ALTERNATIVE

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ALTERNATIVE

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Evaluation and follow up report

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Process analysis – evaluation and follow up report

LESSONS LEARNT ABOUT IMPLEMENTING RESTORATIVE DIALOGUES IN AN INTERCULTURAL SETTING

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Executive Summary

Deliverable 5.4 describes and analyses the action research in Hungary, with a focus on how the research team implemented restorative interventions in the ALTERNATIVE project and what lessons there are to learn on restorative values, principles and restorative models. At the beginning of the action research, after 'mapping' the types of conflicts and building trust through the Local support group[1] we continued directly with a conceptual focus on formal case work to test the full capacity of the restorative models and its impact on people's conflict handling attitudes and practices in an intercultural setting. Realising the obstacles of restorative encounters in the first experiments with formal cases meant a turning point in the action research. Researchers understood the nature and roots of the obstacles but also what kind of restorative interventions are possible and required based on the local needs. We reconsidered our activities on the field and extended the focus from formal restorative methods towards offering interventions which are less directly focused around conflict cases. Less formal, less intense interventions became alternatives to the formal case processes. This included work with a wider community, capacity building for developing conflict handling skills, social and emotional competences. The aim of these activities was to ground trust, to learn more about local ways of conflict resolution and about attitude changes as a result of participation in the activities. We also shifted from seeing these activities as initial steps on the way towards formal case work, to acknowledging them as powerful and appropriate interventions on their own right.

The descriptive part about the context and the process is followed by a concrete example of an action, the Restorative learning group. We highlight the different layers, functions and impacts of that activity: what people gained from a less formal, skill-development process and how that activity helped the research team to think over the local needs for restorative activities.

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[1] In the beginning of the fieldwork a 'Local support group' was set up in the village. This group consisted of volunteer local people as well as the fieldwork leader and other researchers of Foresee. The group represented most local stakeholders and groups in order to form a communication platform. Support group meetings allowed space for discussion, planning and evaluation of the activities of our action-research programme. The Local support group suggested participants for the interviews and connected researchers with community members. Later on they gave their opinion on the community study and helped us to plan the action research further.

The third part explains what we learned about restorative justice values and principles from the various activities of the fieldwork. How we got to deeper layers of the conflicts and how the dialoguers handled the complexity of local narratives when working with formal cases. The local people's motivation for participation and the question of representing interests via agency by dominant 'gatekeepers' is analysed afterwards, together with the relation between the lack of participation and perceived injustice in procedures.

The last part offers conclusions regarding how to build up restorative processes in intercultural settings. Further conclusions are described related to the restorative models, where the main issues are conceptual and methodological flexibility and the need for going beyond conventional boundaries by the restorative professionals. Finally, challenges related to case work are discussed: to what extent is restorative work in an intercultural community context different from case work in usual? A more proactive presence of the dialoguer and the specialities of case referral and local people's voluntary involvement into dialogue processes are highlighted issues.

Introduction

In the following, we provide a process analysis of implementing restorative approaches and practices in the village. The process analysis is based on the thick descriptions, evaluation grids and logbooks of participatory observations about restorative interventions.[2] Important insights are included from interviews with members of the research team and from discussions within the team about planning, replanning and formal evaluation meetings as reflection on the implementation phase of the action research.

First, we briefly describe the context of the action research, then the process with a focus on how the intervention model was designed to implement and observe conflict resolution processes in the village. We highlight how the conceptual and methodological approach was reconsidered and modified after replanning, based on the first experiences with the first few cases. Further on, some empirical examples are

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[2] The comparative methodology of the ALTERNATIVE project included evaluation grids in which cases, interviews, observations could be 'thickly' described, in detail, according to the local language (Vanfraechem 2012a).

provided that show to what extent and how a restorative approach was applicable in an intercultural village setting. The second part of the writing reviews the most important lessons we learned from the fieldwork, including methodological concerns, people's participation in dialogue processes, the dialoguers' position, justice and interculturality from different perspectives. Lastly, we offer general conclusions about approaching conflicts in an intercultural village setting with restorative methods.

Our story in a reversed order

Here we discuss the context of the action research, how the research site was chosen, how the research was set up originally. We describe the main features of the research protocol that we developed for observation, documentation and reflection. Table 1 summarises those interventions that the report refers to as cases or actions in the framework of the fieldwork.

The next subchapter reviews the process when the research focus expanded from a direct case work-centred approach to interventions towards a more universal understanding of restorative interventions. An exemplary case study about the Restorative learning group highlights the complexity of the needs and various impacts yielded by an intervention beyond the case work. The final subchapter illustrates the story from another angle: following the path of one single participant, Ági, through the action research and its impacts on her awareness and practices.

Reviewing the context

Kisváros[3], the village where the 30-month-fieldwork within our four year-long research was carried out, was chosen after a systematic search. During the first period of the action research, we collected possible venues and considered a set of criteria (geographic, demographic and institutional) regarding the applicability of the fieldwork. In Hungary, there are well-known places where intercultural conflicts arose and therefore get wide publicity. However, we planned not to choose a place of

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[3] Within this study, the name of the village, people and organisations are fictive in order to ensure anonimity and protect confidentiality.

harsh and tough conflicts where communities went in emergency cases. In those situations often even the basic contact is missing between the different people – that would have been far too big a challenge for the action research. An important criterion when searching for the village was an existing relationship – either good or bad – between the people. Based on the opposition of Roma and non-Roma residents in most of the Hungarian villages, we assumed that a seemingly more peaceful place could still offer significant conflicts and harms to work with.

The village that was finally chosen offered certain types of conflicts far from an emergency case. But we still recognised signs of segregation and isolation among the community fractions. At first sight, one of the most prevalent dimensions of intercultural conflicts was between Roma and non-Roma residents. When we were searching for the village, we got to know about the story of a local governmental model programme accomplished a few years ago, aiming at eliminating segregated Roma settlements and helping Roma families to move into Kisváros. The programme was accompanied by unsettled debates and raised tensions in the village between some Roma and non-Roma people.

Nevertheless, we found it important not to arrive on the field with a preconception about a Roma-non Roma fault line and keep the spectrum open to other dimensions of the intercultural context. We even kept the possibility open that contentions between the Roma and non-Roma would not always have a dominant intercultural nature. We interpreted the field as a "dynamic, relation-based context", where the Roma-non Roma conflicts might interfere and overlap with other conflicts (Benedek 2014, 21.).

An additional criterion that supported our village choice was the presence of local, civil supporters of the project who saw an opportunity in the action research. The rural nature of the location was also considered in our choice. Though interculturality would also have been a valid research topic within urban areas, we were interested in a community that manifests issues related to the cultural fragmentation of the Hungarian countryside.

The basic set-up of the action research - designing and reframing

In our research project we were dedicated to gather data in many ways and to experiment with multi-methods, even innovative approaches of action research and restorative practices. The long timeframe of the project offered an unconventional opportunity to spend more time on the field than in other projects. The relatively short distance of the village from the Capital enabled us to perform a significant presence in the life of the local community and created the possibility of evolving deeper relationships with residents, instead of being distant strangers as researchers. That had both positive and negative consequences on our work. On the one hand, trust has been built through continuous presence on the field, on the other hand becoming a significant actor in Kisváros was accompanied by being labelled and situated in the local political power space. It also meant that the locals kept questioning the impartiality of the action research.

In the first Problem Analysis phase, within the framework of a community study, we conducted thirty-three interviews to get to know the community of the village and to map the main dimensions that divide people and create fractions among and gaps between them. We concluded this study in a problem analysis report that was presented to the local stakeholders six month after starting the fieldwork.[4]

Our approach of action research allowed a wide space to cyclically review and, if needed, modify the previously designed research method. As part of reflexivity, reviewing and tailoring our methods from time to time to the conditions of and attitudes in the field and to the local needs was an important endeavour. Most of our activities tried to fulfil a dual objective: gathering information for the research – both related to the restorative approach and to the main theoretical concepts[5] – on the one hand and assistance in resolving local conflicts on the other hand, and building trust, as we believed, the basis of the above two.

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[4] The Problem Analysis report is published as Deliverable 5.2. (Benedek 2014).
[5] The main theoretical concepts of the research were elaborated in Deliverable 8.1, the 'Operationalisation of theoretical concepts' document of the ALTERNATIVE research. The main concepts along which the restorative interventions are observed and analysed are security, justice, conflict, restoration and restorative principles, community, active participation, intercultural settings, minorities and migrants, identity and democratic society (Vanfraechem 2012b).

The original idea to arrange our activities in the field had a three part structure: (1) working with a Local support group on a problem analysing community study, leading to (2) dialogues with formal restorative methods, in test cases revealed during the problem analysis phase and (3) further formal case work, complemented, if needed by community development or further trust-building activities (discussing the results of the research in workshops, joining local events and feasts, establishing a Restorative learning group, organising film screenings and discussions around locally acknowledged issues). We hoped that these activities would feed case work and lead to referrals, seen as starting points to case work, which we called restorative interventions.

