

A multi-stakeholder dialogue process for peace in the Basque Country

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Abstract: The article presents a dialogue process within the framework of the Basque Country conflict. Taking the proposals of systemic conflict transformation approach, a scene of dialogue was designed to generate consensus on the fundamental issues that involves peace in Basque Country. After exposing the study's theoretical foundation, the article explains the elements and phases of process of ongoing dialogue. Later, it presents consensus obtained on the questions worked, that is, reconciliation and coexistence, memory and historical narrative, the political dimension of conflict, citizen participation for peace, victims and prisoners. Finally, the paper presents recommendations for peace in Basque Country, as the participation of all stakeholders, the adoption of the human rights as common floor for peace, the disarming of ETA and the transformation of penitentiary and counterterrorism policy.

Key words: Basque Country, systemic conflict transformation, peacebuilding, multi-stakeholder dialogue, Open Space Technology.

Resumen: El artículo presenta un proceso de diálogo en el marco del conflicto del País Vasco. Desde una aproximación sistémica a la transformación de conflictos, se diseñó una escena de diálogo para generar consensos sobre las cuestiones fundamentales para la paz en el País Vasco. Tras la fundamentación teórica del estudio, se explica los elementos y fases del proceso de diálogo sostenido. Posteriormente, se presentan los consensos alcanzados sobre las cuestiones trabajadas: reconciliación y convivencia, memoria y narrativa histórica, la dimensión política del conflicto, la participación ciudadana para la paz, víctimas y presos. Finalmente, el artículo presenta recomendaciones para la paz en el País Vasco, como la participación de todos los grupos de interés, la adopción de los derechos humanos como núcleo para la paz, el desarme de ETA y la transformación de la política penitenciaria y antiterrorista.

Palabras clave: País Vasco, transformación sistémica de conflictos, construcción de paz, diálogo multiactor, Open Space Technology.

Introduction

From an academic standpoint, approaching peace and deep conflicts is prolific and heterogeneous. In a very abridged manner, Gawerc (2006) states that we find structuralist proposals basically focused on political issues, while other psychosocial proposals underscore basic human needs, human relationships and the psychological elements underlying deep conflicts.

From the systemic viewpoint of conflict transformation, both structural and psychosocial issues have specific weight, since conflicts are conceived as complex systems, this is to say, as a network of psychological, social and structural elements related to one another, being the relational dynamics between the elements the driving force that maintains the system/conflict in balance, thereby what determines its perpetuation (Coleman, 2006 and 2012; Körpen *et al.*, 2011).

Thus, transforming conflict and peacebuilding require breaking the relational dynamics between the central elements of the system/conflict—called attractors—either psychosocial or structural in nature, and with it tip the balance of the system/conflict in order to transform it (Vallacher *et al.*, 2010). Coleman *et al.* (2007: 14) say that “what remains constant and functions to perpetuate the conflict are the dynamics that define the relations between the psychological and social mechanisms inside and among individuals and groups”.

The system/conflict’s attractors are states or patterns of change toward which it moves (Novak *et al.*, 2012). In short, attractors are very stable and highly consistent psychological, social and structural factors, which keep strong relations between them and with other elements of the system/conflict. Examples of attractors in deep conflicts are asymmetrical balances of power, histories of ethnic-cultural or political-economic domination, zero-sum relations between group objectives, high levels of inter-group hostility, strong group regulations, negative emotional atmospheres of hatred and fear, or rigid, simple and polarized thinking and perception patterns.

From this standpoint, facing conflicts implies breaking the systemic dynamics that maintain the robustness of conflict attractors and develop new ones for peace so as to generate new balances. For these peace attractors to appear, it is proposed to generate initiatives with diverse objectives, keeping the short and long terms in sight—cease violence, peace accords, reconstruction of the social fabric and reconciliation—and which involve multiple elite groups, intermediate social strata and the citizenry (Novak *et al.*, 2012). Among the initiatives to generate peace attractors, the authors

point out the possibility to create action networks from dialogue between people with different points of view and apply procedures based upon deliberative democracy.

The creation of spaces for participation and dialogue is deemed fundamental in every approximation to peacebuilding. From the systemic approach, the need to generate spaces and processes of participation, interaction and dialogue with people who belong to groups or sectors of stakeholders, who are key for peace, is emphasized (Duran, 2013; Unger and Wills: 2006; Wills *et al.*, 2006). As Lederach (1998) states the need to establish horizontal and vertical bridges for peace, making the conflict lines cross both in the same social strata and between them; Wills *et al.* (2006) verify the need for multi-stakeholder inclusive interventions, where the members of critical groups and various social sectors are present, namely: political parties, the media, the church, education and NGOs and local human rights groups.

