INTENTIONS OF THE NANSEN SEMINAR 2014:

“This year, we will explore the role of dialogue in peacebuilding through sharing experiences from national and international dialogue work. Through a variety of workshops, the participants of the Nansen Seminar will be able to enhance their dialogue skills. The Nansen Seminar will enable practitioners of dialogue to meet and share their experiences as well as discussing and developing dialogue as a method. The seminar is open to anyone interested in dialogue.”

The above statement reflects the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue’s intention of contributing to the field of dialogue work both in Norway and abroad. We sought to do this through sharing knowledge about dialogue processes around the world and workshops in some of the many different approaches to dialogue that co-exist. Our main intention was to make it a “hands-on” seminar, where dialogue were not only discussed at a theoretical level, but also practiced between the participants.

The title “Dialogue in Peacebuilding” reflects our belief that dialogue is needed in the field of peacebuilding. Enormous efforts are being made within state - and institution building in post-conflict areas, as well as investments in infrastructure and development. While all this is needed, the need for establishing and repairing relationships between the groups in conflict is often
neglected, resulting in a lack of lasting peace. Through the seminar, we wished to show some of the multitude of dialogue processes facilitated in post-conflict areas, often with very limited resources.

The speakers all had different backgrounds and approaches to dialogue, as dialogue will always need to be time- and place specific. Those attending got to know important work in Kashmir, Timor-Leste, Rwanda, Afghanistan, The Western Balkans and Somalia, and in the municipalities and on the streets of Norway. The seminar also included ample time for reflection and sharing of thoughts.

71 participants from 13 countries contributed to the seminar by listening, asking questions and attending workshops. Dialogue practitioners from various national and international organizations all over the world contributed with their experience and reflections.

The Nansen Seminar 2014 reached new audiences as a result of international network advertising. Through keynotes, debate, workshops and dialogue, every participant had the chance to enhance his or her dialogue skills.

This report is by no means exhaustive, but hopefully a representative summary of the seminar. The seminar was made possible by financial support from Fritt Ord and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue is very grateful for their contribution.
This article is written as a reflection from a dialogue worker that has spent the last 20 years facilitating dialogue in cooperation with the Nansen Dialogue Network in the Western Balkans. What started as an idea in Norway in 1994, when Lillehammer connected with Sarajevo as the host of the Winter Olympics, has implications in villages and communities in the Western Balkans today, 20 years later. My reflections will deal with several myths about dialogue. These myths are false, and they prevent a more solid effort to strengthen dialogue and reconciliation in peacebuilding.

The wars in ex-Yugoslavia in the 1990s left many societies ethnically segregated. Many societies remain so today. The mantras of international peacebuilding have been state-building and focus on strong institutions, often at the expense of reconciliation among the people living in the state. The Nansen Dialogue Network has tried to address this deficiency through facilitating inter-ethnic dialogue and developed reconciliation strategies to gain long-term peace. In practice the method is seminars in local communities in the Western Balkan countries and at the Nansen Academy in Lillehammer, followed up by concrete efforts to create dialogue spaces in educational and political institutions, and ultimately structural changes toward a more integrative society.

During the years 1995-2000 about 200 people from ex-Yugoslavia participated in a three month-long dialogue training in Lillehammer. The focus was on understanding the causes and consequences of the breakup of Yugoslavia. It was during these years that the Nansen Dialogue method was developed.

Between the years 2000-2005 the Nansen Dialogue Centres were established in ex-Yugoslavia and they built up their reputation locally in order to facilitate dialogue and initiate local projects. From 2005-2010 strong local “Nansen support groups” were established in places like Srebrenica, Bratunac, Jajce, Zvornik, Prozor-Rama, Prijedor, Sanski Most, Kosovo Polje, Bujanovac, and Jegunovce. The focus was reconciliation. During the last five years, 2010-2015 we are working on structural changes, particularly in the field of education and the focus has been integration.

The most visible results are seen in 9 municipalities in Macedonia, where the Nansen Model for Integrated Education has been implemented. Ten Nansen Dialogue Centres (NDCs) are today facilitating dialogue and building reconciliation strategies in some of the most war-torn municipalities in Europe after the Second World War. There is an increasing interest in the Nansen Dialog method within the Norwegian society, as well as in conflict areas like the Middle East, Caucasus, Afghanistan and Somalia.
One of the dramatic consequences of the breakdown of Yugoslavia was an almost complete breakdown of communication. The citizens of Yugoslavia had experienced the largest freedom of movement in Europe. The Yugoslav passport gave free access to both London and Leningrad. These same citizens experienced after 1995 strict borders between all the republics and sometimes even fear of moving across borders and checkpoints in their own hometown. The lack of meeting points, where one could compare notes, and the ethnic segregation of social, cultural and educational life led to public arenas more open to one-sided nationalistic propaganda. Actually the one thing many participants seemed to have in common, was the belief that they were all born in the city of truth, while the others grew up in the valley of propaganda and lies. Whether your home place was Zagreb, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Pristina or Skopje, the belief that the journalists, politicians and history professors you had access to were closer to the truth than those the others had access too was dominant. The ethnic segregation was accompanied with a political segregation. Two participants from the same city could have complete opposing views, but they shared a naive trust in their own sources, independent of whether those sources were so-called pro- or anti-nationalistic.

Democracy is founded on the assumption that I might be wrong, that is why I need other people or other political parties to correct me. The certainty that people expressed themselves with, even when they had completely opposite interpretations of the same events, became obvious to the participants themselves. This started the process of movement. They started out convinced there was only one truth, and they possessed it, while the others were lying. Slowly they started to realize that others seemed to believe in another truth, and it could be worthwhile to listen to their stories. This does not mean that truth is relative. But it means that for two opposing enemies to start pursuing a common truth, there must be established a trust and confidence between them. If the pursuit of the real truth is defined as “we” finding “my” truth, then we rarely see any movement in the positions, rather a deadlock. Participants in dialogue over time experience that dialogue builds relationships between people. Through living together, sharing meals, social time, cultural events etc. they start to discover each other’s multiple identities. Through connecting in other life arenas, they might develop a mutual respect which makes it easier for both of them to open up and listen to each other’s stories, and not see each other only as the representative for another ethnic group.

Myth 1 “Dialogue is too womanish”

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When this process starts, dialogue is challenging the most fundamental assumptions we hold about the conflict, about history and about reality. This way of communicating is not “womanish” unless we define womanish as being a very humane way of communicating on a deep analytical and emotional level.

