Preparing for Nonviolence – Experiences in the Western Balkans

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1.
Introduction[1]

In this essay I will discuss experiences from training for peacebuilding and conflict transformation in the Western Balkans, extracting lessons learned throughout the past 13 years of practice by the *Centar za nenasilnu akciju* (Centre for Nonviolent Action – CNA). CNA is a peace organisation driven by local activists focusing on cross-border activities in the Balkans. It was founded after the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and started its work in Sarajevo in 1997, in-between several regional wars and the escalation of violence that followed (for instance in Serbia/Kosovo and Macedonia). In 2001, a second CNA office was set up in Belgrade (Serbia).

The wars in the Balkans had a strong ethnopolitical background, or at least they led to a confrontation between different ethnicities and countries. So it was obvious that the region would need initiatives that include people from various sides in order to bridge the gaps along the former frontlines. There was a need to search for constructive ways to deal with the wounds, suffering and distrust caused by the war. That is how the idea of CNA was born, as a necessity obvious to common sense. It may appear strange, but right after the disastrous war in Bosnia-Herzegovina there were (and still are) very few people in the Balkans who had common sense. It took some patience and courage to set up an organisation aiming to gather people who were allegedly meant to be eternal enemies due to different backgrounds and identities. Currently, the CNA team includes people from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro, all cooperating with dozens of partners across the region. In our activities we include people from the whole region of former Yugoslavia: we work with mixed groups from different sides, regions and countries (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia).

To start our work did not require a great theoretical vision. In the beginning, we knew little of different theories and practices of peacebuilding, although we knew that we did work on building peace. Our approach was to learn from each other and from the people we trained or otherwise cooperated with. There is no common ideology that connects us but we are all committed to fighting injustice and violence and we want to contribute to creating better societies. Another important bit of CNA's identity is that we are all equal members of the organisation and share our responsibilities.

The ultimate purpose of all peacebuilding work which CNA conducts is to contribute to building fair and just societies that guarantee equal rights to all citizens, irrespective of their name and background; societies that nurture values of tolerance and justice; societies that make citizens capable of taking responsibility for their communities and of resisting populist, nationalistic and chauvinistic ideologies. We want to contribute to building a society that would seek security by building relationships and bridges with neighbours, populated by people who would distance themselves from crimes committed in the past in their names.

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1   This chapter was first published in 2007 in the online version of the *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation* as part of a thematic cluster on training (with Sprenger 2005 and Schmelzle 2006; see Beatrix Austin in this volume). It has been updated for this volume.

CNA's activities in the period 1997-2002 were focused strictly on peace education and cross-border networking, gathering individuals with professional backgrounds who had a potential for disseminating ideas ("multipliers"). Most of this work was, and still is, barely visible in public, but it has contributed to producing a wider network of peace activists across the region who have developed activities and cooperation that now function independently from CNA. Since 2002, beyond its training courses, CNA has also developed new activities that were much more focused on public awareness-raising and activities for constructively "dealing with the past". Within the CNA-team, we all felt that the time was ripe now and that there was an urgent need for people in the region to face the past in the sense of acknowledging and taking responsibility for past violence. We decided, for example, to work with ex-combatants from various sides (Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina) who had participated as draftees or volunteers in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We organised training courses in mixed groups and after this the ex-combatants discussed their experiences in public forums. They basically told their personal stories, how they entered the war and what they feel now looking back on this. These events were broadly covered by local and sometimes also regional media. In addition, we started to produce documentary films that focus on people's experience of the past wars. More recently, we also conducted interviews with ordinary people in different regions of former Yugoslavia on "reconciliation" and we collected practitioners' peacebuilding experiences for further book publications (Centre for Nonviolent Action 2005, 2007, 2009). At the same time, training activities have been continued throughout.

In this essay I will reflect on the effects of training for peacebuilding and nonviolent conflict transformation. I will reflect on these issues from the point of view of a practitioner – a peace activist and trainer for peacebuilding and nonviolent action – and not as a scientist (although we do strive to combine activism and structured thinking and planning in our work). The text reflects peacebuilding experiences through the lens of an insider – although nowadays it is inevitable to think of roles of both insiders and outsiders and their co-relation. The *second section* presents the goals and methods of CNA's training work, followed by a *third section* that outlines lessons learned and recommendations for practice. The *fourth section* goes beyond the training issue as it discusses general trade-offs and dilemmas we face in our peace work. It also reflects on the difficulty of assessing the impact and influence of training. Training aims at changing the attitudes of individuals. The question is whether conducting "successful" training, or conducting more of these activities, will necessarily lead to a situation where social change will follow. It is a difficult task to generate sustainable force that will have social impact. The *fifth section* draws conclusions and points to remaining challenges.

2.
Training for Peacebuilding and Nonviolent Conflict Transformation: Goals and Methods

2.1
Nonviolence as Vision, Value and Approach

CNA is committed to nonviolence as a value, which means that we object to injustice and violence wherever it occurs, regardless of the context. This is not always easy. Many nationalists are quick to condemn injustice that affects the group or "nationality" they belong to, and at the same time tend to ignore injustice and discrimination of minorities in their society. They perceive and legitimise this as a "democratic principle of majority rule". The countries of former Yugoslavia went through transformations from the authoritarian rule of a one-party system towards political systems designed along democratic principles. These transitions were marked by war and xenophobia.