Following the systemic proposal of conflict transformation to build a sustainable peace scenario and emphasizing the participation of multiple stakeholders of social relevance, the present study was proposed with the basic objectives, on the one side, of favoring the development of trusting relations between young people from political parties, unions, universities, and pacifist and human rights movements; and on the other, reach basic consensuses on the central challenges for peacebuilding in the Basque country that serve as recommendations to follow.

Case study; conflict and peace construction in the Basque Country

The case of the Basque Country can be considered a complex ethnic-national conflict, as it presents characteristic dimensions of this sort of conflicts (Gurr, 2000; Horowitz, 1985). Following a complex psychosocial perspective, we can infer that the central attractors in the Basque case, i.e., those elements that keep the conflict in balance, are linked to a negative interdependence in the construction of the Basque and Spanish (and French) national identities, a national contradiction in political terms and a struggle for power and national sovereignty on the Basque territories in Spain and France, and the utilization of various forms of political violence by the Basque National Liberation Movement (BNLM) [Movimiento Vasco de Liberación Nacional, MLNV¹] and agents directly or indirectly linked to the Spanish

1 Basque National Liberation Movement, which comprises ETA as armed organization, the political parties Herri Batasuna or Batasuna (outlawed) and Sortu (legal), and other social structures.

State such as the State Security Forces, or parapolice and far-right groups such as Antiterrorist Liberation Groups (ALG), Basque Spanish Battalion (BSB) or the Apostolic Anticomunist Alliance (Triple A), with their logics of social legitimation and its consequences at national level.

These anchors for conflict seem to be linked to a series of psychosocial processes such as negative impacts on psychosocial Basic Human Needs—as the development of collective identities, security, sense of justice or perception of control on the proper destiny— or characteristic elements of polarized collective identities, such as rigid perception and thinking patterns, simplifying and polarizing, confrontational and conflict-avoiding attitudes or contradicting historical narratives (Mínguez-Alcaide, 2013).

Bearing in mind blurriness as a tool to analyze complexity, the Basque conflict shows as a clear instance of such blurriness. This we notice in a very complex social structure, with a sizeable part of society which increasingly has maintained rather intermediate positions in the conflict, expressed in its contrariety both against Euskadi Ta Askatasuna's (ETA) violence and the Spanish State's antiterrorist policy, in an environment of heavy pressure on polarization by the poles of conflict (BNLM and the Spanish State).

This is also noticed in the identity plurality of Basque society, for in Basque territories there exist various forms of identification with the Basque and the Spanish (and French), which maintain a continuum from the most monolithic identities of stressed ethnic-cultural character, built upon the perception of zero-sum, to the most open in which various forms of compatibility among them are glimpsed.

From a historical point of view, there has been a number of stages in centuries XIX and XX, in which the struggle for the sovereignty and administration of Basque territories has been a central element (Apalategi, 2006). This way, the use of political violence with the goal of retaining power over Basque territories is an element present in the history of the Basque Country in the XIX and XX centuries and in the first decade of XIX. To understand the Basque conflict from a recent historic perspective, it is indispensable to bear in mind General Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975), and mainly the most recent past of transition and construction of a liberal democratic system as of 1975.

The contemporary manifestation of the Basque conflict is linked to BNLM and ETA's armed activity. ETA was born in 1959 as a continuation of the nationalistic student organization Ekin (Alvarez-Enparantza, 1997) and developed its vision influenced by the ideologies of revolutionary and national liberation movements in the 1950-1970's (Lizarralde, 2012).

After fifty year of existence, with more than 850 deaths perpetrated, and having conditioned the social and political life in the Basque county and Spain since its inception, on January 10th 2011 ETA sends a video and a communique to *Gara* newspaper, in which it declares a permanent and general ceasefire that can be verified by the international community (ETA, 2011a). Later on, after the Donostia-San Sebastián International Peace Conference, held on October 17th, 2011, known as Aiete Conference, on October 20th, 2011, ETA announces the definitive cessation of its armed activity (ETA, 2011b).

Method; a dialogue process for peace in the Basque Country

The objective of the present study is to generate a space of trust and sustained dialogue, in which young people key for peace —political parties, unions, pacifist and human rights movements, the media and the university— would be able to deal with the central challenges posed by peacebuilding in the Basque Country, reaching consensuses as much as possible and making them work as recommendations to support the peacebuilding process. The continued dialogue process took place between November 16th, 2012, and January 25th, 2014. Over this time, seven dialogue sessions were held by means of Open Space Technology (OST) and a final session using step-by-step consensus.

In the present section, we will present OST, the collective of participants implied in dialogue, and also the stages and results produced in the dialogues.

Open space technology, a self-organizing dialogue tool

It is an easy-to-learn-and-use tool for dialogue, which can be applied to solve a large number of relevant and complex issues in a self-organizing and effective manner, with a wide variety of actors with various viewpoints (Owen 1997a and 1997b). Its functioning requires passion and responsibility for the topic to deal with, this is to say, a genuine interest in it.