When the research arrived from the first, descriptive-interpretive Problem Analysis to the Action phase, meaning to carry out restorative approach-based activities in a wide methodological spectrum, we tried to stay flexible with the methods (i.e. restorative models) and the scope of activities, but still keep in line with the life cycle of the cases and with the main theoretical concepts of the ALTERNATIVE research. To fulfil that aim we created a research protocol.[6] The research protocol was meant to offer guidelines for the entire case work process and support reflection on the interventions on different levels (researchers, conflict parties, other locals and dialogers). It gave a wide space for flexibility in terms of framing, participation, methods, occasions and time frames. Every action and intervention had a diverse research team, which consisted of a main researcher, a dialoguer and – in case work[7] – a local volunteer researcher. The team members had different tasks in different phases[8] of the intervention. The research protocol laid out the basic tasks for members and main forums of the team discussions. While the dialoguer was responsible for involving the people concerned and guiding the restorative intervention, the researcher followed the story of the conflict and collected information (by participatory observation and interviews) both from the point of the restorative intervention and the theoretical concepts of the action research. The local researcher was a villager not concerned with the conflict, who added his knowledge about the locality into the team. The researcher, the dialoguer and the local

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[6] A the detailed description of the research protocol can be found in Deliverable 5.3. Implementation report on the application of RJ in the community (Benedek 2015).

[7] Case work refers to work with formal restorative methods in concrete conflict cases, which consisted of case referral, preparation, restorative intervention and follow up

[8] The parts of the restorative process were the following: a. refferal by an involved person, b. preparing for restorative conflict resolution, c. mediation/conferencing and d. evaluation.

researcher regularly reflected on the process, sharing insights from their different perspectives within the framework of formalised meetings, feeding the final case study written by the researcher.[9] We realised unexpectedly that the case processes are so diverse in terms of the phases accomplished, the composition of the research team, the people involved and the time horizons, that our local activities demanded an even greater flexibility. Each activity was a different 'alteration' from the research protocol.

Expansion towards less direct interventions and informal practices

In the first period of the action phase of the research that followed the problem analysis we thought that if we carried out formal restorative dialogues in a few conflict cases, the results would create recognition for the approach and for the methods and motivate people to refer cases and to join future dialogue processes.[10]

The first experiments with formal restorative case work showed that in two of the three conflict cases the intervention got stuck in either the phase of referral or the phase of preparation. That made us reconsider the feasibility of working with a restorative approach in Kisváros and motivated us to continue working on deepening trust towards the approach and the research. Within the framework of replanning we expanded our approach: from formal case work towards also less direct and less targeted interventions with a wider group of people, developing conflict handling skills, social and emotional competences, capacity building. We channelled more resources into these activities.

In some cases these more universal, less direct conflict-focused actions became alternatives of the formal case work. Our work in the local elementary school exemplifies that well. In that scene we got to the preparation phase in a Roma student discrimination case. The case got stuck in the preparation phase, but we could successfully work with students in a series of restorative school classes. The dialoguers were working with students between the age of 11 and 14. Students learned about a restorative approach of conflicts through games and role plays. They brought

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[9]   About the cases studies, see Deliverable 5.3.

[10]   In the first period we initiated formal restorative dialogue processes in three 'test-cases': the Civil Guard case, the Butcher Festival and the Charity Distribution case (see Deliverable 5.3.).

in personal examples, conflict situations with family and peers of their own age. According to our hypothesis, the less formal actions would have created a ground for intensive, formal restorative dialogues in concrete conflict cases (for the repertoire of formal restorative methods, see Törzs 2013). But after a point we started to reframe this concept. We experienced that activities on different levels gained benefit from each other in terms of building trust, opening channels of communication, offering new ways of conflict resolution within the group and between groups. Nevertheless, we realised that in many of these situations the informal process had not led to formal restorative dialogues.
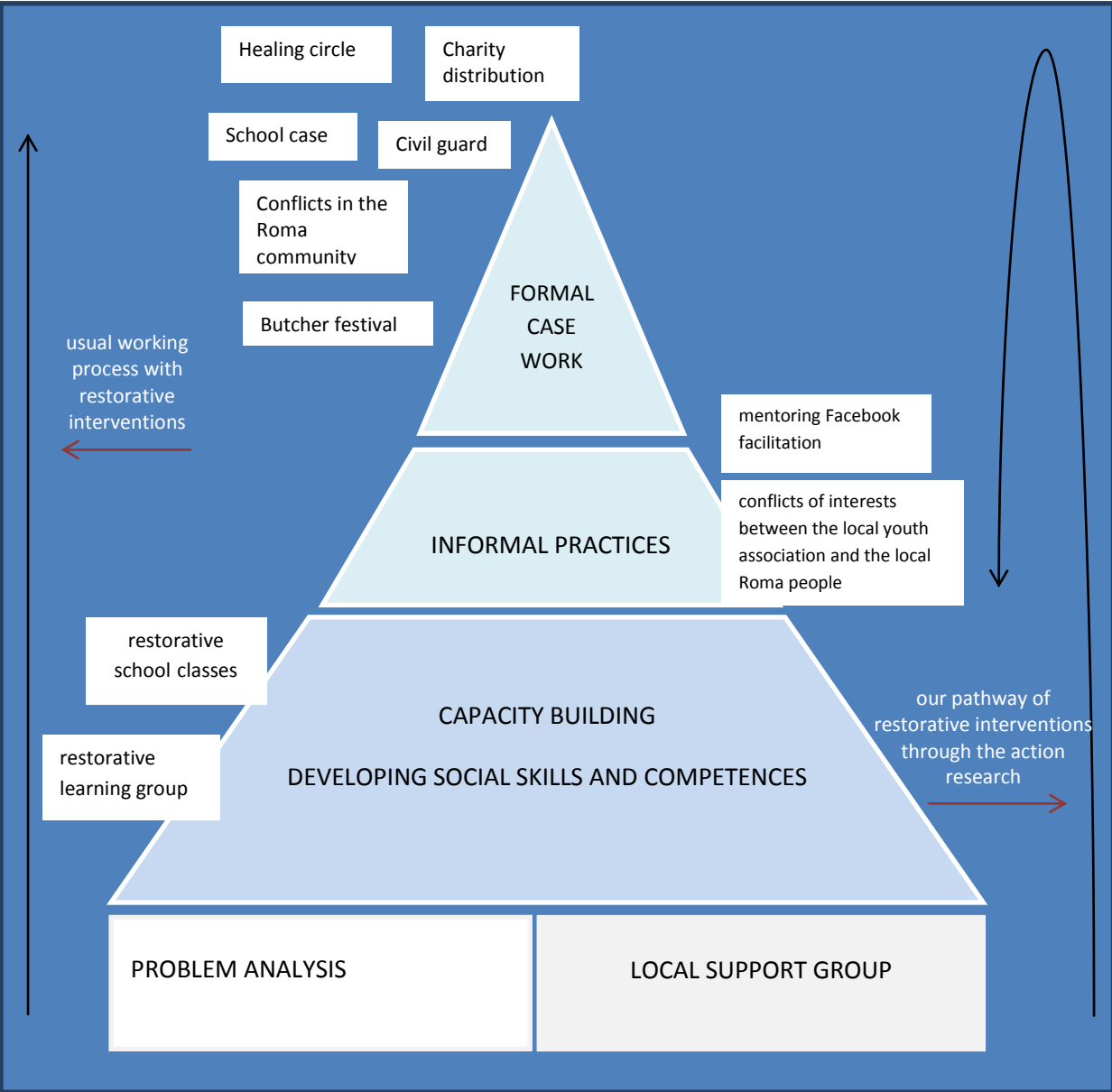
Figure 1 reviews the types of interventions and the working process of the action research. Usually when implementing restorative practices in an institutional environment, interventions follow a sequence of starting from less focused, universal interventions towards more targeted, formal restorative practices. This is expressed on the figure by a pyramid. Concerning our approach to the field work, we worked in a top-to-down, or 'reversed', broadening approach, starting from the top opening towards the fields in the middle and the bottom of the pyramid.

After mapping the conflicts with the problem analysis and starting to build trust and capacity through the Local support group, we continued directly with formal case work. The reason behind was the desire to test the full capacity of restorative methods and the impact of a restorative model on people's conflict-handling approach and practices. After the experiences with the first formal cases (see Deliverable 5.3), we realised that formal case work needs to be grounded and preceded by activities on the level of informal practices, community- and skill development – as described above.

Table 1 is an overview about all of the conflict cases where we initiated a formal or informal restorative dialogue process or got the opportunity to observe a local dialogue process.