Unfortunately, in the newly established democracies many nationalist political leaders have exploited their mandates in order to oppress those who were in the minority. Many societies in the Western Balkans also still remain at this stage of development. Nowadays, as former Yugoslavia has split up into several countries, there is a strong tendency that governments and citizens from one country deny the right of the others to criticise politics and social grievances beyond the borders of "their" national state. If people do so, they are labelled as "nationalist". On the other hand, if someone exclusively criticises the injustice observed in his or her own country, he or she will be considered as "being against" that state or "majority nation". In such an environment it is very difficult to make one's voice heard and to act publicly against discrimination and violence. It is difficult to explain to people that criticising politics and grievances in a specific state in this region does not necessarily mean that one is committed to the politics of another state or ethnic group. CNA simply acts according to its nonviolent values and not in loyalty to any ethnic community or state. This is why it is so important that the CNA team is composed of people from different ethnic backgrounds. This gives us much more credibility and space to act than we would have if all members had just one and the same national identity.

There is a strong need for deconstructing enemy images and overcoming what we call "victimisation", which is a widespread (self-)perception in the Western Balkans and means that societies tend to label whole groups (nations) as either victims or perpetrators of violence. These images have to be questioned and deconstructed in learning processes that involve people from different regions and with different biographies. The goal of CNA's training work is to make a contribution to social change by opening peoples' minds through peace education. We

want to sensitise individuals to new ways of achieving nonviolent conflict transformation and to introduce constructive models for dealing with the past. We want to support people in becoming conscious citizens who can accept, and differentiate between, various forms of identities and who are willing to build a consensus in society around inclusive, non-discriminatory values.

This transformational process faces various challenges, in particular in societies that have recently gone through a war. A prerequisite for transformation is that the foundations of the society are critically assessed and revised, which includes the following tasks:

- (Re-)defining injustice
- (Re-)defining identities (born-in; chosen; built through joint experience of violence against one or more specific (sub-)groups)
- Encouragement for action and change (establishing cross-community dialogue, dealing with xenophobia and nationalism, protecting human rights, acknowledging past violence and injustice, and taking responsibility for the past)
- Overcoming prejudices, generalisation of guilt and labelling of individuals or groups (which are typical phenomena in a society in which most people consider themselves as victims)
- Promoting the motto, "Try to live what you believe in"; or, to quote Gandhi, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world".

When we started working in the region in 1997, the term "nonviolence" was completely new in our languages. Even now, more than ten years later, many people misunderstand the concept and confuse it with a kind of "passive acceptance of violence". That is quite opposite to what our understanding of nonviolence is. In my view, nonviolence is an *active resistance to injustice and violence*, while not using violence in that struggle [see also Véronique Dudouet in this volume]. It is not an ideology to fit into, but a stance to adopt in order to find ways to feel good about what you do and how you live. Another term, which was little known and very difficult to translate in our languages, was "gender issue". Both concepts and values, nonviolence and gender-equality, were not rooted at all in our traditional culture(s).

Conducting a training, I would never insist that new concepts should be adopted in order to replace something that had existed previously. Participants should recognise what best suits them and at the same time does not affect other people negatively. As people usually do not like to see themselves as perpetrators of violence, it is important to provide space for an exchange during which different perceptions and feelings may be heard and understood, yet leave it to an individual to make personal and further changes and take action according to new insights gained in the training. It is not the terminology that is important, it is the standpoint and concrete action arising from it that affect lives. That is what counts, call it what you like.

CNA's training methods are meant to be in accord with our fundamental convictions and dedication to nonviolence; they are of participative, interactive character based on experiential learning. At the core is the belief that attitudes have to do both with emotions (Sprenger 2005, 4) and with rationality, and that the potential for behavioural change is much bigger if people experience the effects their behaviour has on other people and on society. Only then can they

see a connection between certain (nationalist or chauvinist) attitudes they have and the effects of these on others (injustice, discrimination and violence). The equation is not always as simple as presented here, and usually people go through a process that is marked by progress and set-backs on a timeline that is not at all linear. Some of the events along the timeline are predictable, some are not; some show regularity, others remain incomprehensible (to me).

2.2
"Target Groups": Choosing Training Participants and Partners for Effective Action

However uncomfortable I feel with the term "target group" (it sounds as if we should be targeting someone and then maybe hit or miss…), I will use it now as I lack an adequate alternative. Having a close look at the profiles of people and carefully selecting participants for training courses is important. The choice should be made according to the goals and strategy one sees as viable, especially if one intends to work with the training participants in a longer-term cooperation. CNA's approach aims to foster and network peacebuilding initiatives in the region of former Yugoslavia. Our work strives for multiplication and building capacities for intensive local work that will continue beyond our own activities.

Therefore, we work mainly with adults and with individuals who have a professional background and some potential for multiplying our values and approach, such as teachers, journalists, NGO activists, social workers, youth workers, political party activists and members of ex-combatant associations. In short, we train those who should apply what they have learned in their work, and we do that within a rather wide region. We have no capacity to conduct intense local community work. We support local community work occasionally, upon the request and initiative of our local partners, whenever possible and with high priority, but we do not have good access to local communities everywhere, a shortcoming arising from our strategic focus.

The first principle that we follow when conducting training is to make sure that all participants join the training voluntarily. Our training groups are mixed, in regional, ethnic, gender and age aspects. Usually people complete application questionnaires, in which they explain their motivation. This is most important. The only exception we made to this procedure was the training with ex-combatants where participants had been invited through meetings and contacts with veterans' associations (some of them even delegated members to attend our training courses).