The principles that guide OST are four. *Whoever comes is the right people*: the emergence of issues can occur interacting with any person or group with which the passion and responsibility for a topic is shared. *Whatever happens is the only thing that could have, be prepared to be surprised*: no actor shall control the event, there has to be work on the here and now and in the capability to be surprised. *Whenever it starts is the right time* and *When it's over, it's over* (within this session): define watch as a collaborator in the event

that should not take timing rigidly, starting and closing dialogue when the stakeholders decide so.

The central and distinctive element of OST as a method to dialogue with large groups is self-organization (Bunker and Alban, 2006). The collective itself decides the topic to deal, their order in the agenda; each participant decides their spaces to participate and on which topics; therefore, the formation of group dialogues is spontaneous and self-organized starting from the stakeholders' own interests.

One particularity of OST, its only law: the Law of Two Feet, which states: "If at any time during our time together you find yourself in any situation where you are neither learning nor contributing, use your two feet, go someplace else" (Owen, 2008). This tool allows people to change their place of dialogue at any time, begin where they can learn or contribute or where they can build together.

The basic elements of the OST's structure are Circle, Bulletin Board and Marketplace. The group makes a large circle to begin to work. The Bulletin Board is nothing but a wall or large panel where participants place their topics. In function of the stated issues, the agenda is produced, indicating when and in which space they will be approached.

Once the agenda is built, Marketplace opens. This means that all the participants can attend what they are interested in, i.e., they can join the topics' proponents and create groups for dialogue. When the first groups finish their discussions, marketplace opens again and participants can make new dialogue groups in order to discuss the new topics of the agenda.

An OST event can close in various manners, but a usual way is to make use of the Talking Stick. Being all the group in a circle, the participants express their views, assumptions, conclusions, reflections or feelings about the event freely, being the bearer of the stick, the only one who can talk.

Participants; a multi-stakeholder group

Two were the criteria established to gather a plural and heterogeneous multi-stakeholder dialogue group: *a)* the participation of people from various spheres of acting in the Basque Country, mainly the political, the social linked to peace and human rights, and the academic; *b)* voluntary and personal participation, not as a representative of the reference organization.

The initial dialogue group comprised 22 people —10 women and 12 men— aged between 27 and 40 years, with a median of 34 years. Over the process the number of group members reduced, as new labor obligations

prevented them from keeping up with the process of eight dialogue sessions; this way, 17 people ended up comprising the group.

It is important to say that not all the participants were present the eight sessions due to various reasons (labor, personal, health, etc.). The criteria to carry out the sessions were the presence of at least ten attendees and that people representing different sensibilities participated. In the coming section, the one related to sustained dialogue, the number of people who took part in the sessions is specified.

Out of the total participants, nine of them belong to political formations with representation in Basque institutions;² this way, all the political spectrum was represented. On the other side, five participants work for pacifist and human rights organizations that are part of the Basque movement for peace; two of these individuals belong to an organization close to ETA's victims.

Regarding the rest of the collective, three are social-sciences and humanities university professors, two come from unions —one is affiliated to the Basque Nationalist Union, while the other is not— a social and organizational psychologist, another is a journalist, and a citizen, whose mother was threatened by ETA, owing to his political activities. Finally, it is worth pointing out that two people from the academic environment and one from the pacifist movement are linked to grassroots Christian movements.

In order to choose them, different approaches were followed. In the first place, the youth groups of the different political organizations were contacted, and a meeting with them was requested to explain the details of the project —basically the concept of sustained OST, the collective's empowerment and multilateralism— and present the formal invitation so that the member attended of their own volition, not as a representative of the political organization. Secondly, the same procedure was undertaken for the five most important organizations of the Basque movement for peace. The rest of the participants comprised in the group were acquainted by the researcher, as they have taken part in a previous research.

Stages of the process; sustained open space technology

The continual dialogue process was not fully designed before starting, only the use of OST was proposed as a tool to dialogue about peace in the Basque

2 Basque Nationalist Party; Socialist Party of the Basque Country–Basque Country Left; People's Party of the Basque Country; Union, Progress and Democracy; United Left; Sortu; Aralar; Alternatiba; Eusko Alkartasuna. The four last parties electorally compete under the name EH Bildu.

Country. The collective of participants put forward the agenda for the meetings, which was created by means of the bulletin board. After proposing all the topics, seven large blocks of issues were created; the research team proposed the concrete schedule for the process.