Cases	Theme focus	Description	Method
Civil guard	agency exclusion discrimination	Conflict about excluding Roma residents from the Civil Guard – an organisation which dealt with local security	formal case work started, got stuck in the preparation phase
Charity distribution	fair process discrimination	The case targeted the distribution of Red Cross donations for poor people. Some Roma families perceived the distribution unjust and as excluding some Roma people from the donations	formal peacemaking circle
School case	discrimination	Three Roma students were accused of theft in the local elementary school. Their parents reported about discrimination of	formal case work started, got stuck in the preparation

		the children and the families' maltreatment during the process	phase
Butcher festival	Roma discrimination	Some Roma people perceived an exclusion from a local festival ('the festival of the rich'). They interpreted it with the negative attitudes of the organiser against the Roma.	no restorative intervention was requested in that case. We got an allowance to observe the local way of conflict resolution
Healing circle	restoration of relationships	a circle was organised to restore relationships within the group of supporters after the failure of the mayor at local election	formal restorative circle
Conflicts in the Roma community	participation agency	The case was centred around participation, agency, representation of interests, exclusion and identity constructions through a web of conflicts between different groups of the local Roma community	formal case work started, got stuck in the preparation phase
Mentoring Facebook facilitation	anger management expressing needs facilitation	A dialoguer was mentoring two locals who were official moderators of local Facebook discussion groups on the internet. They requested help in moderating debates on the online surface.	informal restorative techniques
Conflicts of interests between the local youth association and the local Roma people	lack of dialogue silence culture	Two local groups, some Roma people and the members of an NGO representing local youth (identified with conservative, rightist attitudes) expressed opposition and conflicts with each other. The research group tried to organise a dialogue platform where both party could talk about problems in the village and discuss conflicts in relation to the other	initiatives of informal restorative dialogues that were realised with the Roma people and got stuck in the preparation phase in case of the local youth

		group.	

Figure 2 describes the scope of our activities from formal restorative dialogues to more informal activities on a time line. As the figure shows, the extended focus allowed us to carry out formal case work in parallel with less formal, skill-development and capacity building activities based on restorative principles during the second phase of the fieldwork. The figure also shows the timing of the case or activity and the approximate amount of people participating (meaning those people who were reached directly with the activity), as the size of the signs is associated with that number. As time progressed, the interventions of the research group became more diverse and involved, on average, a growing number of people per unit.
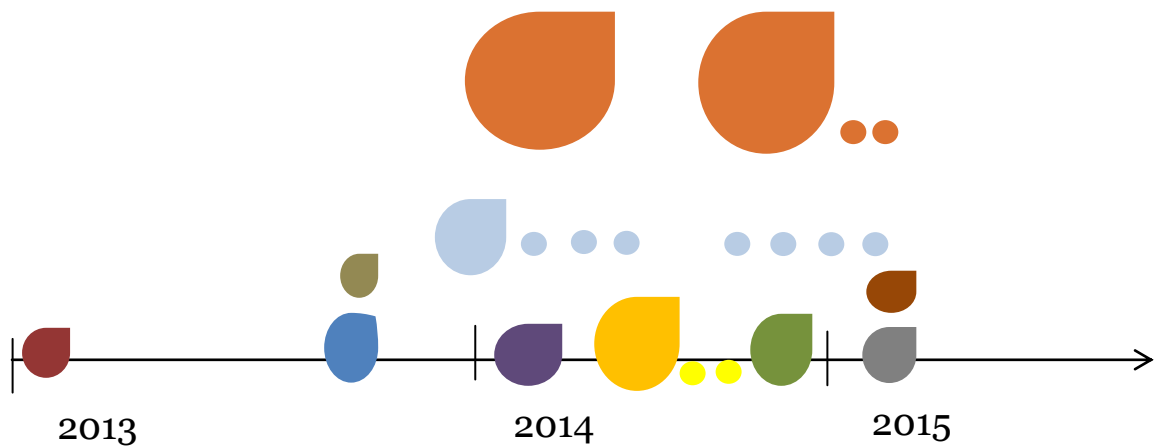
	Charity distribution case		Butcher festival
	Civil Guard case		conflicts of interests between the local youth association and the local Roma
	School case		Conflicts in the Roma community
	restorative school classes		restorative learning group
	mentoring Facebook facilitation		Healing circle

Actions and impacts - the learning group example

In this subchapter, we review the Restorative learning group as an example in order to highlight the mechanism of an intervention belonging to the lower spheres of the pyramid. The case shows what people gained from a less formal, capacity building activity and what the results of that action were.

The idea of a conflict handling learning group was to provide a free of charge learning opportunity about the restorative approach and methods for locals interested, to develop their conflict-management skills and to make them able to use these practices to handle local conflicts. As an indirect aim we hoped to get closer to conflict cases. The frame of the learning group was a small, regular, monthly workshop held in Kisváros by two dialoguers of the action research. They were highly flexible with the curriculum of the workshop, which was negotiated with the participants and tailor-made to their desires. Six people joined the group; half of them remained active during the whole period of the training. Within a one year long timeframe, a variety of group exercises were carried out about restorative conflict resolution, such as circles to reveal questions, feelings, needs or neutralising statements. The focus was set more on personal conflicts: cutting out a protected tree from a public property, conflict with an official inspector about the timing of invoicing, conflict with a school teacher in relation to someone's child. Participants used the group as an intimate space for venting about their own conflict cases. As the training proceeded, the participants experimented with the facilitator's role in some other local conflicts and used the trainers for mentoring assistance. A special direction of these personal conflict cases was moderating discussions in the online space.[11] We also hoped for and predicted that some of the cases discussed online would channel into restorative 'live' facilitated dialogue processes followed by the research, which did not often happen, with one exception. Awareness raising, venting, capacity building and assisted changes in their own conflict resolution practices became the central impact of the learning group on the participants.

For the dialoguers, the learning group offered a platform to experiment with innovative training methods that fit the complex needs of the local people, while the

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[11] Online space means community media platforms and virtual communities on the internet.

researchers gained a more in-depth perspective about local ways of conflict handling and transformation of the local practices through implementing what was learned.

In the following, we share examples about the different purposes for which the learning group was used. All these purposes assisted the locals to 'open up' and helped the research to expand the formal case focus: to understand and to appreciate what an action (informal intervention) can offer 'on its own', not as a preparation for formal case work and to see that whenever people have a direct experience of restorative conflict management culture, they transform – just like in a dialogue process.

From venting about individual conflicts to expressing feelings constructively

As we have seen in other forums of the action research as well, the most 'comfortable' way for people speaking about their conflicts is venting privately or in small, secure groups. The learning group offered a secure platform for that form of communication. Participants brought in conflicts related to their workplace, family and neighbourhood. These issues and participants' strategies of conflict resolution were discussed over the different occasions. An aim of the dialoguers was to go beyond venting these issues and either encourage people to get into dialogues on their own or to channel these cases into formally assisted restorative dialogues. An example was a conflict of the former local postman, a member of the OVNA (Our Village Non-Profit Association). He was upset about cutting a special tree in a public area. He took care of that tree and made a verbal agreement with the village council that they would not cut the tree as part of a construction of the area. The focus in this case was about how to communicate feelings such as anger and indignation in an effective, fair way. At the end of the training he summarised his learning curve in the following way: "For me, these 8 months changed my perspective intensively. I'm not that hot-tempered. I'm more able to imagine the situation of the others, and to think about how can I share my perspective, without being offensive. It's such a big jump, that I couldn't imagine before."

Learning restorative skills to solve one's conflict

The other territory of learning was the aspiration for new communication patterns to be used in everyday situations. For example, the local nurse asked for assistance in relation to her daily work: she often meets families who do not fit some needs of hygiene and do not provide a safe personal environment for their own children. She was searching for a supportive, adequate form to express critics towards the families without hurting them. Mapping resources in the family and neutralising statements seemed to be helpful means for overcoming these difficulties. As one of the Foresee trainers phrased: "I found it methodologically very useful that we dealt with an actual issue that was referred by a group participant. We used the circle methodology to reflect on the case and asked many clarifying questions; other participants brought in their related stories. Desires and plans came up during the circle."

Asking for assistance to facilitate in own conflicts

Some participants of the learning group were active members of the online community media platforms (e.g. Facebook groups). Many community related tensions emerged first in the online space, some of the conflicts were intensified in online debates and continued on the public spaces of the village. Two participants of the learning group were members of a local NGO, members and technical moderators of different, closed and open Facebook groups related to the village in general and to the given NGO.

These participants asked for mentoring how to participate constructively in these debates as moderators. Most of the online conflicts derived either from the lack of information or from the clash of different norms and values. Originally, the usual 'outcome' of online conflicts was cutting off the dialogue, leaving the conversation or even quitting the group. But these unfinished conflicts spilled over to the offline life of the village and made communication more difficult.

One of the conflicts that emerged on the online platform but had an intensive afterlife in the village was related to the local elections. Online rumours were raised that the actual mayor and the Roma self-government leader wanted to move 300 Roma families into the village. The Roma self-government leader published an online

statement on the platform to reject that information, but in the interpretation of the governing actors the intention behind the rumour was to intimidate people and weaken their chances in the local elections. The learning group participants tried to moderate this conflict on the online Facebook group with the help of the Foresee dialoguer. Bringing out the conflict from the online space and making a personal forum for discussion led to relief.