Some people in the region have assumed that we choose only those participants whom we consider as "like-minded" persons, but that is not the case. Some people also assume that our training aims at transferring professional skills. But our training courses are not meant for this, we do not want to professionalise a growing class of people who form the so-called "third sector" (NGO-sector). We want to work with people who want to change reality. What we read as "motivation" is when people in their application forms address their honest concerns and express willingness to tackle issues such as hatred, discrimination, violence and other forms of injustice. Quite often, they see the sources of injustice located in "the other" community, or country. In the training, they are given a chance to confront those views.

I would not dare to claim that our training workshops cross the rural-urban divide that marks the entire region, but in our work we definitely "discriminate positively" in favour of groups and individuals from rural areas, and those areas which have a lack of peace initiatives. Another important principle of our work is to try to gather people from various micro-regions coming from different communities hostile to each other, and hence not only foster dialogue between them but network potential partners who will need support from each other.

Training "like-minded people" is something we try to avoid. However, like-mindedness is also often rather superficial (coming often from urban NGO people, used on a declarative level), bursting into visible conflicts as soon as the hot issues are tackled. So we do try to foster exchange and networking of "like-minded people" through events designed for this purpose in order to channel more energy into those fields where we feel that more activities would be needed (we engaged, for instance, in a networking meeting with people from Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia on dealing with the past).

We decided to work with former combatants because we see that they have a special potential to foster peace initiatives, given their strong acceptance in society. It is not easy to approach them, as many ex-combatants have very extremist views. But there are groups that are even more difficult to win for cross-border dialogue. We had huge difficulties to approach associations of the families of missing persons, and we had the impression that they were often manipulated by extremist political leaders. At least, many of them proved to be extremely sensitive to any criticism directed at the leadership of their own ethnic group and very hostile towards other communities. Few exceptions seem to confirm this rule.

Both groups are crucial for the process of dealing with the past and both enjoy huge public acceptance and legitimacy. It takes a lot of patience and time to build trust and to involve them in pro-peace actions. War veterans' associations and associations of relatives of missing persons sometimes act in a way that is truly detrimental to the peacebuilding process. But to label them as political hardliners or "spoilers"[2] would be unfair. Their distance to peacebuilding is closely linked with the "victimisation" of societies (see above, *section 2.1*). In addition, many of the reasons for their mistrust lie in the lack of legitimacy and transparency of peace groups (see below, *section 4.1*).

Our approach is ultimately based on the assumption that each individual has a potential for positive social change. It is our experience that very few people want to think of themselves as evil-doers. This is an important starting point in sensitising people. It is our observation that many individuals and groups who are actively participating in the public discourse see themselves as actors who fight for more justice in society, for a legitimate and just cause. It is common ground for all involved, although this usually is not recognised since interests and actions are normally opposed. Only by questioning and reflecting the motives and effects of action can processes of change be initialised. Our training approach is to assume good intentions and non-corrupt motives in individuals who want to change society. We cannot change entire

2   We intentionally avoid the widespread term "spoilers" as it tends to label an entire group whose actions may be defined as spoiling, but whose motivation may not be to spoil but to reach justice as they perceive it. Hence they themselves bear a large peacebuilding potential which may be tapped.

peoples or groups, but we can provide preconditions for this by giving individuals the opportunity to broaden their minds through new insights won in dialogue – given their good intention.

2.3
Multiplying and Networking

CNA training has a proclaimed goal of multiplication, in other words we are striving to build cross-regional capacity and an informal network of active multipliers who bring change within their environments. Working cross-regionally (in all former Yugoslav countries and regions, except Slovenia) has the consequence that we are rather "weak" in micro-regions because we cannot focus on single smaller areas. This has led to a situation in which, for example, we have no network partners within West Herzegovina, even after 13 years of work, but a rather wide network of partners in Macedonia, which is geographically much further away from either of our two offices.

In order to develop a sustainable peacebuilding network we have designed various training programmes that have different goals:

- Basic Training in peacebuilding and nonviolent conflict transformation (and, in recent years, dealing with the past) – trainees without prior experience participate in these 10-day events.
- Advanced Training – for the most highly motivated trainees from the Basic Training courses who need not be interested in doing training themselves; held in two training sessions (2 x 10 days).
- Training for Trainers (TfT) – for those interested in doing training themselves, this format includes practical training preparation and sections on implementation, evaluation and administration; conducted over a period of 12 months, consisting of eight phases and around 40 training days.
- Ex-Combatant Training – a special programme for dialogue between former combatants who participated in the war on the Bosnian, Croatian and Serb sides.

From the very beginning we designed our training as a series of events, since the impact potential of one-off training events is very limited (Sprenger 2005). Individually, impact can be huge, but it is very doubtful that, in the long run, one-off training courses can attain a sustainable force for change, or motivate and support so-called active change agents.