**Myth 2 “Everybody will dialogue as long as Norway pays the coffee”**

I often encounter people who say “You must have a tough job?!” I do not. There is almost a longing in people to confront each other after a conflict. The tough job is to convince them to participate. There might be a seminar mafia whom you can always recruit, who enjoy the pleasure of travel and encounters. But Nansen Dialogue is choosing municipalities as the main target area. People have not participated in dialogue seminars before, and is not particularly motivated to do so either. They believe they suffered too much because of the atrocities of the others. The victim mythology is strong on all sides. They are therefore not motivated for win-win solutions, since such solutions will give the other side benefits they do not deserve. After what they have done to us, they should be punished, or at least taste some of their own medicine. People are actually willing to suffer a little, if they know the others will pay more. To sit down in dialogue to explore win-win possibilities is not attractive. Lose-lose is preferable to win-win, as long as they lose more than us.

In South Serbia we waited 4 years for radical Serbs to participate. In Jegunovce, one of our success stories, one village showed no interest of participating the first year. Still, we have to start somewhere. The best promoter of dialogue is experienced participants. So we have allowed for vicarious motives in order to get started (like obtaining a visa). This is based on the trust in the dialogue process itself. So from risky recruitment procedures in the late 1990s, the Nansen Network has established an authority where today we can invite mayors and ministers and we expect that they accept the invitation.

**Myth 3 “Dialogue might be meaningful talk, but it is no magic fix, it is simply not very efficient”**

It takes quite some time to build an environment of trust. Dialogue is not a magic fix that can change things overnight, that is true. Spending time together is a prerequisite (and that takes time).

Most meetings that take place and are called dialogue are exactly that; meetings. From my experience they hardly qualify as dialogue. It is rather a sharing of different positions – but no real process of movement between the parties. I will challenge whether dialogue can be confined to a “meeting” since it is better described as an ongoing process. It takes quite some talking to warm up to talk.

When trust and respect is established it becomes easier to practice the dialogue; a curious investigation into how and why we have reached so different conclusions about our recent history and the current ongoing conflicts we both are a part of. Dialogue is not only listening to what the others say, but also trying to understand why they say it. Such an explorative investigation is very healthy because it gives all parties a better understanding of how the others see the conflict.

“If we had known this was how you were thinking last fall, we would have acted differently” (Teachers from a divided school in Stolac, BH 2012).

During the initial three months long seminar this was the “movement”. Participants became more critical toward whether their own sources had told them the whole story, and it became worthwhile to listen to others to see if they could provide bits and pieces of the puzzle which they were missing.

These reflections around dialogue are not a philosophical discussion, but based on my experiences after facilitating several hundred dialog seminars between Serbs and Albanians from Kosovo, Croats and Bosniaks from Herzegovina, Macedonians and Albanians from Macedonia, Serbs and Croats from East Slovenia, Serbs and Bosniaks from Prijedor, Srebrenica and Bratunac. The participants are often higher municipal officials, still after 20 years I hear them say “Unbelievable that somebody from the outside had to invite us to talk together – why did we do not do that ourselves ten years ago”. Or as one policeman from Prijedor said, “Imagine if we had these words in 1992”.

The impatience and expectations of quick results that can be evaluated are very dominant. Projects that have a larger chance of success are preferred to the more difficult projects. Projects that have a beginning and an end, sunset projects, are preferable to projects that smell prolonging and new applications for more funding. Projects that will be followed with “we can’t just start and then stop now” are not attractive for donors who cannot fully control future sources. These projects are no-go. In other words the slow process of dialogue – which is the nature of dialogue - works against itself. The quick rotation in numerous peacebuilding positions around the world also encourages short term results. Initiators want to see the results on their own watch. In some cases this lack of short term results can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, since it undermines the long term support and efforts needed for success.

The road toward reconciliation is a long and winding road. There are no short cuts, but there are roads. I often hear; so who can we dialogue with when the soldiers stand in our living room? Maybe nobody. Maybe that is the moment that proves that a dialogue failed. The main effort should have started ten years earlier. But the work on reconciliation is still necessary, if not we might punish the children of those soldiers in the years to come.
We, the Norwegians, punished the children of German soldiers in two generations. Current research says it even affects the grandchildren.

**Myth 4 “There is too much dialogue. Too little commitment to action and change.”**

Jonas Gahr Støre wrote an article in International Harvard Review in the summer of 2012. He expressed tiredness of “Summit Mania”, defined as political meetings that had little or no consequences for political action. A Norwegian newspaper commented later that year that now Gahr Støre is tired of dialogue. This is a confusion of political talk with dialogue. Political talk invites the defense of one’s own position, and a change in position can be interpreted as a sign of weakness. It is my experience that dialogue creates the foundation for movement in positions and perspectives. Instead of defending one’s position and interpreting change of opinion as a defeat, change of opinion should be regarded as a mature reaction when confronted with the better argument or a correcting story. When the suffering of the others is recognized, a basis for joint action can easier develop. It is a sad misinterpretation that dialogue is “cozy talk” and avoiding the real issues of power and injustice. A good dialogue is challenging the very perception people have of history and reality, their fundamental world view. I have hardly ever experienced a more powerful way of communicating. I will try to illustrate through describing the seminars themselves.

**How do the dialogue seminars work?**

I establish my position as facilitator by showing I know some of the history, names, places and events. I share some of my experiences from other, but similarly segregated communities all over ex-Yugoslavia where Nansen people are actively involved. When we confront similar problems in all these communities it becomes easier to identify what is related to the very structure of segregation and what is related to certain individuals profiting from the segregation. Further, I am not a judge in an international court. I am facilitating dialogue. I try not to engage in discussions with the participants, but facilitate their discussions with each other. Yes, discussions.

A typical dialogue seminar is dominated by discussions between the participants. I can make them understand the difference between discussion and dialogue. They realize that while in discussions they argue convincingly and take positions, in dialogue there is more room for movement and change in perception. In a dialogue you do not have to defend your experience, you are supposed to tell it and share it with the others. But there is no way we can avoid, and neither is it preferable, important discussions about the crucial issues. Dialogue cannot replace debate; it is an additional way of communicating.

Some participants have refused to take part in dialogue because they have felt that such participation shows an undeserved recognition and respect for the others. My response to this is to ask them if they feel that the others have enough knowledge and understanding of their situation. They often answer something like “No, of course not, that is part of the problem”. When I explain that dialogue is about sharing one’s story, making one visible for the others, as well as allowing the others the same opportunity, the response has been “Is that dialogue? We thought dialogue was the kind of political conversations that take place at Camp David”. When I stress that dialogue is a way of communicating, which is in the opposite end of the spectrum from political talk, they become far more willing to participate.

