead of being before, combining Buber and Levinas' terms, a Thou-Other as a distinct individual separate from us, we meet with Hanh what I will term an InterOther¹⁰, not a separated isolated monad apart from us, but – by being human¹¹ – a being with whom we are already connected in many and complex ways, thus our community and reliance on the InterOther, and their community and reliance on us, is stressed in a dynamic set of bonds that is not just to be before the Face of this one Other, but many and all InterOthers, human and non-human.

Thirdly, in Southeast Asia, many traditions meet, combine, and live together, and as the next strand in this matrix I will add reflections on Islamic thought, in particular how Ibn Sina may help us think about the hermeneutics of dialogue¹². For Ibn Sina, the imagination was a faculty of the soul that provides a bridge between the body, the senses, and the intellect. He saw it as deeply creative, permitting us to extend

⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh is not a systematic philosophical writer, as such we will not find a worked through elaboration of interbeing in his work but the elements can be gleaned from such works as: Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*, 3rd edn (Berkley, CA: Parallax Press), Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2005), 65–82, and Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, ed. Arnold Kotler (London: Rider, 1991), 95–98.

¹⁰ Paul Hedges, 'The Ethics of Dialogue: In Conversation with Buber, Levinas, Hanh, Muholi, and Spivak,' (2020) unpublished draft paper. I plan to develop part of this paper as a journal article and also the whole into several chapters for a book project. The notion of the 'InterOther' is a key original part of the proposed contribution.

¹¹ In Buddhist terms, the focus is on all sentient beings, yet I stress here at this point the interconnectedness of humans as this is key for the current discussion, but it is not to dismiss our connections with other forms of sentient life and the wider ecosystem of which we are part.

¹² What follows draws from Paul Hedges, 'Exploring Christology in Islam as Prophethood,' unpublished paper delivered at the American Academy of Religion annual conference 2019 (24 November).

what is already known, which he linked to artistic creation and borrowed the notion of *mimesis* or imitation from Plato and Aristotle.

In Islamic philosophy, it has been argued that imagination has a unique role, being an ‘in-between’ realm mediating between the spiritual, or intellectual, and the material, contrasting with mainstream Western philosophical conceptions. It therefore has a transformative role in recreating afresh what is known by bringing together differing concepts from the material and the mind in original ways. Space does not permit me to develop this in detail, but if you use what I would term as Gadamer’s concept of the opening of horizons (Hedges 2016), Ibn Sina may give us new ways of thinking about, and concepts for explaining, how we recreate our understanding and conceptions in a globalised world, and one where – under the impact of Covid – old ideas and ways of doing and being must change.

Here I will wrap up, in what I should stress is not a conclusion, for I have at most hinted at various ideas which have not been developed here, and so I have perhaps opened a door to asking new questions rather than concluded either what the questions or answers should be, and so am shutting no doors with a conclusion. I hope these few humble thoughts will nevertheless be meaningful to at least some readers.

Bibliography

- Hedges, P. (2016) 'Gadamer, Play, and Interreligious Dialogue as the Opening of Horizons,' *Journal of Dialogue Studies*, 4, 5–26.
- Mignolo, W. (2005) 'Subalterns and Other Agencies,' *Postcolonial Studies*, 8(4), 381–407
- Noor, F. (2020) 'The Virus Scare as a Mirror to Ourselves and Our Society,' *Straits Times* (10 February 2020). Available at <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/cartoons/the-virus-scare-as-a-mirror-to-ourselves-and-our-society>.
- Rosenlee, Li-Hsiang L. (2014) 'Confucian Care: A Hybrid Feminist Ethics,' in Jennifer McWeeny and Audrey Butnor, eds., *Asian and Feminist Philosophies in Dialogue: Liberating Traditions*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 187–202.
- Sontag, S. (2001) *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York, NY: Picador.

Volume 9
2021



**JOURNAL
of
DIALOGUE
STUDIES**

*The Journal of
Dialogue Studies
is a peer-reviewed
academic journal
published by the
Institute for
Dialogue Studies;
a subsidiary body of the
Dialogue Society.*



**INSTITUTE
for
DIALOGUE
STUDIES**

www.DialogueSociety.org

ISSN 2054-3123



9 772054 312002

Community is an evolving phenomenon. Communities emerge, transform, and disappear in response to the context they were born into. Today, traditional communities exist side by side with new and emerging communities, ranging from online forums and social media groups to online gaming communities.

As such, new communities emerge every day and challenge traditional views on what a community is. In the life cycle of communities, 'dialogue' comes into the picture as a prominent instrument facilitating their transformation and evolution. It is dialogical engagements (inter- or intra-community) of the individuals that allow these social structures to evolve and transform.

In this issue of the Journal of Dialogue Studies, we have nine papers and two reflections that explore the theme of Dialogue with and among the Existing, Transforming and Emerging Communities. The papers are divided into the following themes – *Migrant Communities, Sense of Belonging, and Conflict Resolution; The Transformative Aspect of Dialogue and Emerging Communities; Dialogue Spaces and Communities.*