Referring a case into restorative dialogue

There was one case in the Restorative learning group where the potential was raised to bring the conflict into a formal restorative dialogue. It was the School case, where the issue was discrimination against Roma children in relation to a theft in the school. One of the teachers, a participant of the Restorative learning group, referred to the case briefly in the group. She clearly expressed her intention to help transforming the situation. She initiated a dialogue in the school about the different values among the children and how the school could handle these differences better. The facilitators offered assistance to involve the school and make a dialogue platform about the common aims of the parents and children, and to continue the debate on the case along these common aims. However, the teacher wanted to handle this case with high confidentiality and she was reluctant to take on the conflict as a referral person. As she phrased:

> Several objects were stolen from the school, then a teacher questioned some students and unpacked their school bags. Some parents marched into the school in a group and protested against suspecting their kids. We as teachers were labelled as Hitlerist and racist by the parents. It was very hurtful, although it rather targeted my colleauge. (...)

> These conflicts are happening on a weekly basis in the school. It is a school secret. We have to keep it as a secret. I am afraid that it will get publicity that I talked about these incidents. We have to solve these problems on our own.

Those situations raised the dilemma about proactivity and agitation: how can we intervene if no direct, personal request for assistance arrives? Initiating an action by the dialoguers without an open referral would have meant to violate important restorative principles: voluntary participation and neutrality would have been questioned. Finally, a referral for the School case came from a different forum. Yet sharing information about the case in the learning group helped the research to map that conflict from several angles and to assist the community with facilitating a restorative dialogue process, the Healing Circle.

We could see what complex functions the learning group fulfilled for over one year in the fieldwork. The next chapter highlights the process of the action research from the point of view of an individual, how the same person participated in various activities and cases in the timeframe of the action research.

An individual's pathway across the action research

Local people's participation in the action research followed a sequence somewhat parallel with the stages of the action research, which is illustrated in Figure 3.
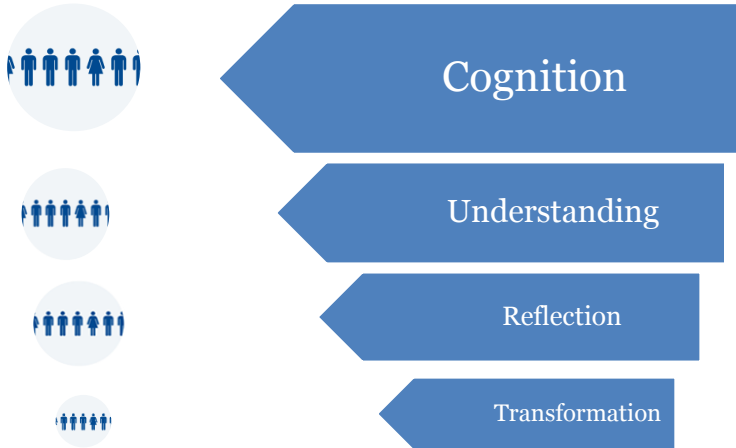

Figure 3. Local people's stages of participation in the action research

Many people got information about their conflicts and conflict-handling dynamics and got to know other perspectives of conflicts (including other locals' and the researchers' perspectives). Some of them were engaged in understanding and reflection and a few of them were ready for possible transformation. The various informal and formal activities offered by the action research created platforms for the local people to go through these phases. Naturally, people contributed to and took part in different stages, not all, but many people got forward in that sequence.

In the following we exemplify one person's link to the action research, who exploited all the opportunities offered by the action research and went through the different stages. In her case, each engagement towards an activity resulted from participation in a previous activity. The person is Ági, the local nurse in the village, who was an important local actor from the very beginning of the action research, due to her connection with local families, including those who belong to the Roma community. She provides health counselling to the mothers of new-borns and small children in the village by profession. The first connection with her was the personal interview that we conducted during the Problem analysis phase. She already mentioned the Charity Distribution conflict in the interview, and later on – although she was not the official referral person of the case – she attended the peace circle that was organised to address that conflict. As the main organiser of the regular charity distributions, she was the most reluctant among the participants to join the circle, due to her worries of unjust accusation and becoming a target of offensive criticism, including racism. In our interpretation, the previous personal relationship that we had built through the personal interview and on the workshop for locals to present and discuss the Problem analysis phase embedded her trust and helped a lot to gain her cooperation and presence in the peacemaking circle. Although the conflict was not resolved within the circle, she experienced a positive transformation of the conflict in the circle and found some common points with the 'other party', the woman representing the Roma community in the Charity Distribution case.

Based on that experience, she became engaged with restorative methods and was enthusiastic to join our Restorative learning group to gain new skills for handling conflict situations with the families and asked for assistance in certain conflict situations. Figure 4 illustrates Ági's participation process in the action research, how

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the different forms of participation fed into the others, and how the whole process was channelled into her working praxis in the village.
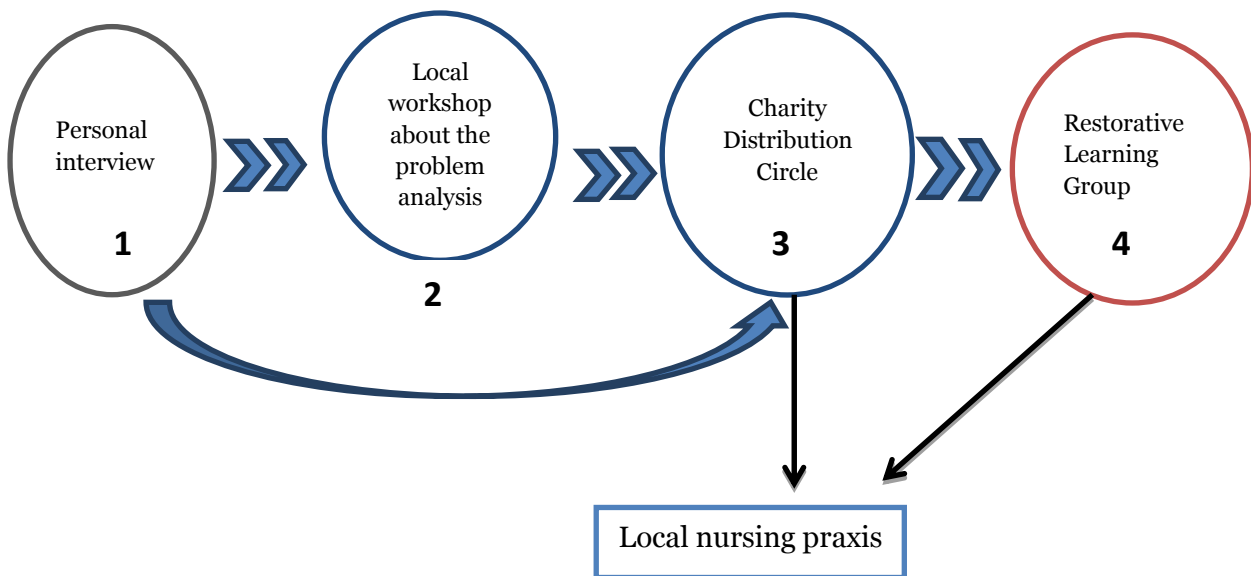
Figure 4. Ági's participation process in the action research

Lessons learnt about action research in an intercultural setting

We here describe the main lessons learnt in the action research. We start with those lessons that refer to the local interpretations of restorative justice, how the locals interpreted participation, justice and interculturality, to what extent it was possible for the dialoguers to take a neutral position and what the impact was of ideological fault lines on local people's perceptions. We continue with methodological considerations about the three main restorative models and other informal practices, and the relation of action and research from the locals' perspective. Then we review what we learned about the life cycle of conflicts, the different layers of the conflicts and people's motivation for and against participation. Questions related to participation, such as motivation, agency and silence culture are discussed afterwards. Finally, we summarise those findings that are related to approaching a fragmented community, such as the neutrality challenge of researchers.

Lessons learnt about the possibility of neutrality in an intercultural setting

The local status of the action research and the dialoguers was a challenging aspect of the fieldwork. It gave us important viewpoints to understand the chances of restorative practices in an intercultural village setting. However hard we tried, we could not take a neutral standpoint in the view of the villagers. Our position was appointed in a local political power space and was anchored to one side of the power: the left-liberal mayor and his council. It deterred some people from participation in any of our activities and had an impact on people's involvement into restorative dialogue processes as well. As the newly elected mayor phrased in an interview: "When you approached this village there was a great conflict between the former mayor and some groups of people in the village since long. Because he approved your activity in the village, many people who got hurt in that conflict refused to cooperate with you. They did not believe that you can do your work impartially. It is that simple."

We identified some background causes related to our arrival into the village that possibly explain this symptom. The restorative justice approach and methods have not had any antecedents in Kisváros before. There was no call for us by the villagers. The lack of recognition or any existing official or informal restorative services in the village predicted that our project had a bumpy road towards legitimacy. The action research got an official allowance from the mayor and the council of the village.