The negotiations arranged by the international community are almost always focused on reaching an agreement or at least a compromise. In a dialogue you do not need to agree on anything, because the aim is to understand why a conflict has such devastating consequences for everyone involved. We cannot assume that everyone knows. My experience is that people need to be told. A dialogue between the perpetrator and the victim might be necessary simply to make the perpetrators aware of the immediate, but more importantly also of the long term consequences of their actions. In ex-Yugoslavia, where all the ethnic groups have a strong victim mythology, the inter-ethnic dialogue facilitated by the Nansen Dialogue Centres can be an eye-opener. No one is asked to give up anything in a dialogue seminar. The aim is to increase the understanding of each other, talk about why the conflict became so brutal, and explore possibilities for reconciliation.

The first task in the seminars is almost always to sit in small groups of about four, and share perceptions and experiences of how the conflict has affected their lives, their living situation, family life, and working conditions. Already in this first conversation some participants recognize, with deep empathy, the suffering of the others, and they often see similarities to their own experiences. Many of the young people in the 1990s lost their youth. All citizens of Bosnia Herzegovina lost their freedom of movement in the world. Many have lost their homes and family members. In some cases their whole village was destroyed. I have facilitated dialogue between members of the International Commission of Missing Persons, their stories are of the most brutal kind, still they develop some understanding and respect because of the similarities of their experience. The pain of losing your father in the cruellest way does not have an ethnic colour.

The next task is to share how they experience the present situation. What is the current quality of the communication and cooperation? How do they experience the ethnic segregation? There are reasons why these communities are segregated, and in many cases strong political and public will to keep it that way in the future. For instance the case of Vukovar, a city which was bombed for 87 days during the war.
Vukovar is also by many seen as the place where the breakup of Yugoslavia started. In Vukovar a Serb/Croat coalition had the power for eleven years with the political goal of keeping the municipality ethnically segregated. The Nansen Dialogue Centres strive to be political neutral while facilitating the dialogue meeting, but in these cases we argue strongly in favour of an inclusive state. We support integration, not segregation. We argue that a state built on respect for democratic values and the protection of human rights is an alternative to social and political mobilization based on ethnic principles.

In the discussions of reconciliation there is a conflict between those whose main loyalty is toward the past; as exemplified in the building of a war memorial centre in Vukovar, and those whose main loyalty is toward the future generations, born after the war. Every 14 year old student will visit this memorial. It must honour the War Veterans. There is of course the obvious connection that we have to learn from history to avoid repeating the crimes of the past, and we should honour war veterans that did service to their country. On the other hand we know that history can lead us to destroy the lives of future generations; like in the case of the “German” children in Norway. Children fathered by German soldiers were punished for the crimes of their forefathers and today the grandchildren of the same soldiers tell a similar story.

Reconciliation in the most minimalistic sense is accepting that the past has happened, and that we have to do our best to prevent that the crimes of our forefathers should destroy the opportunities of unborn generations. There are many tragic stories of human suffering. I have listened to people in seminars talk about the most extreme brutality hitting their closest family. How is reconciliation even humanly possible? On the other hand future generations will have to live together. A successful dialogue process can help participants avoid becoming “prisoners of the past” and instead to become creators of a new future together.

The final task is to identify the obstacles to improvement of the cooperation and discuss what we can do about it. In the case of Bosnia Herzegovina, many of the dialogue seminars have focused on ethnically segregated schools, particularly in Herzegovina, but also in Kravica, Konjevic Polje and Jaje. The majority of the local population does not favour integration of the schools, even though ethnically divided schools means transporting their children to schools further away from home. Ethnically separated schools still exist in order to secure ethnically pure upbringing. Today there are more than 50 such schools in Bosnia Herzegovina.

This ethnic politics is challenged through asking whether a municipality run according to professional and democratic principles, rather than ethnic-based principles, can be more efficient in dealing with the everyday human needs of the citizens. While ethnicity may have its place in ceremonies and holy days, in art and traditions, in certain myths and legends, the state should be built on already agreed upon European standards of integration, democracy and human rights. When such standards are applied you cannot find a legal basis on which to divide children according to their ethnic background?

I share with the groups a recent Norwegian research. 900 job applications were sent with a Norwegian name, 900 equivalent applications were sent with the same CVs, but with a foreign name. Those with a Norwegian name had a 25% higher chance to be called for an interview. The response I get is that “this is normal”. And yes, Macedonians have advantages in Macedonia, Croats in Croatia and Serbs in Serbia. But what is normal is not necessarily right. If we take seriously the political foundation our constitutions are built on, people should not be discriminated against based on the things they have no control over, like their names. Upon direct questioning, the employers claimed they were not against immigrants, but in this particular job they wanted somebody with strong knowledge of Norwegian society. Well, the CVs revealed they all had strong knowledge of Norwegian society, including an education from Norway and complete mastering of the Norwegian language. But probably the CVs were never read.

I introduce Norway in this way to show that the issue of segregation vs integration is not a typical Western Balkan issue, but a European issue. We have much to learn from each other in this regard, both from successes and failures. The challenge; how to live together in spite of our difference is probably the most burning European political issue. People from the Western Balkans need to see themselves in a larger European context to move themselves out of the local majority/minority bubble.

Myth 5: “One cannot really learn anything during a week in Norway”

The three months long seminars in Lillehammer went on for 5 years. As we gained reputation the function of the Lillehammer seminars changed to become a follow up of the initial seminars described above. As we started to recruit actual leaders they could not stay away more than a week at the time. Norway is often taken as an example of how slow the process of reconciliation is through referring to our Second World War experience and its aftermath. We can turn this around and stress that Norway was an example of how slow the process is when no politics of reconciliation were developed. The trip to Norway offers participants in dialogue a neutral space where they can continue their discussions. In most cases the careful exploration that started in a local seminar in their community accelerates.

Regarding methodology of the Lillehammer seminars, the most efficient technique, is simply to let the two groups ask each other questions. Questions and answers provide a genial form of communication which we often abuse by asking the questions too fast and answering to soon.
A child is a good dialogue person because it lives through the day by asking many questions. The child that goes to bed at night is a different person from the one that got up the same morning. There has been movement, change, and growth during the day. This is also what I observe in the participants during the day; movement, increased visibility and improved relations.

Each group gets 2-3 hours to formulate 5-6 questions to the other group. They exchange the questions and spend 2-3 hours discussing, reflecting upon how they will respond to the questions. Sometimes they have a group answer; sometimes there is a need for individual answers. During a weeklong seminar, we have time to ease into the situation and spend as much time as it takes on asking and answering each question. In this way the participants themselves set the agenda, not the facilitator.