An important aspect of the process was the systematic delivery of information. In each session, the collective produced minutes in which ideas, knowledge and visions of the topics dealt with were registered, as well as the agreements reached. The minutes were gathered and transcribed verbatim, turning into documents of minutes with the main contributions from each dialogue session. In total, some more than 100 pages of ideas were gathered on the different topics. Each document was sent via email to the collective so that each participant was able to analyze it and make new complementary contributions, should they consider.

The process had eight stages, an initial session to establish the schedule of topics, six dialogue sessions under OST to approach the various issues stated and a final session to establish basic consensuses.

1. Opening session; construction of a schedule for the dialogue sessions and appreciative dialogue dynamic

In the first dialogue session 16 members of the group participated; after the introduction to the process, there was an exercise to outline the topics to deal with over the dialogue processes, following the bulletin board. The group was elicited to expose the main challenges posed by peacebuilding in the Basque Country. The topics, once announced, were joined by affinity, producing seven large blocks. Then, the topics were prioritized by means of a weighted voting —the participants gave seven points to the block they deemed most important, six to the next most important, and so on to reach the block to tackle at the end, which they gave one point to—. The order of the topic blocks followed by the process was:

- a) Peace, conflict and violence
- b) Memory and historical account
- c) Political issues
- d) Citizen participation for peace
- e) Reconciliation and coexistence
- f) Full reparation to the victims; treatment of prisoners

To close the initial session, an exercise in appreciative dialogue was undertaken in view of approaching the positive aspects Basque society has to reach peace. In groups of four, the participants stated and dialogued on the characteristics of society that can serve to develop the process and creation of a sustainable peace scenario in the Basque Country.

2. Thematic session: a) peace, conflict and violence

In the first dialogue session, twenty people took part. Topics linked to peace, conflict and violence were approached both at general or abstract level and associated to the Basque conflict.

The bulletin board contained 23 interest issues, which were structured in six dialogue spaces. Two spaces were devoted to peace; one of them to speak of the concept of peace at global and abstract level, and the other linked to peace in the Basque context. In like manner, two spaces were devoted to conflict, one on its general nature and the other on the Basque case, and two spaces to dialogue about violence: the first aimed at the various ways and concepts of violence, and the second on the forms of violence and its perpetrators in the Basque context.

3. Thematic session: b) memory and historic account

In the second dialogue session there were fifteen participants. In this session issues related to the construction of the memory and historic account of the past were approached.

The bulletin board comprised 32 topics that were grouped by affinity to be dealt with in six spaces. Two of them were devoted to the construction of a common account and memory's public policies. A third space, to human rights violations, victims, the perpetrators' motivations and the ethical and political meaning of violence. In the fourth space there was dialogue about the role of political parties and social agents before conflict and violence. The fifth space was devoted to civil participation in the construction of memory and historical account. Finally, in the sixth space the transmission of memory and historical account to younger generations was approached.

4. Thematic session: c) political issues

In the third stage 10 people participated, aspects related to the political dimension of the Basque conflict were approached.

There were fourteen topics in the bulletin board, later they were structured in four dialogue spaces. In the first space, the importance of social issues in the construction and development of the National States was discussed. In the second, nationalism, its various forms and national construction were worked with. In a third space there was dialogue on the need to give peace preference over partisan interests to reach specific agreements. In the last space, there were talks about the legitimacy of deciding the future of the political status of the Basque Country in a democratic and legal manner.

5. Thematic session: d) citizen participation for peace

In this space 10 members of the groups participated and there was dialogue on the role of citizenship in the development of the peace process.

After proposing 15 topics, three dialogue spaces were opened. The first space was devoted to the what for of civil participation, this is, the objective civil participation must fulfill and in which spheres citizens should participate. Second, it was discussed how to facilitate the citizens' participation in peacebuilding and with which tools. Finally, the various social actors that should have active participation in peacebuilding were discussed.

6. Thematic session: e) reconciliation and coexistence

In this session, ten people participated and there was work on various issues linked to social reconciliation and the reconstruction of civil coexistence.

Twelve topics were proposed and four dialogue spaces were created. In the first there was dialogue on the direct implications of social reconciliation, for instance, the role of forgiveness and the recognition of the damage caused, or the capability of managing memory and social neglecting. The second focused on the possibility of learning from peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in other contexts, as well as the agents in the Basque and international spheres who may contribute to the reconciliation. In the third, the current status of the reconciliation process and the importance of the social dimension for reconciliation were discussed; and finally, in the fourth space, the importance of symbology and linguistic aspects for identity coexistence in the Basque Country, and also the relevance of mediation and the influence of political negotiations in reconciliation were dealt with.

7. Thematic session: f) victims and prisoners

In the last session there were 13 members. In this session aspects linked to the victims of conflict and the situation of ETA and BNLN prisoners.