If we followed a bottom-up approach and some local people would have called for assistance in their conflicts, they might have perceived the action research more as their own. This assumption can be justified with the fact that the few cases which ended up in formal restorative dialogues (the Charity Distribution case and the Healing Circle case) were those conflicts where the case referrals were entirely local initiatives, free of institutions. But a bottom up research set-up would have resulted in an even bigger challenge of taking a neutral position in the eyes of the locals and to reach a wide spectrum of people.

Based on our thorough impressions about the village aspiring for a neutral, all-partial position in the eyes of the locals in the power space of the village seemed to be a 'mission impossible'. Labelling based on the existing ideological and political categories was an inherent mechanism that came into operation in relation to everything that was new or was considered as insecure.

The fact that interculturality, and especially Roma conflicts, as a focus of the research proved to be a sensitive issue in Kisváros, created some labels and stereotypes towards the action research project. Within the local settings interculturality as an issue often served as a means of political-ideological communication for the local stakeholders. Thereby dealing with intercultural conflicts was interpreted by some people (from both conservative and liberal stance) as a manifestation of an ideological standpoint. The local perception of interculturality made it more difficult to approach people and to frame often conflicting narratives into 'stories' that we would have liked to address with restorative dialogues.

Focusing on the Roma and non-Roma conflicts were also limiting labels. Terms such as 'Roma', 'minority' and 'racism' were delicate issues. Local people were afraid of being labelled as 'racist'. The sensitivity has manifested itself in the situational avoidance of using the term 'Roma' or 'minority' and substituting them with 'poor people' or 'cultural differences' by the local non-Roma, although it became obvious that they referred to Roma people.

In some situations, the usage of sensitive words became a basis for conflicts. As the following quotation shows, the local Roma people used the term 'racist' very often to label local people they opposed with: "We cannot reach anything if we talk, so we do not protest. The rich people are racist, but the mayor is not racist – that's why they don't like him" (statement of a local Roma person in a group discussion). Roma people presumed racism in most of those situations where they suffered harms regardless of the background circumstances. Stigmatising certain people by the 'racist' label could also be interpreted as an indirect exercise of power.

Dealing with the conflicts between Roma and non-Roma people caused resentment and insecurity in some local people, who thought that these issues served the interests of the local Roma minority and the liberals and went against the majority interests of the village. In such a sensitive power space, political-ideological

standpoints of the local people determined their attitude towards the research: cooperation or aversion. As one member of the newly elected village council phrased it:

> You should consider that if you address certain kind of people, and I don't mean their appearance here, you will lose your credit in the eyes of other people. You will reach that other people reject you. (…) When such people talk about Kisváros they should not talk much, because what they say is not credible. After that, a more credible person won't sit down with you and tell his opinion about the village. He won't make an effort to descend to the level of some of your interviewees. Neither do I. (…) They will not put their face and name besides these people. Look in your heart. Would you? I think you would not either. Equality never existed and won't exist any time. (…) It is a small community. People realised that 'Oh, those people told their opinion! Come on.' – and at that moment Foresee as a brand has lost its value. Even if your work was valuable. You identified yourself with these people, which was a mistake.

The challenge of being ideologically labelled got a higher emphasis after the local elections took place in 2014. As a result of these elections, the mayor and the village council completely changed. The new leaders of the village were those people who were distrustful towards us based on the political fault line. After getting into a power position they started to express negative opinions about the action research based on their perception about our ideological stance. The research team tried to react to this distrust in a restorative way by creating a space for dialogue about the dissatisfaction of the 'new elite'. Although these people have not accepted us as 'independent' actors in the village, our restorative reaction to their problem transformed some of them from resistance towards the acceptance of our activities. Some of them even joined a dialogue with us and shared their thoughts about conflicts, which they had not done before.

While the research group interpreted conflicts as a way to understanding and agreement and strived for their resolution, it turned out that this positive orientation towards the dialogue processes was hardly shared by the locals. Some local people (especially formal and informal leaders) were motivated in positioning themselves in

the local power space (gaining power, representing their own interests, keeping dominant positions). Closed, hierarchical communication and withholding information often fit more into power plays than partnership-based, open communication. Dialogue processes were at some points even perceived as a potential risk to the well-established local power structure.

Lessons learnt about restorative methodologies

Beyond the repertoire of formal restorative methods

Regarding the phases of the implementation, we experienced that we could not spend enough time and resources for trust building. That phase had an even greater weight in an intercultural village community than in other scenarios. Methods of community development and informal restorative practices worked effectively, led to people's cooperation and opened ways of transformation much more than formal restorative interventions. As one of the dialoguers reported: "We were a bit idealistic concerning the amount of time needed to build trust in such a village. Although trust building was planned into the action research process, we approached the village carefully, with humility. But our practical experiences confirmed that even more time, energy and care would have been useful."

From the point of the methodological spectrum, the dialoguers experienced that those initiatives worked well where they had to transgress their conventional and customary competence boundaries as restorative practitioners. When turning to the means of skill- and community development the question was raised: to what extent can the case focus be expanded? Could we interpret the less formal practices still as restorative practices or were these rather tasks on the table of some other professional scenes? Further areas of crossing traditional boundaries of the facilitator's role were proactivity in encouraging referral and in preparation (that sometimes even felt as agitating), and expanding the timeframe of the interventions sometimes up to several months to fit the proceedings of local conflicts better.

In various cases, these endeavours have not directly led to formal interventions in conflict cases. People who participated in any of our capacity-building and skill-

development activities (e.g. Restorative learning group or Restorative school classes) or got involved in less direct, informal restorative practices (e.g. film screening and discussions about conflicts, mentoring Facebook facilitation) got the opportunity to experience the transformative power of dialogue processes. For many people expressing their opinion publicly within facilitated dialogues was a complete new way of communication. We interpreted that step as a precondition of joining a formal dialogue process related to their own conflict. In some cases, we faced that those experiences led people out of their comfort zone, offered new perspectives and built the foundations to get engaged in further, more conflict-oriented dialogue processes.

Although sometimes our restorative activities seemed like a set of episodic actions, without a clear orientation towards more formal, direct and intensive practices, after several rounds of uncertainty, thinking and replanning, we finally realised changes: some of the seeds that we sow, grew their roots. Encounters with the restorative approach initiated a change in local people's attitudes, their perception of conflicts and strategies to cope with conflicts. Close to the end of the fieldwork, we gained a few experiences that confirmed that assumption. The first 'studybook case' call for a healing circle arrived during the last period of the action research. It reflected trust towards the action research and showed that people became aware of restorative methods. Secondly, the fact that after the local elections the new village council responded positively to our request for a dialogue process about the action research and about our participatory videos was a further positive feedback towards the fieldwork.

The relation of action and research – the locals' perspective

We experienced many times that some people have not shared our understanding about the complex setting, concept and practices of the action research, although we did our utmost to formulate the framework together with them and keep it clear. Still, by the end of the field work, on the local closing workshop – where we presented the lessons learnt and discussed it with the locals – the dominant local voice had expected concrete, classical research results (mainly numbers) and ready-made solutions for problems. Despite our efforts, local people have not easily identified

with the role as active contributors and have not accompanied us in the 'mutual learning' process through recurring periods of common action and reflection.

We have to admit though that activating intervention accompanied by a research with the participation of the locals in both processes was a complex challenge even for us. Especially because based on the methodology of action research we had dual roles at some points of the process. For example, during the case work, researchers, local researchers and dialoguers were reflecting together on the dialogue process. A further aspect that made it more difficult for the locals to place action and research on their mental map was the 'personal nature' of our presence that evolved with time. It meant that some local people addressed us with questions and requests proactively. These requests were crossing the boundaries of our formal positions in the action research. That was a further factor that made the interpretation of action and research more difficult for the locals.

Some people interpreted research in opposition to action, like two endeavours that confront each other. Some of them asked: "So do you help us or do you examine us?" These interpretations served as a basis for deciding whether it is worth taking part in the action research or hoping anything from it. But the complexity of thought processes can be specified further: some people interpreted talk versus action, have not understood the 'action' nature of the dialogues or even depreciated talk against action ("just talk, without action").

Lessons learnt about active participation

Two interrelated phenomena: participation and justice

A conceptual framework was used by the action research to understand how people gave alternative understandings of security, justice, conflict, restoration, community, active participation, intercultural settings, minorities and migrants, identity and democratic society – and how their interpretations of these phenomena were transformed in restorative processes. In the following, we describe the local construction of active participation in relation to justice referring to empirical data drown from cases and actions in the field work, especially the School case and the Charity Distribution case.