Bridging the former frontlines and ethnopolitical borders is not an easy task. But our experience shows that example-setting helps. The multi-ethnic team of trainers (usually consisting of 4 trainers with different backgrounds) is just such an example. In the initial state of training many participants perceive this as something very unusual. After several days this perception is replaced by the image of a value-based community regardless of multiple or single identities the team members bear. The original reasons to build multi-ethnic teams included: a) attaining initial legitimacy for cross-regional work by having "representatives of various sides"; b) securing the presence of various backgrounds and sensitivities arising from them, c) clarifying expectations and stereotypes at an early stage and incorporating them in the training

framework (participants usually get disappointed in their expectations when hoping for solidarity based on ethnicity, and are pleasantly surprised when experiencing self-criticism of team members of the "other side").[3]

2.4
Sharing and Transferring Responsibility

An important principle of our approach to training is the sharing of responsibility and/or responsibility transfer. Unlike cognitive learning, which is achieved by listening, acquiring knowledge and needed skills, empowerment is a goal that can only be achieved if people take responsibility and stand up for the consequences of their actions. They are then no longer merely recipients to whom trainers deliver what they need, but demand it actively, or remain passive but not free of responsibility. There is a direct parallel to real life: one can nag about things that are bad, unjust and wrong, one can "victimise" oneself – or one can face up to reality and think of possible improvements.

An example for this is an "exercise" that we designed during the Training for Trainers course, aiming at creating "ownership" and the sharing of responsibility for the training process by participants (see *Box 1*).

Box 1
Sharing & Transferring Responsibility: Choosing a Training Location

During a Training for Trainers course we designed an "exercise" that gave participants the opportunity to take responsibility for the process. The group (trainees who had passed a basic 10-day training course previously and were committed to go through an advanced course) was asked to make a decision on the training venue for the next course phase. They were given 3 options to choose from:

The first option was to conduct the training in Western Bosnia, in a Catholic monastery that is located in a small town notorious for extreme nationalism; in this place, during one previous CNA training session, some trainees were threatened by criminals and two CNA cars were stolen (a third car had a different type of license plate, which proved to be an excellent security system, although functional in that region only).

A second option was to choose a hotel in an idyllic landscape in Eastern Bosnia, equipped with excellent facilities. During the war, the hotel was used as a detention camp for Muslim women, who were raped and tortured there. The area is known for ethnic cleansing that took place during the war and many murders of civilians (local villagers). Within the hotel and in the area there are no monuments or other insignia pointing out that it is a place where war crimes have taken place. The management of the hotel claims to know nothing of the past.

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3   Post-training analysis tells us that using mixed trainer teams does indeed have these effects.

A third option was to hold the training in a hotel in Northern Montenegro, where one hotel wing was still used as the base for special police forces. The area itself has not been affected by any war.

It took the group several hours to reach a decision. The final result was, of course, respected by the trainer team. The most important benefit of the exercise was that it opened up different layers of discussion. People asked questions like: "shall we deal with crime and crime scenes?", "who is responsible for security, what risks can be taken?", "is it OK to take the easiest way, and go for the most acceptable option?", "is training something that should happen isolated from reality?", etc.

3.
Lessons Learned

3.1
The Content of the Training Must Match Reality

One of our training goals is to contribute to awareness-raising and to give incentives for responsible social action. People have attitudes towards reality that they express during the training. It is necessary to empower participants to recognise spaces to act and opportunities to change things for the better. At the same time, it seems important to adjust the contents of the training to fit reality. Close links to "real life" are necessary in order to prevent people from getting "high" during the training and developing unrealistic expectations of what can quickly be achieved; because, almost inevitably, weeks after the training, the whole glass-construction crashes due to the lack of support in their own environment. To avoid this, it is necessary to sensitise participants not only for visions but also for the obstacles they will face in reality when they want to translate vision into action.

It is important for trainees to acknowledge how difficult it is to produce visible social impact and to create a nonviolent and just society. Of course, goals that seem to be achievable very soon are much more attractive than process-orientated approaches that will show results and contribute to improving society only in a distant and vague future. How to resist the temptation to set up unrealistic expectations? One answer is that people have to experience it practically and that they have to feel it emotionally. On the one hand, they go through a process of empowerment during the training, and on the other hand, they have to see and feel how difficult it is to achieve visible results on the long road to social change. That is the training framework and all contents should be embedded within it, provided there is enough time to do so.

Trainees should practice during the training something they ought to do in real life. They should not "pretend" during training and then continue all the same afterwards. Besides, it is the feeling of ownership for achieved dialogue and perceived changes that makes people feel obliged to continue on and keep acting – not pushed along by anyone else, but out of their own responsibility.

3.2
"Safe Space" vs. "Space for Insecurity": Practising Criticism

Respecting the needs of participants belongs to the basics of training work. It is necessary to satisfy those needs with respect to a) feeling that one is in a safe space, b) equal treatment and c) respect for diversity. One important lesson that we learned after conducting various training workshops is: "listen, but process yourself, with your team, given that all of you are a part of the same political, cultural and social context". (We are, after all, internal actors.) We also experienced that very often the group strives for internal harmony, despite visible conflicts. There is a "sweep it under the carpet" attitude that needs to be challenged by the trainer team, which in turn may feel uncomfortable for some trainees. Challenging this attitude, I always have to take into account that some trainees might see me as their friend (as a member of the "national" group they belong to), and some might see me as a member of the group of former enemies, due to my (Serb) name and origin. Challenging a majority from a minority position is definitely something an individual will need as an experience in real life, so fostering and practising this can certainly be useful. Thus, while on the one hand it is important to create a safe space, it is, on the other hand, really important to demonstrate space and capacity for challenge and insecurity.