Fifteen topics were proposed and four spaces for dialogue were structured. The first was devoted to talk about the definition of victim to start from, the role the collectives of victims and prisoners in the different spheres of the peace process, and the role of society and ETA regarding victims and prisoners. The second space was devoted to how to visualize, distinguish and compensate the victims, legal and economic consequences of being a victim or a prisoner, as well as the possible use of shared grief as a meeting point for victims.

A third space was devoted to dialogue on the role of forgiveness in reconciliation and the possibility for the prisoners to collaborate in such reconciliation, as well as the role individual encounters between victim and victimizer —ETA's prisoners and victims— that have taken place and that will take place in the future. In the fourth dialogue space there were talks on

the reinsertion of prisoners, how to deal with prisoners who have not been applied the Parot Doctrine, the consequences of derogating such doctrine by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR, 2013);³ likewise, there were talks on equality or not before justice and the differential fulfillment of punishments by the victimizers.⁴

8. Final session; construction of basic consensus

In the final session, OST was not utilized, but another dialogue tool was utilized, as the objective was to accomplish a series of basic consensus on all the topics dealt with over the thematic sessions. The tool was step-by-step or flood consensus.

This tool consists in dividing the group in pairs. Each member of the couple presents their proposals on issues that must be consensual; once this is done, the couples reach consensus and establish a series of proposal accepted by both. When couples have a series of proposals, they join another couple to become a group of four.

In this new space, each couple presents its proposals, they are compared and agree which proposals are commonly accepted. This process is repeated until all participants join the large group and agree on the final proposals. At first, it is positive to concur on the number of proposals to be accorded by each couple, group of four, eight, etc.; for example, there can be three proposals by issue to be agreed. In this last session 11 people took part, so there were four couples and a trio at first; a group of five and another of six, at the second stage; finally, all of them gathered.

As previously mentioned, the dynamic of dialogue focused on reaching consensus on basic aspects of all the issues dealt with over the sessions. To do so, at the beginning of the session, the participants were given a document in which all the minutes of the dialogues were summarized, and another paper in which the issues to be agreed were defined. Then, thirty minutes were given for each participant to mature their proposals as regards issues to be agreed. Once individual maturation was performed, consensus in pairs was undertaken, then in the groups of five and six people, and finally the definite consensus were reached in the large group.

3 Jurisprudence established by the Supreme Court of Spain, on February 28th, 2006, known as Parot Doctrine, which allows for the accumulation of sentences and unlimited permanence of prisoners in jails. The sentence of the of the European Court of Human Rights annuls the Parot Doctrine, as it violates article 7 of the European Convention of Human Rights.

4 Victimized belonging to GAL, Triple A, Basque-Spanish Battalion or to law enforcers have received favorable treatment regarding punishment via pardons or sentence reduction.

The issues to agree on were divided into six blocks, with three specific issues for each of them:

1. Reconciliation and coexistence. *a)* What does reconciliation imply? The fundamental elements for reconciliation. *b)* How to facilitate reconciliation? Aspects on how to facilitate reconciliation. *c)* Who has to become involved / lead the reconciliation? The agents which have to be involved.

2. Memory and historical account. *a)* Which objectives are followed in order to produce a historical account? Motivations to produce it. *b)* How to undertake the historical account? Formulas to produce it. *c)* What does it have to include? Issues that have to appear in the account.

3. Political dimension of the conflict. *a)* How to solve the conflict of nationalistic interests? Formulas to further agreements. *b)* Are there formulas capable of satisfying all the stakeholders? Possible agreements in which all the parties can fit. *c)* How to solve the identities' conflict? Elements to build a scenario of identity coexistence.

4. Civil participation. *a)* Which objectives should civil participation have? The what for of citizens' participation. *b)* Which role must society have? Spheres and aspects where the citizenry has to participate. *c)* How to undertake civil participation? Formulas to facilitate civil participation.

5. Victims. *a)* How to define a victim? Key aspects to define the victims. *b)* What role do victims have in a reconciliation process? The questions / actions victims can take to facilitate reconciliation. *c)* How to repair the victims? Elements to repair the victims.

6. Prisoners. *a)* How to solve the issue of prisoners? Elements to deal with this situation. *b)* How to facilitate reinsertion? Elements to favor the prisoners' reinsertion. *c)* Which role can prisoners have in a reconciliation process? Questions/actions that prisoners can do to facilitate reconciliation.

Data analysis

The data exposed in this article refer to the aspects dealt with and agreements reached in the different dialogue sessions, especially the consensuses established in the last session. The analysis of minutes was carried out through the creation of emergent categories on the various aspects dealt with; later on, a contrast was made with the collective in order to verify the consensuses, and after this, the creation of a final report with conclusions about the process.

Results; ideas and consensuses for peacebuilding in the Basque Country

This work's objective was to establish a series of basic consensuses on all the stated issues; for this reason, in the present section we will present the consensuses reached in all the sessions. Following this order: we will present agreements and ideas related to: 1) implications of peace, reconciliation and coexistence; 2) memory and historical account; 3) the political dimension of conflict; 4) civil participation for peace; 5) victims; 6) prisoners.