The trip to Norway can show them, in a slightly surprising way, how much they have in common; language, historical and cultural references, food, music, dances etc. A new “us” and “them” is shaped, often with humorous undertones, as they approach Norwegian culture and institutions. Norwegian municipal institutions are not shown as a model for development, but more as examples of how things can be done differently. The dialogue participants often transcend ethnic differences when they express a common interest in municipal development or the use of peer mediation in primary schools.

There is no doubt that the participants relax more with a long distance from home. The pressure from their own ethnic group is reduced. Reaching out, crossing over seems more natural when the event is visiting the recycling compound (garbage dump) or a classical concert. A trip to Norway gives a new experience of Europe. Many of the participants travel for the first time outside their own country or region. They discover that the people of Europe seem to struggle with their own issues of majority rule, minority rights, integration and segregation, and lack of political dialogue. In some cases they realize that they have come further in their work for integration, simply because they were “forced”. In a European context their problems even start to look less special and unique. Germany, Poland, France and Russia have their own brutal history of war, more brutal than in the Western Balkans. The reconciliation processes of Germany and France and Germany and Poland are hopeful stories, and the vision of numerous minorities living side by side in a larger European context reduces the claustrophobic tension “back home”.

We at the Nansen Dialogue Network pay particular attention to organize the participants visiting the mayor of Lillehammer, the Norwegian parliament, and sometimes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These visits give them a feeling of being taken seriously and treated with respect. It heightens their feeling of political responsibility in their own communities and highlights the importance of uncorrupted behaviour. But the main purpose of the visit to Lillehammer is the reconciliatory effect it has on the participants themselves, it is not what they can learn from Norway. More than 3000 people from ex-Yugoslavia have visited Lillehammer and the “famous” “Blue Room” at the Nansen Academy over the last 20 years. Some even talk about the “Nansen spirit”. I have difficulties explaining this spirit. The Nansen Academy is founded on the very values of freedom of expression and a strong faith in humanity. This “spirit” makes it easier to develop reconciliation and dialogue. People find it easier to express new thoughts and perceptions in Lillehammer than at home.

The trip to Norway is not a tourist trip, although they take a lot of pictures. It is a journey that expands their mental, geographical, and political horizon. For some freedom of expression becomes more than just a human right, it becomes an experience. And Europe becomes more than standards, concepts and a map. It becomes a place where people live.

Myth 6: “Dialogue does not lead to structural change”

On September 1 2008 the Fridtjof Nansen School in Jegunovce opened. This is the first bilingual multi-ethnic school in Macedonia. Four villages that were shelling each other in 2001 are now cooperating about a joint school for their children. In this way they are giving their children an opportunity to grow up in a different world than themselves. These parents choose to move from confrontation to cooperation. How did they do that? What was the reconciliation strategy?

The local Macedonian / Albanian team from NDC Skopje first went in and did only need assessment in the municipality. The next step was to offer computer classes for the children from all four villages, based on a need expressed by the villagers. This was done in close communication with all the parents. The condition was that children from three villages had to be bussed to the fourth village. But then advanced computer classes were offered in the second village. A basic English course was offered in the third village and advanced English course in the fourth village. In this way the children started to travel between each other’s villages and they started to get curious about each other’s language. We responded by offering classes in Macedonian to Albanian children and classes in Albanian to Macedonian children. Still in close communication and cooperation with the parents. We emphasised that this should not be developed as an outside initiative, but from a wish from the students and parents themselves.

We were realistic and did not expect too many students. One village was reluctant to participate in any of our activities the first six months. After time they offered education in the language of the “enemy”. Would students come? We expected around 20 percent, but everyone came (97 percent). The classroom was packed.
We had to offer two shifts. At this time some students felt that more learning was taking place outside the school than inside the school and the idea of a joint bilingual school started to take shape. The bilingual multi-ethnic Fridtjof Nansen School opened September 1st, 2008 in the village of Prełubiste in Jegunovce municipality. In March the following year the local Nansen Dialogue centre started to build the first bilingual secondary school, which opened September 1st 2010.

The establishment of this first bilingual school in Macedonia did not happen without strong opposition; stopping of the school bus, roadblocks to prevent parents to bring their children to school, verbal threats, mobile phone threats, character assassinations in newspaper articles etc. It was the strength of the parents that have kept the school running. Their belief that their children have the right to a better future with open doors and windows to the world made them stand strong.

We believe that this school will become a model for Macedonian education in the years to come, it has already inspired similar Nansen projects in East Macedonia, where the languages are Macedonian and Turkish. The interest among municipalities has been so large that it became obvious that there is no infrastructure for educating teachers in bilingual pedagogy. To compensate for this NDC Skopje opened a Nansen Training Centre for teachers; 100 teachers have already gone through a basic two-year program.

The participants in our seminars are opinion makers; people with status and a position in the local community. They have an arena of action in which to implement new insights and perceptions. Our target groups are most often the municipality level or local authorities in education, law or medicine. The Nansen approach underlines the importance of a multi-level approach. If you want to work toward changes in the educational system you must include students, parents, teachers, village leaders, municipality leaders and the Ministry of Education. If you want to see structural changes you have to include the people that can make these changes.

Myth 7: “Dialogue will always benefit the dominant culture”

When my son was five he came and sat on my knee. I was watching a soccer game. He asked which side we were on. And I explained that we wanted the red to win. He is still, 22 years later, a devoted Manchester United fan. The comparison is not good, but the chances a child born in the Serbian part of North Mitrovica will grow up with negative feelings toward Albanians are very high. The chances an Albanian child in South Mitrovica will grow up with similar negative feelings toward Serbs are equally high. If they meet on the bridge 20 years old and look into each other’s faces, they might look into a mirror. Would I have hated me if I were you? Is it so coincidental that the family we are born into will decide who our friends are, and who are our enemies?

The strength of our approach is that it moves the participants away from looking at each other as the main problem. This approach leads them to see how structural factors, such as the very segregation itself, and the one-sided propaganda represent the problem. This acknowledgement reduces the strong blaming of the other, and expands the space for human interaction in post-conflict societies. The minorities often claim dialogue is a waste of time, since the dominant culture does not need to listen. I want to reverse this. The dominant culture is very visible, they do not have much to gain from engaging in dialogue. Their story is known. It is the minorities that can make themselves visible through dialogue. The alternative is more violent reactions or to remain invisible.