The operationalisation framework (Vanfraechem 2012b) differentiated between justice in the law – meaning how justice is interpreted in relation to the justice system and the feelings of justice – and justice of the people. During the fieldwork, we experienced that people interpreted fairness in personal interactions. They have not referred to the justice system, nor to formal and informal welfare services in the village in relation to conflicts. They neither perceived the laws and legal institutions as protective nor blamed the laws of being the source of injustice, as it was out of the scope of their lifeworld. That circumstance led us to the assumption that the existing statutory and informal justice and welfare services in Kisváros were not effective: people had not counted on any existing (official and informal) institutions when aspiring for fair processes and fair decisions.

In the School case and in the Charity Distribution case, the two formal cases in which justice was a central issue, the focus was around the fairness of a social procedure or a practice. In both cases, the different actors had very different conceptions about what a fair process was. In the Charity Distribution case, the representative of the Roma community blamed the distributor of aid that the charity packages were not distributed in a fair way and that some poor Roma families did not get access, while other people who were not in need received some of the scarce amount of packages. In the Roma School case, the parents perceived unfair treatment of their kids in relation to a theft: their children were accused of theft and challenged without reason.

In both cases, the people who suffered injustice explained maltreatment by their Roma ethnicity. The lack of communication and the lack of information about the other people's motivation were crucial aspects in both cases. Roma people's discrimination as a macro-level phenomenon strongly influenced the conflict and people's perception of the situation. The Roma people were influenced by previous experiences of being disadvantaged due to their Roma ethnicity, which affected their sense of fairness in the actual situation. Other layers and circumstances of the conflict were not perceived and considered. We assume that would have been the goal of a restorative intervention in this case.

On the other hand, the non-Roma people's fear of being labelled 'discriminative' or even as 'racist' determined their perception of the conflict. Different self-defence

mechanisms, such as withdrawal and control of open communication, were actuated and dominated their actions in the conflict.

We experienced throughout the action research that justice and participation were interpreted by the locals as two closely related phenomena. Injustice was perceived in relation to the lack of participation in decision-making processes or the lack of gaining access to information, goods or services. In the Butcher Festival and Civil Guard cases, the conflict was centred around the lack of opportunity for the Roma people to participate in a local event and in a local organisation. In the Charity Distribution case the Roma people, who felt the charity distribution to be unfair, agreed that more information and more active participation in the distribution process would have helped to improve their sense of fairness. In the School case, the parents perceived it as unjust not being involved into the procedure in which their kids were accused. Their need for participation was violated.

In these cases, the restorative dialogue intended to offer a platform where the different interpretations of a fair process and features of fair decisions could have been displayed and discussed by the participants. In case of an effective restorative dialogue, which happened in the Charity Distribution case, people accepted the existence of alternative truths. As illustrated with the quotation from an interview with a participant of the Healing circle (see Deliverable 5.3): "I already took part in a debate when my colleague told me: 'You are right but at the same time I am right as well.' It happens. She is right, from her perspective. There is not only one 'justice'. Sometimes, there are more 'justices'. Maybe both of the people who are involved in a conflict are right."

The key for achieving those mutual recognitions was to move from the level of 'grand narratives' to the level of personal stories. The grand narratives were often built upon several, previous negative experiences – like discrimination against the Roma – and hid the complex reality and uniqueness of each stories and personal motivations behind those stories. Restorative dialogues could have been tested as platform for personal stories.

Pealing the onion - layers of the conflict

Besides the issue of who is right and who is wrong, we had to consider the life cycle of the conflicts that had a bigger influence in our setting than in any formal and controlled case scenario (e.g. in the justice system). Although we only got episodic signals about the most visible aspects of the conflicts, people lived together with the conflicts on a daily basis. Whenever people met, the conflicts typically got several new 'inputs' and these had an influence in terms of shaping the issues, reformulating the focus and the level of emotional involvement. As Avruch (2002, 29) states: "Individuals, even in the same society, are potentially members of many different groups, organized in different ways by different criteria: for example, by kinship into families or clans; by language, religion, ethnicity, or nationality; by socioeconomic characteristics into social classes; by geographical region into political interest groups; (…). The more complex and differentiated the society the more numerous are potential groupings. (…) This means that conflict across cultural boundaries may occur simultaneously at many different levels, not just at the higher levels of social grouping."

As a consequence of the complex, interrelated nature of the conflicts, it was a hard task to find a firm focus on the cases; different actors were interested in different aspects. Several local narratives ran parallel about each conflict. Sometimes it was a challenge to divide the various interrelated layers that constructed a changing hub of conflicts. Often the official 'grand narratives' were the upper layers that covered the deeper layers of the conflicts. Grand narratives meant official interpretations of dominant local group members, who were entitled to represent the group. These narratives often hid personal demands and interests and resulted in ready-made panels of communication. The culture of silence as a mechanism[12] made it difficult to let us go beyond these 'cover stories' residents, who made the Roma people responsible for all the crimes in the village. The two, incompatible narratives clashed, while other, marginal narratives of local people did not get a voice: e.g. some local Roma people reported to us mixed feelings of not being concerned with crime and sharing the need to fight for public safety but knowing that some of their relatives

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[12] The culture of silence concept is presented in a subchapter below.

commit crimes. On the one hand, they felt unjustly equated with the criminals, on the other hand they have not felt being credible to fight against crime in the village until some of the burglaries were related to local Roma people. Personal, private venting sessions between the dialoguers and the parties were the usual forums for getting an insight into the deeper layers of the conflict. The most challenging step for the dialoguers was to transfer the discussion into a more public and open dialogue process where people share their viewpoints in a wider group of people concerned.

Figure 5 describes the levels of involvement into formal restorative case work, in terms of the circle of people involved. Most frequently, people were open to vent privately about conflicts (e.g. in interviews or in informal conversations with the researchers or the dialoguers) and shared their individual narratives. But they were not willing to have any level of publicity and join a dialogue process with the other party. These cases where those that got stuck at the stage of referral or preparation. In some of the conflict cases, people let us get an insight and follow the life of a case from the side-line. But there was no call for us to get involved in the case in any form, neither using us as a surface to vent, nor requesting mentors to consult with or dialoguers to facilitate (Butcher Festival case, Civil Guard case).

Usually we perceived very similar dynamics of communication in these cases as in those where people used the space provided by us to vent: people talked about the conflicts privately or in their own group and were not open to widen the circle and undertake the conflict publicly (Conflicts of interest between the local youth association and the local Roma people, School case, Roma Conflicts case). In a few cases where people were bystanders of conflicts, they were open to experiment with the facilitator's role and requested us to consult (mentoring Facebook facilitation).

A big step on the scale of involvement were those cases where people became motivated during the venting process to take up their viewpoints publicly and requested us as dialoguers to help. In one of these cases, they were open towards a restorative dialogue within the own 'circle of care', meaning the participation of different people who suffered harm (Healing circle). One case resulted in a formal peacemaking circle with the participation of conflicting parties and other community members (Charity Distribution case).

Staying away from a restorative dialogue process

The Butcher festival case (focus: Roma exclusion)

Civil Guard case (focus: Roma discrimination)

Participation of each party separately on the level of venting

Conflicts of interest between the local youth association and the local Roma people (focus: Silence Culture)

The School case (focus: Roma discrimination)

Conflicts in the Roma community (focus: agency)

Mentoring locals to facilitate

Mentoring Facebook facilitation (focus: how to handle anger)

Personal involvement on the level of healing and recovering relationships - participation of only one party in a direct, formal dialogue

Healing circle (focus: restoration of relationships)

Face-to-face, facilitated dialogue

Charity Distribution case (focus: fair process)

Figure 5. The levels of local involvement into a dialogue process

From a conceptual viewpoint, the main lesson that we learned from these unique scenarios of restorative interventions with different degrees of involvement was that instead of the aspiration for dialogue processes as tools to resolve conflicts, dialogue 'as a goal to reach' was a more feasible approach in the intercultural village setting. In accordance with that, in those cases where a dialogue took place, the fact of a dialogue as a symbolic gesture was more important than the outcome and formal agreement as such.

The culture of silence and its impact on participation

The main challenge related to involvement was the lack of open communication among the people; that we faced from the beginning as a typical, local strategy of conflict resolution. Many people believed that undertaking conflicts caused more tension and considered avoidance as a key for peaceful coexistence. The newly elected mayor phrased it this way: "Self-censorship functions. Everybody thinks it over: if they tell something they cannot easily withdraw it. They don't want to tell bad things about other people even if it is true. In the countryside most people are reserved. They have their opinion about issues. But they won't tell it. They don't want to hurt others. And they don't want to take the consequences – which is happens if they tell their opinion."