1. Implications of peace, reconciliation and coexistence

The participants point out that peace is a polysemic phenomenon, being a process and society's ultimate goal at once. Space and sustained work are necessary to build it, it is essential to overcome the various forms of violence and human rights violations present in the Basque conflict. It is underscored that ETA's disarmament and the changes in the antiterrorist and penitentiary policies are elements that facilitate the various aspects implied in peacebuilding.

On the other side, a sustainable peace scenario is linked to the development of a culture of democracy and peace from tolerance, respect and empathy for the different one, allowing new meanings of life different from the ones built during the conflict. Reconciliation consolidates as a global process that affects the whole of society and implies the transformation of social practices. In order to build a frame of sustainable coexistence, the need to bet on the common future is stressed, nevertheless preserving a critical social memory of the occurrences. The need to create formal and informal spaces for civil dialogue from which to approach the challenge of turning social practices proper to the conflict into social coexistence practices.

An element to distinguish is the acknowledgement of responsibilities on the suffering and damage caused. It is indicated that recognition should be made from an ethical perspective, with honesty and content, and from self-criticism due to have caused human rights affectations. Linked to this, the need to de-construct the discourses that legitimize violence produced over the conflict, promote the rejection of violence; to do so, it is important not to socially recognize violent actions in a positive way.

A transcendental aspect revolves around who is to lead and be involved in the reconciliation. The collective indicates that leadership shall be shared horizontally between institutions and public administrations, political parties, agents from the organized civil society, the educational sphere, etc. involving the society as a whole. The political parties' responsibility in reconciliation is stressed, being positive to bring up the peace of political

confrontation, using a measured communicative style and conciliating and empathic attitudes with the one that is different, even though without renouncing to express the proper stances with assertiveness.

The importance of stressing the positive of Basque society is also noticed in the documents, for there have been civil and institutional experiences favorable for peace and reconciliation.

2. Memory and historical account

The role of memory and historical account in peacebuilding and reconciliation in the Basque Country seems to be linked to a number of issues. In the first place, the objectives of the work on memory and historical account must include the comprehension of the past in order to overcome the violent conflict, ensure the no-repetition of the deeds, the construction of coexistence based on human rights respect, facilitate the de-construction of the logics that legitimize violence and recognize the violations of human rights committed in order to be able to build the necessary truth in a processes of social recognition and integral reparation to the victims.

Regarding memory, a first aspect is the need that political and social actors do not to make a partisan use of it. In terms of procedure, the possibility of carrying out a participatory-inclusive process is noticed; in it all the visions and experiences of the conflict are gathered in the dialogues. This is complemented by the importance of producing an account of objective facts, especially those linked to human rights violations, mainly the right to life, and physical, psychological and moral integrity.

Furthermore, in the face of various subjective accounts about the past, the need to recognize there are different visions of the past is evinced, however generating new channels to enable a baseline agreement between different actors with diverse visions, this is to say, to enable the development of more inclusive memories.

A third aspect refers to the contents the account shall include; establishing respect for human rights as starting point, the need to set a veridical account of all the violations is noticed. Obtaining photographs of the victims, with neither comparisons nor hierarchies of their victimization processes, can facilitate the elaboration of consensuses on the interpretation of the past.

In this interpretation, objective facts, experiences and sentiments of the people who contribute with their testimonies fit. One last aspect refers to the need of the account to include analyses on the obstacles the various agents of the conflict had placed in the search for pacific coexistence, as well as those that had been favorable.

3. The political dimension of the conflict

Two important elements to understand public conflict, and therefore, to transform it, are territoriality and the political subject of decision. We may say that the core of political conflict is the possibility to exercise self-determination and which territories can exercise such right.

In order to resolve the conflict, the collective deems impossible that the different sectors reach an agreement on the definition of political subject and so, on the right to self-determination. In spite of this, to find formulas that can satisfy all parties, it is indicated that solutions have to undergo the development of inclusive formulas from identity and participation and to agree on the procedures, to be able to ask the citizenry about their political will.

At identity level, the negative interdependence between Basque and Spanish collective identities is one of the central elements of the Basque conflict. In view of this fact, it is noticed that the transformation of the of identity conflict requires the recognition of the identity plurality present in the Basque reality in order to protect it, mainly in the linguistic, indicating that identity groups will not be able to accomplish every single of their objectives in the context of the global solution. In like manner, the identity conflict is separated from the violent dimension of the conflict, as the defense of collective identities is not subject to the use of violence.

A final aspect indicated by the collective, and which can be a premise to structure new ways of political coexistence the Basque Country, is to develop dynamical visions of history, where political situations change and can be changed democratically with the objective of living better.