The Nansen school in Jegunovce, which might become the model for Macedonian educational policy in a few years, would never have happened without the willingness of parents. They have stood strong against the pressure from a harsh opposition. But the parents in Jegunovce and the Nansen support groups in Bratunac and Srebrenica are stronger due to their interaction with the Nansen Dialog Network and Norway. The Nansen Model advocates integration as standing apart, but with respect and knowledge of the differences. This is the opposite of the Norwegian definition of integration which is a moderate form of assimilation.

Conclusion:

In most development assistance there is a fear of dependency and a strong belief in the mantra “Don’t give people fish, give them fishing equipment and teach them how to fish”. My experience has been the opposite. We cannot teach people in the Western Balkan much about “fishing”. But we can go “fishing together” with them. Financial support from Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, training at Nansen Academy, local Nansen Dialogue Centres with strong local support groups have worked together as a leverage turning stones in segregated communities. Together we built this reconciliation strategy. Together we have shown that integration is possible. This is not dependency, it is cooperation. There seems to be certain values inherent in the dialogue approach itself; Tolerance, inclusion and integration. This can explain why so many of the participants in long term dialogue work engage in active work for social change. These values; tolerance, inclusion and integration are necessary in modern multi-ethnic democracies, that is why dialogue cultures are needed not only in post-conflict areas – but at the heart of our political culture in Europe.
KOENRAAD VAN BRABANT:
Inclusive ‘national’ dialogue: drawing on participatory-action-research principles

— By Kim Sivertsen

Koenraad Van Brabant is Senior Peacebuilding Adviser for the International Peacebuilding Advisory Team at Interpeace in Geneva.

- Peacebuilding involves taking risks!

This was the opening statement from Mr. Van Brabant in his keynote at the Friday morning session of the Nansen Seminar.

- I am here to learn, from anybody here, and get some useful thoughts and reflections.

A personal line of work

He shared his experience that dialogue work invariably becomes very personal. - It is not a technical profession, the personal is important, Van Brabant said. His training as an anthropologist, a profession he never practiced, has been valuable for him in his work.

The past 12 years he has focused on peacebuilding through Interpeace, a relatively small, international organization working to strengthen capacities in societies to manage their own conflicts without resorting to violence or coercion.

- You can create a lot of stability in a society through coercion, but it can easily lead to new outbreaks of violence, 20 or 30 years down the road, Van Brabant said. He sees dialogue is one of several tools to be used in strategic peacebuilding.
Dialogue in peacebuilding

Interpeace will not normally facilitate dialogue in any given society, it will be people from that society that do that themselves. In the true spirit of dialogue, Van Brabant did not want his keynote be a monologue. He asked the audience about their one key question for the seminar, and these questions provided the structure of the following conversation, the asking of questions being relevant to the dialogue process.

- Who is setting the agenda? It is very important, as is the art of asking powerful questions - open questions, Van Brabant said.

Interpeace puts together teams that reflects the main division lines in the society in which they work, reflecting ethnicity, religion etc. in accordance with the conflict lines. It is a tremendous challenge to create a basic level of trust, according to Van Brabant.

Reactions from Timor-Leste

He showed video clips from dialogue sessions in Timor-Leste, where Interpeace cooperates on dialogue processes with local partner CEPAD (Center of Studies of Peace and Development), and shared his views on the shortcomings of the international society in Timor-Leste.

- In 2005, the international society thought of Timor-Leste as a real success story, and started to exit. In spring 2006, there was massive internal violence, which none of the international actors saw coming. A process had to start among the Timorese to build trust among them.

CEPAD has filmed several dialogue sessions among the Timorese, asking for reactions from the filmed audience. These spanned a wide spectrum of societal problems, like dealing with the past, connecting the politicians and the people and curbing violent groups operating in the streets, as well as basic human reactions - anger, fear, distrust and broken relationships.

- They pointed a lot of fingers to the leadership, which raises the question: why are we following these leaders? There are no leaders without followers. The strategic mistake of the international society was to see Indonesia as the biggest threat. No one was looking at internal divisions - they were focused on state building. All these internal fault lines blew up when the international society withdrew, said Van Brabant.

- The question is: how do you create an environment where people want to look into what really happened?

Van Brabant then explained the idea of working in different tracks of society – an idea used by peacebuilding veteran John Paul Lederach. Track one is the top level of society – the political elite, track two is the civil society and track three the people.

- In your work - who here works in track one or two? asked Van Brabant.

First to answer was NDC Serbia’s Tatjana Popovic:

- We work mostly at the grassroots level, because we are locals. Most of us grew out of the local societies, but we tend to include local politicians, trying to reconnect them to national policy. To some extend also with national politicians, but we don’t negotiate political deals and the like, said Popovic.

Steinar Bryn, of the NCPD replied that the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the main donor of many of the Nansen Dialogue projects, is not happy about him being in too close contact with top level politicians, thinking it gets too close to the work of Norwegian diplomats.

Van Brabant stressed the importance of a multi-level approach:

- In Interpeace we always say we work on track six: one + two + three. In our analysis, thinking in tracks is part of the problem. Steinar used the word „blamestorming” to describe the reactions seen in the film clip. This venting of emotions is often the first step in a dialogue. People were pointing their fingers at their politicians. For that to happen without your organization being shut down, you need to operate at the highest political level. Our donors can’t challenge these reactions, because the Timorese are doing these sessions themselves.

Identities in Rwanda

Van Brabant then showed another movie clip, this time from Rwanda. The interviews were with Rwandans talking about ethnic identities.

- Governmental policy is to say there are no Hutu or Tutsi, only Rwandans. This is understandable, but the distinction exists, said Van Brabant, explaining something that is controversial in Rwanda:

- Lots of moderate Hutus were killed as well (during the 1994 genocide). Every year there is a national commemoration of the genocide of the Tutsis, but these Hutus are not recognized as victims. The revenge killings afterwards are not recognized either.

Creating the spaces for people to talk about this is extremely politically sensitive.

Elaborating on Interpeace’s work, Van Brabant said:
- Dialogue is a tool, or method, or approach. It is not by itself a strategy. At Interpeace, we look for deeper strategies for peacebuilding. Dialogue is one of many options.

Van Brabant was met with critique from several members of the audience for the use of video in handling sensitive issues. He defended this approach by replying that videos can be shown to people who do not want to talk to the others.

- They can have their stereotypes modified by watching their opponents on video, and then become interested in talking to each other. The Timor-Leste video is being taken to a national event and shown to the leaders. It is hard to deny, as a political leader, what comes out of it.

He also stressed the fact that the video work was done by the participants in the dialogue sessions themselves — there were no outsider camera crews present, neither in Rwanda or in Timor-Leste.