This means that trainers should also have the space to express themselves as human beings and personalities. Trainers do not need to have answers to all questions, they also do not need to show patience and understanding at all times. Most important to me is that I am honest and transparent, which includes that I can make mistakes and apologise for them if needed. I believe that such an attitude is also very useful in demonstrating that one does not need to be perfect in order to take action, that it is acceptable to make mistakes and it is desirable to be courageous and proactive. I think that is one way to empower people and I want to give an example for this. On one occasion one quite loud trainee interrupted a woman telling her that her opinion is stupid. I was very annoyed and I wanted to show that, so I dropped the notebook I had on my lap, which made quite a bang in the room and drew people's attention. I wanted to object to an insult and make a clear statement. Some trainees were "shocked" and perceived my behaviour as a physically violent gesture. I have no problem with that, as I believe that nodding your head at everything you hear or see is not a useful attitude. Beside that, I believe that a trainer should show emotions, particularly if that is also demanded from trainees. We all are meant to be doing peace training because there are things in our societies that hurt us. Fighting injustice is a legitimate motivation for me. Of course, one's own readiness to criticise should then at least be matched by the level of personal readiness to receive criticism.

3.3
Trainers as Facilitators, Providers of Input and Partners

It is important to adjust the training pace to those who are learning and acting in a faster dynamic, but at the same time trainers have to take care of emotionally fragile situations, foster mutual care and solidarity among the group of participants and facilitate communication. Trainers have to

know – at all stages of the training – where the brakes are, to slow down and give room for the settling of thoughts and emotions.

It is furthermore important that trainers create an open space for trainees to introduce their issues on the agenda; however, considering this a general rule may be counterproductive at certain stages of the training. Trainers should act as equal partners in discussions on contents of the training, and their input is needed. They should get involved by expressing their own views, not at least because they as individuals are also part of the troubled society to which the trainees belong (I am talking about training in which trainers act as "insiders"). Therefore, the role of trainers in CNA training courses would often also be to *impose burning issues* and push them proactively until they are openly addressed and dealt with by the group. Only in extremely motivated and self-confident groups, or if we see that single participants fully take on this role of an engine, there is no need to do so and we would leave this task entirely with the group.

Trainers choose the methods and actions according to their own values and selves. There is no recipe for designing "effective" training. The quality of the training depends on the trainer team's sense of what is right and fair. It is of great importance that each trainer and the trainer team clarify their roles, self-understanding and their individual expectations. For me, personally, being a trainer is not important; it does not define my identity that I am a professional "trainer". Conducting training in nonviolent action is just a tool I am using in my peace work to achieve progress towards the goals I believe in. I understand the need for some people to establish professional recognition – which is definitely important in a world where people need to earn their living by doing such work. However, I doubt that a developed "professional" trainer identity is useful or superior in terms of engaging for peacebuilding and social change.

3.4
Dealing with "Difficult Participants" Needs "Dealing with Myself"

Situations that provide valuable challenges for trainers are the following: a) part of the group has no, or only vague, motivation, b) the fear of confrontation prevails among a large part of the group – hence they try to avoid conflicts, c) a "nothing can be done" attitude dominates, or d) the group shares the perception "we are all good friends, it is the politicians who are to blame", or "it is not our fault, we are all nice people". All these situations can create obstacles for the training process, and trainers have to find constructive ways to deal with these difficulties created by group dynamics and, sometimes, individuals.

When confronted with a situation during a training session in which my perception tells me that I am dealing with "difficult participants", I need to remind myself that I am having difficulties dealing with my own reactions, feelings and thoughts. Understanding the reasons for that largely helps me to deal with the rest.

Some of the training methods or individual exercises have a manipulative dimension, where trainees may feel cheated into a difficult situation (see *Box 2*). For certain issues, such methods can be very helpful in unveiling existent and lingering discrimination or similar problems.

> **Box 2**
> **An Exercise in (Experiencing) Discrimination**
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> During some exercises we divide trainees into groups and give them a task, instructing them so that they compete with each other. When conducting the exercise, a trainer discriminates against certain groups and favours one group, in order to make them win. The goal is to have participants experience discrimination and see in practice whether this is noticed – and who notices. Normally, the winners deny discrimination and the losers notice unfair actions of the trainers. Exercise debriefing then goes into real life experiences and draws out parallels.

The feeling of being manipulated obviously collides with the sense of sharing, having ownership of the dialogue and interaction process, the very importance of which I have already stressed. Therefore, I feel that such methods must be applied with extreme care and awareness of what they may trigger. Before applying any such methods, I would need to ask myself whether it would be acceptable for me or my colleagues, and then think of the group and individuals with whom I am intending to work in that manner. Exact limits are difficult to point out, as they depend on the trainer team's perceptions, on the level of trainees' trust towards the team and in particular on the concrete practice of such methods; there is a need to explain those methods and to be transparent about the goals.

3.5
Setting Realistic Expectations

Unrealistic expectations of training impact can be a huge source of dissatisfaction and disempowerment for the peacebuilding trainer team, as I have experienced myself. My colleague Tamara Smidling was more realistic and she reminded us that we had to review and question our initial goals. During an evaluation of a training seminar that CNA held with former combatants, when we were not satisfied and rather frustrated about our achievements, Tamara pointed out that our goal to motivate ex-combatants to get engaged in peacebuilding within a 6-day training was far too ambitious and unrealistic. Instead of regretting what we had not achieved (change of behaviour), we should rather acknowledge what we had achieved: a *change of individual attitudes* in the sense that trainees would no longer adopt or accept attitudes or actions for justifying, advocating and inflicting injustice or violence. Thus, we had contributed to *reducing the potential for peace-destruction*, which was definitely a huge step for the group, given the profile of the trainees (a mixed group of individuals from three sides that confronted each other during the war, all of whom can be considered as "losers", suffering from invalidity and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), poverty, unemployment and the lack of perspectives).