4. Civil participation for peace

Civil participation is considered an essential element to produce a sustainable peace scenario. Results indicate that civil participation for peace has as an end to make citizenry protagonist in all the aspects comprised in peacebuilding. The importance of establishing relations of bidirectional influence between the decision-making upper tiers —institutions, political parties, etc.— and civil society. To do so, the relevance of empowering society is underscored, establishing social forums and other direct participation mechanisms. An important aspect is the need for the citizenry to participate in plural spaces and forums created by rivals or political adversaries, not only in those organized by the collective itself, transcending thus the barriers of conflict.

As for the roles the Basque citizenry has to perform, it is indicated that, on the one side, people have to perform a reflexive role to contribute

with ideas that can help advance, and on the other perform a role of direct participation and “social lobby” to press for the solution of problems.

The documents point out that citizen participation has to be carried out by means of various formulas. The spaces for civil dialogue with plural and heterogeneous representation are emphasized, as well as the generation of channels so that the measures adopted by the citizens have a binding character. Likewise, the importance of the intermediate structures of society and labor at local level is noticed, as they are spaces with the potential to create alternatives and solutions for reconciliation and the reconstruction of social fabric.

5. Victims

An essential aspect for the consensus of the victims’ role in peacebuilding, and also to propose aspects for integral reparation, is to share an idea or definition of victim. This has been an important issue in the case of Basque conflict, for there are difficulties to recognize the status of victims to various victims of the conflict, as it implies the presence of various perpetrators.

Over the process, the collective understands that victims are those people who have suffered violations of human rights and undeserved harm from the various perpetrators of direct violence (ETA and related groups, law enforcers, ALG, and far-right groups [Basque-Spanish Battalion, Triple A]). Moreover, it is assumed that the victims of the conflict are those who have suffered political violence associated to the Basque conflict and which due to their victim status deserve reparation.

The results point at the need to establish a classification of victims in function of the violations of human rights suffered, but not supposing a source of comparison between them. Besides, in such classification of victims it is possible to introduce the figure of victim/victimizer, for there are cases of people who have been perpetrators of violence and have violated human rights and also have been victims themselves.

As for the role of victims to facilitate a reconciliation process, the positive of offering a voluntary testimony of their experiences with no political intentionality, or to produce meeting spaces where empathy, humanization and forgiveness are facilitated, always from willingness, respect and discretion. These two cases are closely linked to the need of transmitting positive and exemplifying images to society.

In like manner, the need for social and institutional recognition that favors visualization and reparation from manipulations of suffering by political and social agents is emphasized, also the mutual recognition of the victims’ suffering by different victimizers as an important aspect for their reconciliation.

In order to redress the victims, it is stressed the need to recognize them at social and institutional level, and guarantee their rights to the truth, justice, reparation and no-repetition, being emphasized that no crime committed remains unpunished. The need to deliver a status of “normality” to the victims’ daily life is underscored as well; their victims’ role shall not be stressed and they shall not be linked to any aspect linked to peace and reconciliation, as this can re-traumatize them, making their social roles be always related to their or their relatives’ victimization.

6. Prisoners

The issue of prisoners linked to ETA and BNLM is an aspect of the utmost importance for peacebuilding in the Basque Country. The Spanish State’s antiterrorist directives have implied an exceptional treatment of incarcerated ETA and BNLM people, which is exemplified in the policy of prisoners’ dispersion,⁵ and in the no application of penitentiary measures which any inmate should receive.

The need of a bilateral process between ETA and the State is pointed out, being indicated that the Spanish government has to respond to the steps taken by the collective of ETA prisoners, for instance their acceptance of the Spanish penitentiary legality.

In short, the results verify the importance of ending with the dispersion of inmates, incarcerating them close to their residence, releasing sick prisoners, favor individual releases through the application of ordinary penal legislation and revise the punishments in function of the sorts of crimes committed (assassinations, *kale borroka*,⁶ political,⁷ etc.). To these aspects adds the need to facilitate actual reinsertion channels by incumbent public administrations, understanding that reinsertion does not imply supplementary punishment for ex-convicts stripping them of civil or political rights and favoring labor insertion.

Finally, it is pointed out that inmates can have an active role in the setting of a sustainable peace scenario. It is indicated that this can be associated with the express relinquishing of violence to favor its social delegitimization, to accept the state of the violations committed collaborating to solve them, or to contribute with positive images for reconciliation and performing a pedagogical work for society and those ideologically related. Moreover, it is

5 The policy dispersion of ETA’s prisoners, which starts in 1989, supposes that these people do not serve their sentences in jails close to their households, but in other Spanish jails.

6 *Kale Borroka* is the Spanish term coined to refer to street violence exercised by groups akin to BNLM.