Polls and research

- Polling can be used to show public opinion and give the politicians the courage to move forward, as happened with the Black Friday agreement in Northern Ireland. It is very important to know what your population is willing to go along with. What will they support, what will they reject, what might they be willing to go along with? These polls can again be a basis for further dialogue.

- Interpeace also uses research to gain insights. People have conversations where they think they have the facts, but that is not always the case. People will often be surprised to learn what has really happened. Several members of the audience were skeptical of using research during dialogue processes.

Chro Borhan of the Nansen Dialogue Network voiced the opinion that what happens in the dialogue room is what is important, not the conditions on the outside. Van Brabant replied:

- Research is not a substitute for the conversation, it supports it. What kind of research are we using? The numbers killed? We are not going to find that out. But the numbers of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon can found out. Is it relevant to the conversation? It might be - it is up to them (the people taking part in the peace process, journ. remark) to decide. They will commission the research, not outsiders or even the facilitators. It is asked for by the people themselves. It is not up to us to decide.

Sushobha Barve supported Van Brabant by telling about documentation work done in Kashmir on young people killed by the police in uprisings. By doing researching these killings, and disseminating it to both the people and politicians, the CDR (Centre for Dialogue Reconciliation) was able to reduce the passion surrounding them. The central government and the police were happy to receive the research results, and the families of those killed found it easier to find relief afterwards.

- There are no hard and fast rules! We should not throw research out of the window, Barve said.

Not a “dialogue organization”

Van Brabant summed up Interpeace's use of dialogue among other methods:

- If someone asked me if Interpeace is a dialogue organization, I would say “no”. We do dialogue, but we do a lot of other things too. We approach dialogue as one element used together with others.
AZIZ NADERI: How people Make Dialogue Possible in Afghanistan

— By Gulabuddin Sukhanwar

AZIZ NADERI IS DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS FOR SANAYEE DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION (SDO), A KABUL BASED AFGHAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION.

In the Nansen Seminar 2014, the keynote How people Make Dialogue Possible in Afghanistan, was presented by Aziz Naderi. A member of the Sanayee Development Organization (SDO), Aziz is from Afghanistan and works to promote peace in the country.

In his presentation, Mr. Naderi highlighted some facts about development and challenges still facing Afghanistan, mainly focusing on peace-building initiatives based on SDO’s experience at ground level for more than a decade.

The progress made in Afghanistan is record-breaking: improvements in education, better healthcare, improved infrastructures, the involvement of human rights and women’s rights organizations, a more promising civil society and more open media communications show that Afghanistan is now doing better than neighboring countries.

Aziz Naderi believes that ineffective governance, corruption, ever-changing properties and lack of communication between citizens and the state, political instability, the reducing presence of international forces and ineffective peace talks are the main challenges facing the country today.

The economic situation of this nation is still highly dependent on international aid and the level of unemployment and poverty remain high in the country, while narcotic use is another problem affecting its economy.
How the SDO work for peace building?

SDO is an Afghan NGO working in the area of peace building since 1996, and the main principle of its methodologies are cultural norms and the perceived reality of the community.

The organization runs community programs aimed at conflict resolution and mobilizing the community, establishing peace Shuras (special councils) to work at ground level starting dialogues with local people. Training and facilitating Peace Shuras to work towards conflict resolution within the community, SDO also organizes programs for youths to get them involved in ongoing debates.

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The youth for peace program trained and promoted young activists during elections and it proved helpful to motivate young people to support the common good instead of focusing on their differences.

The Peace Shuras who represent villages work based on traditional and cultural customs to identify the roots of violence and involve local people as volunteers for peace building and open talks “dialogue”.

Women are very important in the peace building program and SDO promoted Women’s Peace Shuras in every village. As a result, women now play an important role in conflict resolution at grassroots level.

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SDO has provided a peace curriculum for schools and talks from teachers about peace building from grades 1-12.

The Peace Building programs in Afghanistan has no budget and the High Peace Council (HPC) does not have an effective program although one is needed; we need peace talk “dialogue” at every level, said Aziz.

His presentation was highly appreciated by the participants who all said that they got to know the reality of life in Afghanistan through his explanations.
ZAHRA HASSAN: Reconciliation in Somalia through Vision 2016

— By Gulabuddin Sukhanwar

The reconciliation process of Somalia was presented by Zahra Hassan. She believes that security is still a major problem for the country and that it survives due to international donors’ help.

She explained that Somalia had experienced elections and that the president is elected by the parliament, so power sharing is nationwide and the minority vs. majority is no longer a concern.

For the reconciliation process, the government planned to create lasting peace and sustainable development in the south and central regions and bring together its rightful indigenous residents. The government aims to engage the public and ensure a shared political vision and objectives to work towards successful reconciliation.

Still the judicial system of the country is weak and people have a lot of problems, especially relating to land and property that have been occupied by warlords and other insurgent’s members during the civil war.

Somalia’s government has a program in place to create an environment conducive to economic growth by enabling businesspeople that have roots in the regions to invest. This will create more jobs and improve the economy so that unemployed youths and refugees can be attracted back home.

Zahra Hassan maintains that Somalia is rich and has mineral and oceanic resources, but that the international community should help them to have a sustainable economic power of their own.
The government has planned to encourage intellectuals to return to the country and create unity, peace dialogues, respect and real collaboration and brotherhood between all residents of the regions.

For the returning refugees, the government’s strategy is to establish programs including creating skill building training and the main objective of the strategy is to help and re-settle those refugees who are still living in neighboring countries.

The IPD, UNHCR and some other international organizations are helping the government to build houses for refugees who are returning back to the country.

Somalia has its own military, police and national security but the insurgent groups, especially Al-Shabaab, is a threat for all and they kill whomever is against their ideology.

Security is still a problem, with the country suffering from external and internal problems of danger; many insurgent groups with fundamental Islamist ideology are active in causing conflict and creating problems for the nation, explained Zahra Hassan.

In her presentations Mrs. Hassan raised her concern about young people that are attracted to insurgent groups and get brainwashed by them; another problem is the payments that such young people can get from the insurgent groups to entice them in. The insurgent group Al-Shabaab pays more money than the government and that is why many young people are joining them.

No one knows where the insurgent groups are getting funds and support from, but they are more active and have presence everywhere, attacking many important areas like parliament, the presidential palace, the court and other public areas during Friday prayer, Hassan told us.
SUSHOBHA BARVE: Bridging Divides - Experiences from Dialogue Work in Kashmir

— By Gulabuddin Sukhanwar

SUSHOBHA BARVE IS CDR-INDIA’S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND AN EXPERIENCED DIALOGUE FACILITATOR.

Sushobha Barve gave a presentation about the current situation and how conflict resolutions work in Kashmir.