4.
Dilemmas and Challenges
for Peace Work

4.1
Legitimacy and Dependency – Insiders and Outsiders

An important challenge when attempting to influence social change is the question of legitimacy and credibility. You have to be transparent about who you are, what values you stand for and how they are reflected within the organisation you represent (who supports you, what compromises you make, on whom and what you depend). The relationship with different external actors aiming to influence the conflict (foreign governments and non-governmental actors intervening in the conflict) is a very sensitive point in this respect.

Cooperation by insiders with foreign actors, at least in the Balkans, is often suspicious to a great part of the population. There is a widespread prejudice that in such a relationship the local activist is the one who is paid and acts according to orders of foreign partners who supplied him with money in order to pursue their selfish interests or political agenda. The majority of "ordinary people" usually do not trust external actors and ask the question: "why do they act as if they want to help us? What interest do they have?" – a question which is not that misplaced and absolutely legitimate. In order to counter prejudices and conspiracy theories the question "what is your motivation?" has to be answered and requires an honest response, which is sometimes very difficult. I admit that I was only partly successful when explaining to people, for example at meetings with veterans' associations, the Swiss or German governments' motivation for funding our meetings with ex-combatants; or why an evaluator from the Berghof Center is coming to speak with them about the previous peace actions, dialogue meetings or training courses they have participated in.[4]

Being an insider one faces no less suspicion, but it arises from a different angle. Questions are asked along the lines of: "are you acting in favour of a secret political agenda favouring one or the other side?", or: "are you just mercenaries, fulfilling tasks given to you by foreign bosses?" In particular, people observe an organisation's equipment and ask: "how is it possible that your organisation has a new car, when I, as a war victim, receive such a ridiculous sum as annual invalidity pension?"

Once I talked frankly in a TV show about how much I earn – which compares to the salary for employees of the Civilian Peace Service ("Ziviler Friedensdienst") in Germany but is almost the double of the average wage in Serbia. I was criticised by some NGOs who complained that "this fosters mistrust towards NGOs". Those who criticised me earn incomes that are several times

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4   Staff members of the Berghof Research Center (Berlin, Germany) have conducted several evaluations of CNA's work, see Fischer 2001; Zupan/Wils 2004; Schmelzle (with Konjikusic) 2008. See also Fischer 2006 and 2007.

higher than mine, but they would not talk about this or deal with it transparently. The question that comes to my mind is: how can you advocate values of solidarity, honesty and transparency, if you do not live what you preach? If the truth damages the proclaimed superior cause, the problem is not with the truth, but with your methods (and possibly also the cause).

Another serious question for peace workers is: "how independently can you work if you depend on foreign donors?" The question should be rephrased: "does an organisation compromise its values when entering such a cooperation?" A second relevant question is whether it strives for cooperation with equal partners or commits itself to the dictate of donors. There are many more questions to be raised in this context, for instance: can one accept money from a government that conducts wars around the world (the US, for instance), and at the same time retain one's legitimacy and credibility? How can peace organisations maintain their integrity and how do they manage to criticise even those who support them (e.g. financially)? Can one actually find partners who would accept this? I believe that we in CNA have made it possible so far not to compromise on our values, searching for partners who would support us financially, but not blackmail us – but that is not an easy task and it gets ever harder. Some of the compromises we entered were also not easy to swallow.

Our publicly declared unwillingness to accept funds from the US government was motivated by the policy of the US Administration (not by anti-Americanism!); it was not shared by others working on peacebuilding in the region, which may be legitimate if they have a critical distance and dialogue with their funders. In reality, there was dependency and silence instead of criticism, feeding into an image of applying double standards, which has a very bad echo in the public mind and affects negatively the image of all human rights and peacebuilding organisations.

For these reasons, NGOs in general do not have a good reputation in our societies. Very often, we feel the need to apologise for being an NGO, and also for our activities, almost to the extent of saying: "please forgive me, I am doing peace work", as one of my colleagues has put it. I think we should be much more self-confident and focus on the core of what we are doing, saying "I'm not in an NGO, I'm a member of a peace organisation".

The friction point that is often ignored is the one between various actors who act in favour of peacebuilding. Some of the frictions may be explained by existing perceptions by some actors that, for instance, local NGOs are competing with each other (for influence, funds, etc.). The lack of cooperation – sometimes even leading to an obstruction of each other – happens below the surface, because there is a lack of communication channels and constructive criticism. On a deeper level, fundamental approaches (inclusive vs. exclusive) to peacebuilding sometimes collide. We faced mistrust by some other pro-peace NGOs simply because we started working with ex-combatants, who are viewed by these other NGOs as a homogenous group of murderers, nationalists, fascists – as enemies. Instead of being asked about our motives and intentions, we were sorted into the same group as ex-combatants. We were subjected to a generally pursued division of good and bad groups in society. And if the Serbian society is generally nationalistic (as it is), one may act by distancing oneself from Serb identity, or one may be challenging the set-up in which being patriotic and a "good Serb" is the one who hates others, and instead fight for re-defining patriotism as a value that can be in accord with human rights, respect of others and peace policy.

The biggest challenge and open question we face in our work, though, is: how to sustain momentum in our own and other people's engagement for peace?