7 Belonging to BNLM political parties or social agents, declared to belong to ETA networks.

stated that the release of prisoners shall be done discreetly and sparingly, so as not to suppose a grievance for the victims.

Final reflections

Such as Jonhson (2003) stated, complexity and self-organization have changed from ways to understand reality to ways to build it. The present study for peace in the Basque Country is but an example of the application of the systemic and complex approach of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. This way, following Wills and collaborators (Unger and Wills, 2006; Wills *et al.*, 2006) and Coleman and collaborators (Coleman, 2006 and 2012; Coleman *et al.*, 2007), the dialogue process generated has followed the premises of multi-partiality and inclusiveness, including key people and agents, who at one are key for peace, such as member of political parties with vocation to further the transformation of the Basque Country, people from peace movements and committed academicians.

In like manner, an exercise in sustained dialogue was implemented on the basis of self-organization, collective empowerment and deliberative democracy, being these central practices and values of the systemic and complex approach of conflict transformation and essential for the emergence of new ideas and alternatives for peace.

Over the encounters confidence relationships were built between the participants, the vision of others became complex, overcoming previous stereotypes and prejudices. This enabled intensive and deep dialogue on the most relevant issues of the Basque Conflict and the most important challenges to succeed in peacebuilding. Finally, the possibility of reaching basic agreements between people with different visions, needs and values linked to conflict and peace in the Basque Conflict came true.

As regards the content of the consensuses and their scope, and starting from a systemic vision of the Basque Conflict and peacebuilding, it can be noticed how the collective of participants has stressed the transformation of the conflict attractors mentioned in the description of the case study (Mínguez-Alcaide, 2013) and has put forward possible peace attractors to build a sustainable peace scenario.

Although neither extensively nor exhaustively, the recommendations offer an integral vision of peacebuilding in the Basque Country, from a broad and processual approach of reconciliation and coexistence development, peace with multiple dimensions that have to be approached from multi-partiality and the search for common good.

In short, and traversing over the transformation of conflict attractors and the creation of peace attractors, the need to end expressions and relationships based on violence —conflict attractor— from ETA's disarmament and the change in the antiterrorist and penitential policies of the Spanish State and the creation of frameworks, contexts and practices based on human rights for the integral reparation of the victims and the development of a solution for the prisoners —peace attractor—.

On the other side, in the consensuses there appears the importance of breaking up with discourses that legitimize violence —conflict attractor— and de-construct those discourses from self-criticism and the recognition of the damage inflicted to the victims by the BNLN armed actors, the Spanish State agents, parapolice and far-right groups, the social, institutional and political recognition of violations to human rights and the development of effective measures of truth, justice and reparation —peace attractor—.

As for the conflict's political anchoring, the overcoming of the national contradiction and the negative interdependence of Basque and Spanish identities —conflict attractors— is proposed from the recognition of identity plurality and the importance of reaching the development of collective identities, and at the same time democratic deepening is aimed as an ideal to generate political formulas that serve for the satisfaction of the most of Basque Society —peace attractors—.

Furthermore, it is considered important to underline the collective's recommendation related to strengthen shared leadership for peace between all the tiers of Basque society, from plural and heterogeneous participation as the transversal element to approach to the various dimensions of peace, construction of the account and memory, and the integral reparation of the damage to the victims, to the defining national contradiction of the political dimension of the conflict.

Results verify that in spite of the responsibility of institutions and political parties, the leadership of the process shall be shared by the agents of Basque society. This way, it is recommended transiting to a peace scenario making the citizenry a central active for change, creating spaces for dialogue where to turn social practices marked by division and mistrust into social coexistence environments.

The centrality of civil participation and dialogue are especially relevant in the transformation of the psychosocial substratum of the conflict, this is to say, the simplified, distorted and polarized perception of reality, the images of the other, the attitudes which the conflict has been dealt with, the emotions stirred by the conflict or the moral processes of exclusion and dehumanization.

This way, the need of dialogue to make new psychosocial peace attractors for peace emerge is presented, namely, development of more complex and less confronted historical accounts of the conflict, broader visions of the groups historically considered enemies, or empathy from its most cognitive to its most emotional sides. All in all, new psychosocial anchorages to create a sustainable peace scenario in the Basque Country.

This exercise has not been the only process of sustained dialogue in the Basque Country from the cessation of ETA armed activities in October 2011. A number of social organizations have been revitalizing dialogue spaces with the citizenry, with youths from political parties or public representatives at municipal level. These processes are being set up discreetly, basically in the municipalities of Gipuzkoa province. Some differences between these processes and the one presented here are the multi-stakeholder nature of the latter, the utilization of dialogue tools with large groups such as OST, or its academic character associated with the systemic approximation of conflict transformation and peacebuilding.

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