The example of our initiative to build up a dialogue with members of an NGO gave a deeper insight into that mechanism. After the community study, the researchers felt that although they described all groups represented in the village, they did not know enough about some people, being members of specific social groups, their opinion and attitudes. Among these groups were the members of an NGO (a group of young locals identified with conservative, rightist attitudes). Based on several unsuccessful attempts to initiate a dialogue about 'hot topics', like Roma in the village, Héra described the phenomenon with the concept of 'silence culture' (see Deliverable 5.3.). A quote from the logbook of participatory observations written by Héra is an expressive manifestation of the silence culture in action:

> I tried to fix the date of a meeting where members of his NGO and the Foresee Research Group could meet. I was interested in the problems of the village and the NGO which should have been discussed at such a meeting. I asked the questions: "What is your problem here, in the village? What do you consider as difficulty in the life of your NGO?" His answer was immediate: "Gypsies." As I was interested in this topic I asked further questions. Primarily, I wanted to know whether he could organise a meeting where members of his NGO take part and discuss the problems with Roma. However, he retracted. As he emphasised, it was a sensitive issue and nobody would have talked about it.

Communication in the culture of silence was characterised by formally opened gestures in publicity, being controlled to avoid hot topics, where opinions could be harsh: "I am trying to talk with members of [the Association]. It is not easy. They keep distance from me in a non-verbal way. There is greeting and handshake - but nothing else. (…) I feel a kind of resistance. It is not easy to identify this resistance because it prevails in a hidden and non-verbal way" (logbook from a local Charity Ball). The hidden resistance against the research team could have been a result of our status in the ideological power-space of the village (see the subchapter: 'The possibility of an independent position in an intercultural setting'), since that NGO was confronting the actual mayor. But the silence culture has been manifested in other interactions among various groups of the village as well, also not in relation to the research team. To give an example, in the case of the 'Butcher Festival' the conflict was about the entrance fee of the festival. The organisers were accused that they did not want Roma people to participate. The mayor wanted to clarify the issue and started negotiations with the organisers about possible solutions (e.g. supporting the festival with free entrance for locals). At that point, neither the organisers nor the Roma community leader wanted to talk about the conflict. They have not even admitted the reasons behind the conflict. The organisers hid behind the desire for profit when explaining high entrance fees, while the leader of the Roma self-government did not want to generate further tension between the Roma community and the organisers of the festival by addressing the issue.

Based on these examples, we concluded that the silence culture cannot be described simply as a characteristic of the relationship between the village and us, but rather as an inherent characteristic of the village life. Both our status in Kisváros and the silence culture were circumstances – amongst others – that resulted in people's reluctance to share their insights into conflict cases and to avoid participation in the restorative activities.

The question of agency and its impact on local participation

When initiating dialogues about the conflicts, we found a typical social pattern, which we called 'gatekeepers'. Gatekeepers were assigned to exercise agency and represent

the groups of interests and their standpoints about conflicts in the village. In case of local conflicts, we saw the tendency that gatekeepers monopolised the access to conflicts, in terms of access to information and controlling advocacy. In many cases they formulated and echoed official 'grand narratives' about a conflict, which often represented their own interests and eliminated the variety of the opinions. That mechanism sometimes generated conflicts within the groups. Gatekeepers were sometimes targets of harsh critics by the group members and challenged whether they really represent the communities' interests or use certain narratives to exercise power over others.

We experienced many times that the gatekeepers tried to use the restorative dialogue situation as a means in their power strategies. They controlled participation in the dialogues, framed and thematised the dialogues, monopolised information or stayed away from the dialogues (see the next subchapter about motivations).

For example, in case of the local Roma people's narratives, we realised in certain cases that the opinion of individual group members contrasted the narrative that was portrayed as a consensual opinion by the local Roma self-government leader. He complained about Roma's discrimination by the local civil guard and treated the endeavour of delegating Roma people in the local civil guard as a central issue. But when the researchers interviewed some local Roma about the issue, many of them reported that there is no need within the local Roma community to become a civil guard.

Due to those functions of the grand narratives that served the conservation of status quo, social inequalities and hierarchical relationships, we often faced the limits of addressing these narratives with a restorative approach. But whenever we could reach the level of individual stories, the approach showed its strengths. Most people who have engaged with the action research remained active and joined other activities as well.

The dilemma came up from time to time on how to handle the gatekeepers who exercised agency over the community: to what extent can we and should we go beyond the accepted ways of the community and search for more direct relationships with people? The action research tried to encourage personal narratives by

restorative methods, which often inferred the violation of the locally accepted pathways of participation and agency.

Motivation for participation: pros and cons

When examining people's motivation to participate in the action research project in general and more specifically in formal restorative dialogues, we faced several challenges and some supportive circumstances. Figure 6 reviews the main challenges that had a negative impact on the motivations towards dialogue processes and hindered cooperation.
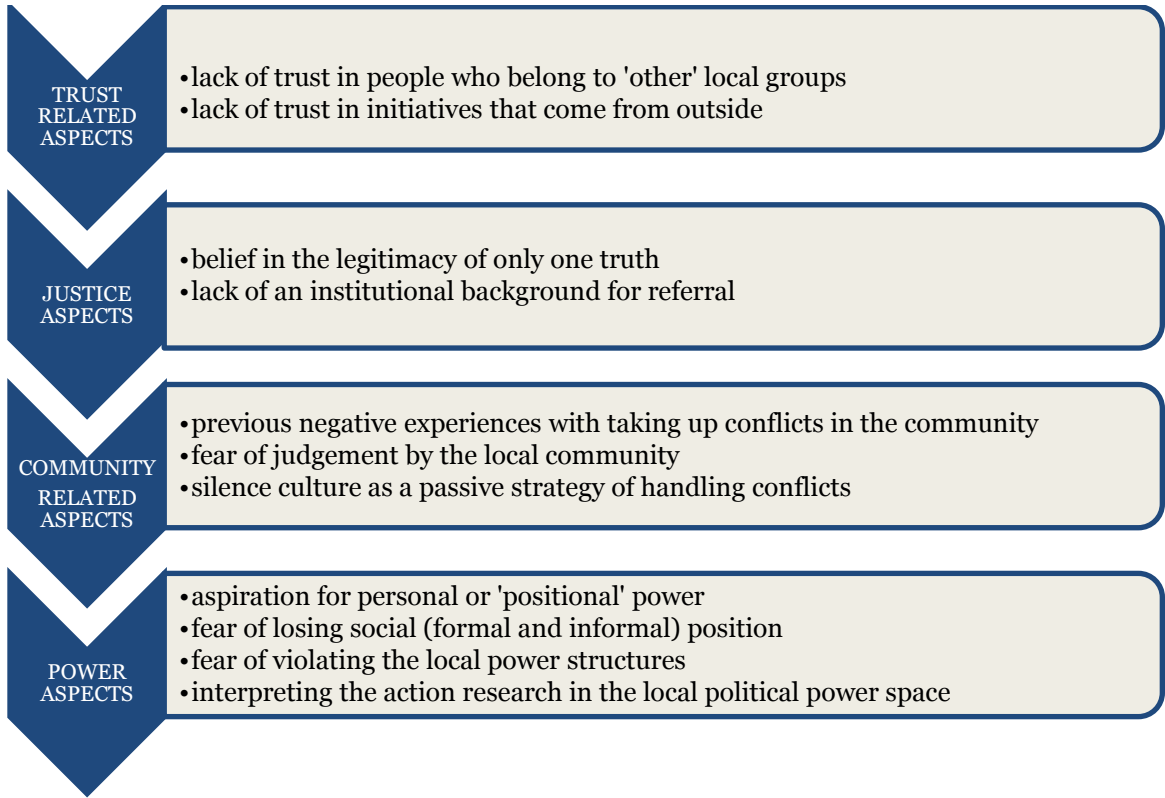

TRUST RELATED ASPECTS	• lack of trust in people who belong to 'other' local groups • lack of trust in initiatives that come from outside
JUSTICE ASPECTS	• belief in the legitimacy of only one truth • lack of an institutional background for referral
COMMUNITY RELATED ASPECTS	• previous negative experiences with taking up conflicts in the community • fear of judgement by the local community • silence culture as a passive strategy of handling conflicts
POWER ASPECTS	• aspiration for personal or 'positional' power • fear of losing social (formal and informal) position • fear of violating the local power structures • interpreting the action research in the local political power space

Figure 6. Factors that had a negative impact on the motivation to participate

Besides the challenges described above, some factors increased people's motivation and supported the willingness to join restorative dialogue processes. Although we often realised that the local motivational factors have not matched with the basic restorative principles of repairing harm and restoring relationships, some of them even opposed the restorative principles. The following examples show that the mechanisms of power could support or hinder participation in different scenarios. The aspiration to exercise control over the dialogue situation was a supportive factor

in joining a dialogue process. This pattern has been most likely practiced by 'gatekeepers', agents who represented local groups of people and their interests. We saw an example of that mechanism when we started to prepare the Charity Distribution case. Without negotiating it with the dialoguers, the leader of the local Roma self-government intervened in the preparation procedure: he approached Roma people whom we invited as participants into the restorative circle. As a consequence, many people from the Roma community stayed away. Some people claimed that the Roma self-government leader convinced them not to join the dialogue. When searching for interpretations for that action, we found that our invitation might have violated the conventional local ways of the representation of interests when addressing local Roma people without the assistance of the 'gatekeeper'. He might have wanted to control the dialogue process and recover his power position in the context of the dialogue through that 'counter-activity'.