4.2
How to Sustain Momentum?

"Should I stay or should I go?" – this is the title of a song by The Clash from 1982, and in my view the question reflects a central dilemma in peace work: that is, the constant temptation to withdraw from the struggle for peacebuilding. I often experienced this as I felt overwhelmed by all the conflicts and challenges we are facing in our society. It is easy to say "you should stay and fight" from the point of view of an outsider. Of course there is an enormous potential for peacebuilding in each society; this should not be forgotten. The main challenge lies in the stirring of this "local" pro-peace energy into constructive action and attitude and in making it visible.

We have noticed "negative impacts" in this sense in several cases. Participants from the Training for Trainers programme, for instance, tried to change structures within their organisations. They wanted to introduce more participatory decision-making processes and principles to share responsibility, thereby undermining existent hierarchies. They did not succeed and finally had to leave the organisation. They now face the problem of how to find a new way to act, which is very difficult as they have lost motivation.

Another negative development, which I have observed in my closest environment, is that people who put much energy into peace and conflict transformation suffer from burn-out and get ill. And yes, the question poses itself: "why should you expect to stay healthy if the whole society is ill?" However, let us apply the rule of "start from yourself" also here and strive for effective burn-out prevention. And let us be honest and admit that we fail here, not only as individuals but as structures sharing responsibility for it.

In order to make sure that people stay, and to avoid that they flee (physically or mentally), structures have to be provided, a net that can catch up with, link, empower and support individual partners/associates/trainees. One of the few mechanisms that we have at our disposal to support individuals and keep their motivation up is to invite them to cooperate with us in various actions, be it training or other activities. We have used this mechanism increasingly, not only in order to support individuals but also to energise groups and include them in the cross-regional network, which offers exchange and cooperation possibilities beyond CNA.

But our readiness and desire to be a supporting pillar for many individuals or small groups has limits. We also do not want to become the centre of the network, which is always expected to push initiatives and take responsibility for action. In reality, responsibility is very often left to us, and our partners who form the network do not take as much initiative and responsibility for their own initiatives as we had expected. One big obstacle is the pressure that people feel to earn their living, but people are also reluctant to handle administrative issues and to pursue the role of change agent with all the burdens it brings with it.

Another reason is the lack of financial support that peace groups and our former trainees can pull together for implementing their ideas, projects and activities. The question that remains is

whether it makes sense to conduct Training for Trainers workshops, energise and network people of whom at least half will not succeed in implementing their actions due to lack of financial support, and hence will also not succeed in building further local resources and contributing sustainable efforts for change. I have no simple answer to this question, but what other options are there? Do no more capacity-building work? Create a super-large, centralised peacebuilding corporation that would only focus on fundraising and pass on funds locally? The response that we have found is only partially satisfactory: it lies within peace-promotion activities that mobilise larger numbers (20-30) of peacebuilders across the region for whose activities we secure the funds.

4.3
From "Training" to "Social Change"? Reflections on Impact and Outreach

CNA's work is driven by the idea that peace education can contribute to positive social change. We are convinced that training may be a tool for initiating such processes and may affect individuals at three different levels:

1. Training can change personal attitudes and sensibilities, it can contribute to clarification and empowerment (attained at different speed: superficial and only verbal; slow but deep; delayed and surprising; invisible, i.e. not easily perceived by others).
2. Training can contribute to change in the environment (institutions and groups) that trainees come from; very often during the training, trainees have gained capacities to better address conflicts which exist in this environment.
3. Training can lead to trainees' action towards more explicit peacebuilding in the wider society; trainees adopt inclusive approaches and contribute to extending peace constituencies.

In discussions of the impact and outreach of peace education, the third level is often seen as the ultimate goal and the previous two levels are neglected. But my experience tells me that peace education can only work following these different stages and that one cannot skip the previous two levels in order to achieve change in a society. At the same time, not everybody is either capable of going through all three stages or of passing through them quickly. The pace depends on individual strength and the challenges one faces at the first and the second level. It is my experience, for instance, that most ex-combatants that we have trained have remained at the first level (change of personal attitudes). But this should not be interpreted as a shortcoming in terms of not having produced a profound change of society. In this case, the change of personal attitudes means reducing an important source of conscious and unconscious behaviour that ends up in peace-destruction (for instance, actions that justify, advocate and inflict injustice/violence and are serious obstacles for effective peacebuilding).

Our training is based on the assumption that once trained, participants will be so-called "change agents", or as we usually say "multipliers" who initiate change by influencing their environments. Very often people decide to participate in our training courses because they want to acquire skills to resolve or handle existing social conflicts in a better way. However, unless these initial expectations change, disappointment is inevitable. Why so?