She believes that the first and potentially most dangerous dimension is the bilateral conflict between India and Pakistan about the legitimate sovereignty over Kashmir.

India and Pakistan have fought at least three wars over Kashmir, including the Indo-Pakistani Wars of 1947, 1965 and 1999 and since 1984 the two countries have also been involved in several skirmishes over control of the Siachen Glacier.

According to her presentation, the political issues of both countries have made the situation too complicated for productive dialogues and few have taken place between the people of Kashmir, which remains a serious problem between India and Pakistan.
CDR’s first specific objective is to bridge regional, ethnic and religious divisions and strengthen trust between conflicting areas through civil society dialogue.

Their second objective is to create awareness among Indian and Pakistani politicians, opinion holders and policy makers about the view of Kashmiri stakeholders on both sides of the Line of Control (the military control line dividing Kashmir between India and Pakistan. ed. remark) regarding the resolution of this conflict.

Restoring trust and understanding of Kashmiri people was the group’s first aim and they started with dialogues about how to reduce the conflict, working with women’s groups and its own members to further their objectives. In some cases, the women had suffered greatly and their husbands had been kidnapped, Barve told us.

Kashmir people believe that they need confidence building activities to understand each other, as neither separation nor violence are appropriate responses to resolve the Kashmir issue.

CDR programs in both India and Pakistan focus on peace and stability and target different sectors in their work, including women’s dialogue, inter-regional talks, trade discussions, debate about water issues, youth leadership programs and India-Pakistan dialogue on regional peace and stability. The aim of the programs is to bring peace and trust between the people of Kashmir who are suffering and have been through a very hard time.

CDR reached policy makers and high officials on both sides of the border, to help them better understand the Kashmir issues. Although there was no connection between traders from each country, the organization worked hard to encourage dialogue with both sides to pave the way for collaboration and as a result, each side released statements that the road for trade was now open, albeit with some conditions.

However, some insurgent groups are still operating in this area and surely the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan will affect the security of Kashmir, said Barve.
Help Increase the Peace Program - HIPP

— By Gulabuddin Sukhanwar

HIPP is a worldwide organization, represented in more than sixty countries.

The HIPP workshop was held on Saturday June 14th, with participation of seminar members from different countries to discuss ways to encourage peace programs as an alternative to violence for youth.

The workshop was led by Chro Borhan and HIPP members to introduce their programs and explain how they work within each community.

HIPP’s program is based on methodology called “alternative to violence for youth” and mainly focuses on young people and minorities, including refugees, to make them active and involved in society.

The workshop’s participants divided into working groups and discussed how to work alongside peace programs offering different activities whose main focus is to give space to minority groups.

In the working groups, members shared their experience and points of view in order to learn from each other and use the methodology of HIPP in their societies.

Participants from post-conflict countries such Somalia, the Balkans, Sudan, and Afghanistan enjoyed the teamwork and found it helpful to improve a regular talks “dialogues” within their communities between youths and older immigrants, to raise more awareness of common problems and so increase understanding and communication skills.

The activities of teamwork are based on the principles of value and respect for each other, and much was learnt from the course about how to engage young people in the formation of a stronger community.

Our methodology of activity works by encouraging youths to be more active in the community based on the ideology of peace-building whose roots began with Gandhi, according to Chro Borhan.

HIPP works worldwide and has a presence in more than sixty countries, offering training and facilitating programs to improve communication skills, co-operation, conflict resolution, diversity and community building.

The organization aims to find peaceful solutions and better talks with the public to support their vision of a non-violent world.

HIPP’s workshop team leader said that Norway is a multi-cultural country which therefore needs MORE dialogue (between its minority groups, refugees, politicians and authority figures).
Inter-ethnic Dialogue in the Western Balkans

— By Kim Sivertsen

TATJANA POPOVIC IS DIRECTOR OF THE NANSEN DIALOGUE CENTRE SERBIA.

Popovic came into dialogue work after participating in a workshop and wanting to know the human causes of the breakup of Yugoslavia.

After a round of introductions, Popovic presented the Western Balkans and the Nansen Dialogue Network.

She then told about the interactive dialogue in local communities in the Balkans.

- When we started, we did not know where to go. We wanted to empower people to engage in their local communities. The long-term presence and follow up of these communities is very important. Staying in the communities, discussing with them people there; what are their needs, how can they work to fill them?

- Conflict transformation should focus on the long-term relationships between people, instead of the short-term perspective of conflict resolution.

Providing a safe space is very important. We took them to Lillehammer, away from the resistance to reconciliation that often exists in their local communities. In the beginning, it was important to not be mentioned in the media. We are different from activist organizations - we wanted people to listen to each other, Popovic said.

There is, however, no guarantee that people will listen to dialogue facilitators.

- What we can do is to provide space for dialogue and make sure that everyone makes a serious effort. It is important to explain to them that we are not trying to change them. We will respect their identity and their choices.

- In Southern Serbia, the conflict is denied. We are nice neighbours, ignore each other in the work place and pretend there is no conflict. The Nansen approach is to have presence - workshops programs, meetings.

We help them bring the local authorities closer to the people. We have done that by bringing them here, to Lillehammer, and showing them how to serve the people.
In Bujanovac it took 5-6 years to achieve to take the first, small steps towards better cooperation.

Bujanovac has a population of Albanians, Serbs and Roma. After the conflict in 1999-2001 NDC Serbia started working in Bujanovac municipality. On the suggestion of Steinar Bryn, Lillehammer municipality got involved in Bujanovac.

Popovic mapped the complex local politics of Bujanovac. In schools, teachers did not meet across ethnic divides and students did not interact at all with youth from other ethnicities. There were armed groups in the vicinity, almost invisible, but influencing the process. In 2006, a bomb was thrown close to a schoolyard, and parents were retracting their kids from school.

- This incident that sets us back three years. It is important to get authorities to engage in this, as the society is still authoritarian, and people will follow their leaders, Popovic said.

How to bring people to the table

- It is a long time process, building trust, building capacity, hosting dialogue seminars. Norwegians are seen as positive contributors by all sides in the Balkans. The role of Norwegians was very important in the beginning. After a couple of years, we started including local facilitators and they took over. Steinar (Bryn) still follows up and is important to the processes, but a part of the success is that local facilitators are present.

Koenraad Van Brabant attended the workshop, and asked:

- Interpeace would never bring in an outsider, as a principle. How do you feel about that now? And why was there no Roma facilitator on the team?

