

Report on conflicts in intercultural settings

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Executive summary

This report is the result of one of the initial tasks included in the ALTERNATIVE research project, concerning restorative justice, human security and conflicts in intercultural settings. Based on a review of the relevant literature and a preliminary presentation of ALTERNATIVE's selected empirical sites of investigation, our aim is to contribute to a theoretical basis and a common platform for consultation for all the partners in the project. This is done through a critical discussion of the concepts of **culture**, **intercultural contexts**, **ethnicity**, **conflict**, and **conflict transformation** as used or lacking in the security discourse and in proposing a potential way to approach their use in our project and in the restorative justice discourse in general. Our review will form a primary basis for the comparative analyses of the data from the four study-sites in ALTERNATIVE.

In summing up the perspectives, the analyses and the discussions: what are the points of entry into the four case sites in ALTERNATIVE? Which research questions do this leave for the fieldwork? What does „conflicts in intercultural settings“ mean? Among other theoretical approaches, we use Amartya Sen's proposal for another level of problem definition and empirical approach by questioning the concept of **justice**. He bridges the world of ideas with the world of policy by asking whether the ideal of social justice might leave us with practical decisions. There are social, economic and political injustices as well as justices. Sen takes a pragmatic approach to justice as he reasons about “as much justice as possible” taking participation, democracy and human rights into considering how to reduce injustice and advance justice. In this introduction to the work to come in the ALTERNATIVE project we have scrutinised the main terms and assumptions which form the basis of the

aims and issues of the project. The concepts of culture, intercultural contexts, ethnicity, conflict, and conflict transformation are discussed as they are used or lacking in the **security discourse**. The discussion ends up with a potential way to approach their use in our project and in the restorative justice discourse in general. The handling of diversity seems to emerge as an overarching challenge in the four project sites. This goes well with a proposal for an alternative approach to justice, relative justice, acknowledging exactly what is at stake: cultural diversity, free will and moral responsibility. There are no objectively correct answers to such basic questions. The answers may best be not seen as given, but as tasks.

Restorative justice takes many forms in different contexts, depending upon e.g. jurisdiction, whether criminal or civil cases, conflict lines and conflict area.

The question of transformation of conflicts into **positive participation** locally by people who thereby enhance the grounds for safety and security is an empirical question. Nevertheless, the ALTERNATIVE project will provide “opportunities to consummate transactions” to quote Fredrik Barth (1969), for and with people within and across the four conflict case sites. The deliverables that will follow in the ALTERNATIVE project throughout its four years will discuss these issues based on practical interventions, empirical findings and theoretical analyses.

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