Each of us living in a war-torn society has a variety of conflicts we can choose to deal with or run away from. By going through a cross-community peacebuilding training it is very likely that participants will develop ways to understand and deal with these conflicts in a more constructive and just way. But this deeper understanding of conflict may at the same time bring them "in conflict" with people in their environment. Some of our trainees have had the experience that, due to their increased level of "empathy" and tolerance, they are considered as "traitors" who act against so-called "collective national interests", especially when they express a view that seems to diverge from what is defined as mainstream by ethnopolitical discourses. As a consequence, for these people the new situation is probably more difficult to deal with than the previous situation. Before the training, they felt exposed to the cross-community conflict only when they crossed the community borders. Now, they have to face conflicts all the time (e.g. in their family, group of friends or work environment), which is much harder to stand. Therefore, the time after the training is crucial in terms of sustaining "change agents". They need support and ongoing empowerment to retain the energy that is needed for action focused on change. Being an insider trainer, I myself went through this experience. Dealing with conflicts will catch up with you even in safe areas of your life, starting off with family dinners (confronting xenophobic comments), talking to friends (who express nationalistic views), etc. In other words, people may find themselves in a situation where their private life is strongly affected and turned into a conflict arena, and it is no longer a sphere in which energies can be recharged. In the work place, in institutions such as schools, and generally in a public environment, the situation is even more difficult. Questioning dominant discourses, and acting to address cross-community conflicts, remains extraordinarily difficult, because each side of the conflict perceives the other(s) as large groups of "enemies" who are held responsible for discrimination and hostility. Hence, even if you have distanced yourself from "your" side's attitudes, you will still be perceived as an "enemy" by most of the members of the other community, as they do not see you as an individual but as one of "them". This means that your burden has just doubled, not reduced.

Therefore, before judging people on how slow or inert they are, one should take this dynamic into account and try to understand it.

So what are our criteria for success or failure? We can assess the quantity of cross-border cooperation in peacebuilding, the number of groups and individuals willing and active to engage in human rights protection and cross-community dialogue, or confront mainstream chauvinism and nationalism in their environment. But how can we assess the quality of cooperation?

The timeline is important, as it is a variable that determines the actual meaning and value of specific actions. Whether a certain action happened two years after the war, when the threshold of violence was very low, or whether the same happens 10 years on needs to be assessed differently. Initiating cross-border dialogue at different conflict stages has a different meaning, and it is important to adjust and change the contents of the dialogue, training or public actions according to the timeline. To give an example: if you set-up cross-border dialogue meetings in a climate where such actors will be physically attacked, sacked from their job, threatened, along

with their families, by neighbours or security services, can you really claim success, leaving your associates and partners with shattered lives overnight?

I would say that one walks a thin line. I cannot take risks for other people nor should I judge them according to their readiness to take risks. Some of the people we worked with, who felt initiated and empowered through our programmes, have faced such troubles. Some of us were also threatened occasionally. This is often included in the price of peacebuilding. Showing solidarity was our response. It seems to have nothing to do with measuring the impact of peacebuilding actions – yet I would argue that these alleged "side-effects" should be measured as well. Being courageous definitely is a part of building peace, but it is difficult to say what is acceptable and what is not. Each of us must do it for herself/himself. I do not pay other people's bills, just my own.

5.
Conclusion and Looking Ahead

As outlined in this essay, CNA has set up a variety of training programmes aiming to respond to the different needs and capacities of participants. Apart from Basic Training courses, we have developed an Advanced Training and a Training for Trainers programme as tools for ensuring multiplication. However, we can never be absolutely sure about the results and impact, or whether we achieved our goals. We really do not know exactly what happens in the long run after the training courses.

External evaluations do confirm that our training does activate, motivate and prepare individuals for peace work and that dozens of participants took action, which they organised independently from CNA. Nevertheless, these individuals face various obstacles in reality when attempting to implement their ideas. Resistance might emerge from their private or professional environment. Trainees who have strong leading positions within their institutions have more power, more confidence and more resources to implement their ideas. However, even under very favourable circumstances, they can only plan activities if they have access to financial support. In our societies there are very few funding sources for this, which means that in most cases funding has to come from abroad. Dependency on external donors remains a serious problem.

In general, there is insufficient money and not enough patience available to adequately support peacebuilding over a longer period. External donors often want to see fast results and do not feel committed to long-term engagement in one region. This applies also to the Western Balkans, where international donors have invested a lot in short-term reconstruction programmes but much less in programmes for long-term peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding processes in general need time. Peacebuilding processes in societies that are torn apart by ethnopolitical violence need even more time. Individuals change their attitudes and behaviour only during a long-term process. It may be possible to calculate in money and time how much it takes to start a war, but to try such calculations for peacebuilding will fail.

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"Making war" is much more efficient and pays back the planned dividends quickly. Building peace is not such a fast endeavour. It takes much longer to rebuild relations and trust, and if both can be created at all, they will remain fragile over a long period of time.

Reflection on success and failure, influence and limits of training activities also needs to take into account a longer timeline. The need for "impact measurement" has been introduced in recent years, but it is often donor-driven and limited to short-term evaluations that count specific events, numbers of participants and some randomly collected statements. Of course, it is necessary to reflect on the impact one wishes to achieve by a specific activity, as this also fosters strategic thinking and sets milestones for reflection. But, if impact measurement is only done because it is requested by donors in order to justify spending of resources, then it would really be a wasted chance – as it indicates an intention to be proven right instead of honest analysis and readiness to learn from our own mistakes, failures and achievements. This kind of impact assessment is aiming to legitimate training success rather than to generate systematic insights [see also Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church in this volume]. There is hardly ever a long-term assessment of impact. Even if the long-term process is evaluated it is hardly possible to "measure" results. It is difficult to identify impacts of single events or activities, as these are embedded in a complex set-up with numerous actors and impacts dependent on various internal and external factors.

Evaluation should not be done in terms of "measuring success" in the first place, but should contribute to self-reflection and encourage peace activists to be more conscious about what they do, how they can set realistic goals and find strategies that match their context. Peace work needs sound analysis of the context, convincing strategies, legitimacy and transparency of peace workers. But excellent conflict analysis, strategy and integrity will not generate any impact if agencies lack social support and sufficient resources. And so we have come full circle.

6.
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