A further example illustrates actuating power in restorative dialogues. When we started to prepare a group discussion about our participatory video, we intentionally addressed a local Roma person who was in a less powerful but yet central position in the community to help us inviting people. Due to the goal of the endeavour (to go beyond the official, 'grand narratives' and to get to alternative understandings of local Roma people) we wanted to connect with people directly and not through the 'gatekeeper'. We realised that this was hardly possible through the way how we planned it: the person who we requested did not help us and finally has not even participated in our group event. In our interpretation, it was a risk for him to join and to encourage other people to participate in a dialogue process where the 'gatekeeper', the local Roma self-government leader, was not represented. In this case, staying away from participation and thus from conflict management, or avoidance in other words, ensured safety (to prevent confrontation with a more powerful actor) and reflected the power position of that person in the Roma community.

In those cases where the motivations slipped into the realms of power-based, non-equal and strategic communication, the question was to what extent restorative dialogues have a transformative impact on the parties and their motivational basis? Figure 7 reviews the main patterns of individual motivation for participation identified across the action research.

TRUST RELATED ASPECTS
- trust in the research group
- trust in the own circle of care

JUSTICE RELATED ASPECTS
- claim for justice and fair process

COMMUNITY RELATED ASPECTS
- aspiration to express thoughts and feelings
- aspiration to resolve problems
- aspiration to repair harms
- aspiration to restore relationships

POWER ASPECTS
- aspiration to break out of a marginalised position
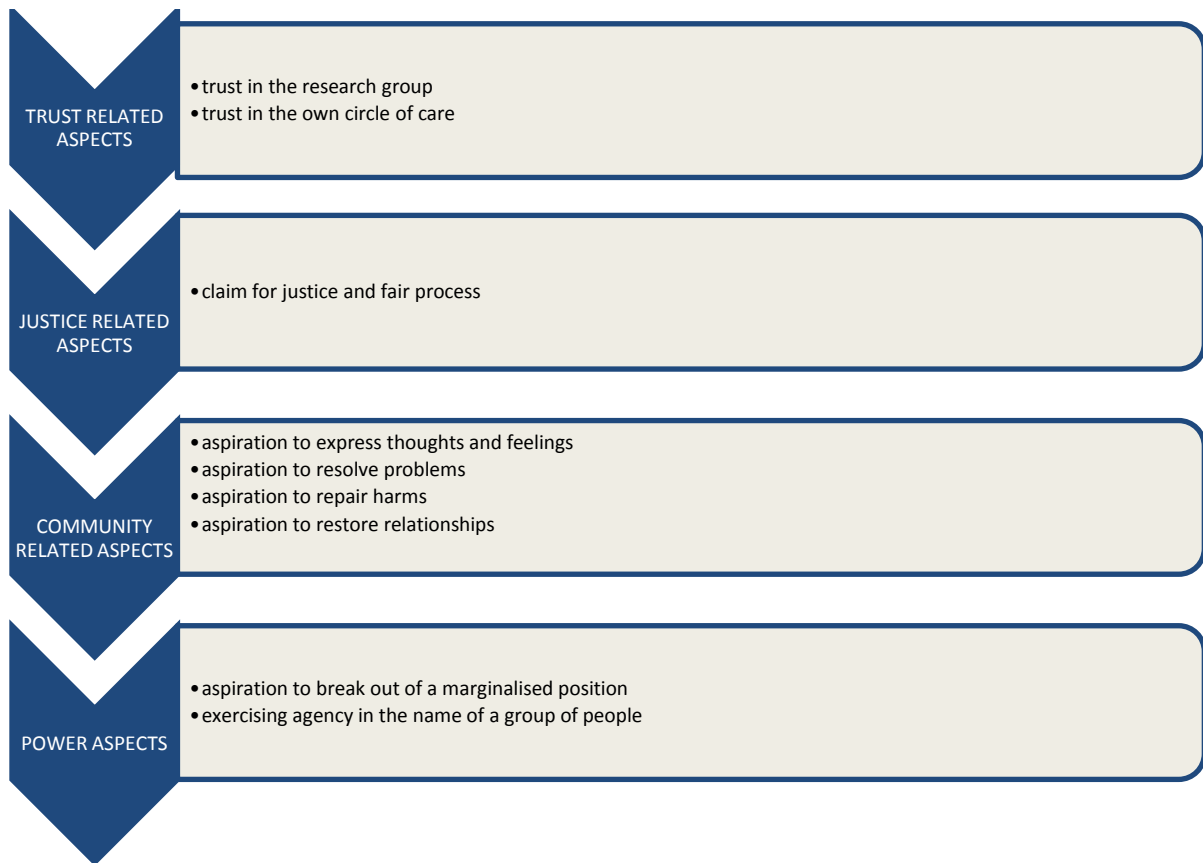- exercising agency in the name of a group of people

Figure 7. Factors that supported the motivation to participate

As we could see, many different factors worked towards and against participation on at least four different facets. The actual dynamics of these positive or negative forces resulted in a motivation with a complex background. Thus motivation could be clearly positive or ambiguous. Dialoguers' interventions could be helped by analysing stakeholders' motivations to participation based on the four motivational facets before planning interventions in the preparation phase.

Conclusions of implementing restorative justice dialogues in intercultural settings

Participation turned out to have a decisive role in the applicability of restorative justice in intercultural contexts. This final chapter offers practical considerations from what we learned about carrying out restorative interventions in an intercultural context.

Designing the process

When building up the action research, a direct, local request for the restorative interventions would have been useful to base legitimacy for the research. Due to the lack of manifest needs for conflict resolution, the resources put into trust-building were crucial keys for the locals' cooperation and involvement. When there is neither a formal, institutional request for the restorative dialogues, nor an official referring body for case referral, the dialoguers could only build upon individual case referrals. As we experienced, that situation implied a higher pressure on personal, individual responsibility-taking. The complex, often dependent and sensitive relationships between the local actors caused a high risk of referral in a small community, which was difficult to take by the actors.

Intensive, personal presence and good relationships with the locals constituted the basis for trust. Trust was built through informal practices and private conversations about conflicts, providing platforms for venting and for discussion about the village and the research.

There were pros and cons for bottom up and top down approaches equally. A top down approach targets formal and informal leaders, crucial figures of the village who approve of the action research and help the research team to orient in Kisváros and exercise agency between the local people and the research team - that is the approach we have chosen. A bottom up approach would not ask for the approval of the local leaders but target local people directly, through informal calls.

Choosing a method

Methodological and conceptual flexibility – an inherent characteristic of the action research approach itself – was even more important in the case of an intercultural setting. Based on our experience, when approaching intercultural conflicts the restorative practitioners walked on 'thin ice': they had to respect the sensitivity of the intercultural conflicts and take into account people's reluctance to speak publicly.

General capacity building activities and social skill development were the optimal first steps to involve people and make them feel more comfortable with the restorative approach and open to speak about the targeted issues.

In an intercultural setting, the restorative practitioners had to count with transgressing their professional boundaries and widen the horizon of formal restorative methods towards community building and social skills development, thereby possibly using the methodological toolkit of other professions. These methods were tested in workshops, film screenings, trainings and learning groups for building trust and strengthening communication between the locals and the research team. People were more motivated to participate in those activities that offered restorative techniques in general and did not focus on any of their own, concrete conflict cases.

When choosing from the repertoire of the restorative methods (mediation, restorative conference, peacemaking circle and healing circle), it was important not to get stuck with previously planned scenarios and methods, but to tailor the restorative toolkit to people's attitudes and readiness to participate in the activities.

Working with cases

Further challenges were related to the dialoguers' role in case work: compared to other settings, a higher degree of proactivity by the dialoguers characterised referral and preparation. When widening the circle, the dialoguers often faced the limits of participation. Most people were ready to talk openly to the dialoguers in segmented, secure, private discussions or within their own group. The hardest step to take was to get from that level of individual venting towards an encounter between the people concerned in a case. In these conflict cases a step back to a less direct, more general level of discussing conflicts in informal settings (e.g. to join local community gatherings and initiate informal talks with people) helped to get beyond the 'grand narratives' and reveal the deeper layers of the conflicts in the community. Bringing people closer to each other, close enough to listen still remained an utmost goal in a context, where people typically avoided open discussions and the 'culture of silence' was the dominant conflict management strategy.

After highlighting the two main obstacles to formal, intensive restorative interventions in conflict cases, such as the lack of an open communication culture and the dividedness of the political-ideological field, we learned what the main areas of intervention are to overcome the obstacles. Firstly, people need encouragement and skills for taking up conflicts publicly, to join dialogue processes. Secondly, they need several sorts of exposure to recognise the restorative approach as a resource and opportunities to accept a neutral, external actor to facilitate dialogues. We also learned that positive personal experiences in any kind of (formal and informal) restorative-approach based dialogue processes do have the potential to overwrite obstacles of the silence culture and offer an alternative to it in order to create the foundations of change.

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