- Roma people attend Serbian schools. They all speak Serbian, and learn in Serbian. A neutral facilitator was necessary in the beginning, to bring people together and Norway had a good name. Concentrating on the present had a positive effect on the participants. We did not address it through trauma healing - the role of the neutral facilitator was good, we locals learnt from them. The Serbs and Albanian children talk in English together. The danger of having neutral facilitators is that people become too dependent on them. But after a while, people started to take initiatives and organize projects themselves. We have to invest in these processes all the time. We have improved relationships in schools. We know that, because now they meet outside of school.

Popovic’s workshop also consisted of different exercises, giving possibilities for reflection on cooperation and problem solving.
On Friday 13th June the Nansen Seminar 2014 Program held a workshop for multicultural dialogue led by Christiane Seehausen. Twenty-five people from different countries took part.

Ms Seehausen explained that multicultural societies need increased dialogue within its people so they can work together for building a peaceful coexistence in the community and giving space for minorities to be more in contact with mainstream society.

In Norway the program helps refugees to get involved in local society and learn about the culture and system of the country.

“In today’s world we really need dialogue between the cultures at all levels of society for example in most cases people are judging us by our face color and religion (because we are African and black) and think that Africans are not educated and Westerners are more educated and more peaceful nations, so we want to change this idea and give equal respect to all human beings”, said one of the participants from Somalia.

“In a society, both sides (the majority and the minority) have responsibilities in community building but in most cases the majority or native residents are responsible for deciding to give space to new residents (refugees) and accept them through mutual respect. This is our thinking about multicultural dialogue: to feel and respect people and understand them”, said Mrs. Seehausen.

In the workshop, the participants divided into groups and discussed some important subjects that are especially necessary and should be the focus of their programs.

**Working group discussions**

The working groups mainly agreed that freedom of speech and religion, and individual safety are crucial in a multicultural dialogue and that there should be more attempts to create trust between the majority and minority populations, this aiding the security of the country.

For everyone, peace and dialogue have different definitions, as in Norway they mean to trust others,
while in post conflict countries, safety and peace means meeting people’s basic needs, protecting their security and being away from war and conflicts. So with these wide definitions we can work with the peace programs of Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue (NCPD) based on the reality of our societies.

The workshops challenged the participants to reflect on their own attitude and values in relation to inclusive communities, to share experiences and learn some tools that can be used to create a good meaningful communication.

The programs and methodologies of the workshop were found helpful to implement the ideology of peace building and dialogue in society.

WORKSHOPS

Red Cross Street Mediators

— By Ingvild Tanke Nygård

THE STREET MEDIATOR PROJECT IN RED CROSS OSLO AIM TO PREVENT CONFLICT, AND TO MEDIATE WHEN A CONFLICT HAVE ESCALATED AMONG YOUTH IN OSLO.

Ellen Rykkja Gilbert (international advisor for Street Mediation, at Norwegian Red Cross) and the youth instructors Mohammed Hussein and Kristoffer Agari gave us an introduction in their work among youth in Oslo. The projects main objective is to empower the youth, and to give them tool for solving conflict in their own local community. It bases its work on youth volunteers reaching from the age of 13-25, whom are trained in conflict resolution through a program at the Red Cross. To work with youth gives the street mediators opportunity to start the conflict solving at an early stage before the conflict has reached a more deeply and serious level.

At the Nansen Seminar we were given a short introduction in the 36 hours training program that the youth participate in before becoming a youth instructor in the Street Mediation project. The workshop focused on giving an insight in the work of the street mediators and the methods they use in the field. Through a two-hour session were Ellen, Mohammed and Kristoffer told their stories from the work in Street Mediation and gave a short introduction in the methods, all the participants were able to try out some of their methods themselves and to participate in the exercises used in conflict resolution. The workshop ended with a discussion and reflection about the effect of this project, their methods and use of the different exercises applied in conflict solution.
“If you are intellectually engaged, emotionally involved and you are physically present – you are participating!”

During the workshop, Lojancic shared his strategic thoughts behind dialogue processes as well as several stories of important events from his seminars, illustrating how a dialogue seminar can run its course. He started by sharing how he ended up doing dialogue work.

- I ended up doing this job as an accident. I spoke English good enough to be invited to my first seminar. I didn’t want to go, I had a comfortable life – but the woman who invited me was very persuasive. After 15 years of working with Bryn, I realized I couldn’t do anything else, Lojancic said.

The last place on the bus

Lojancic then recounted several stories from his life as a dialogue worker – each story leading up to a point he wanted to make:

- We had a group of politicians from Southern Serbia, working to establish a multi-ethnic government with Albanians and Serbs in one town. We invited politicians from different parties to a dialogue seminar. We had 20 participants, which is about the number you would want for a seminar – big enough that you can make groups, but small enough to have individual relationships. 19 of them sat in the bus, but the 20th just stood there. My colleague invited him to enter the bus, and he said: No, I am not going. We asked: what do you mean - you came all the way here from your house, you have waited all this time for the bus to be ready to leave, and now you say you are not going? Why did you come?

And he said: I wanted to make sure that nobody used my place in the bus.

- This man saw the whole thing as a political struggle, and he invested his time in trying to block the interaction between our dialogue and his political party.
The interruption of monologue

- Some say dialogue is the interruption of monologue. Monologue is addressing some basic needs you have – you think that while you are controlling the whole situation, nothing bad will happen to you. As long as you are not interrupted, you can continue with your monologue. You can be interrupted - by another person or by your brain - sharing dilemmas with what you’re saying. The moment that happens, you enter into the process of dialogue – and you cannot control it, because there is somebody else sharing the space with you. You enter an unknown land which is fertile for sure, but you never know what is going to grow in it. That is one of the beauties of dialogue.

- How is this reflected in planning? You have to plan everything, down to the last detail! But you also have to understand that your whole plan can go down the drain in less than five minutes. So what do you do when that happens? Do you adjust, or do you say – we will come back to this later? Many facilitators will do that, and then go back to the original plan. They are going from the dialogue back to the monologue. It is a violation of the dialogue process. So feel free to step out and trust your participants – your partners in dialogue. They will always come out with something valuable. You have to make all the plans, and then don’t stick to them.

Not a third party

- In the first years in Southern Serbia, we were focused on Albanians and Serbs, the two major ethnic groups. But there is a third ethnic group there that could actually shift the balance of power. They would have enough votes, if they used them, to take away the majority from the others. This is the Roma people.

- All countries in Europe have only one thing in common – they discriminate Roma people. It is everywhere; from Scandinavia and Norway down to the Balkan countries. By living with this discrimination, they develop certain habits that prevent them from organizing politically. We wanted to explore whether it is possible to work with them and get them to develop a political force that could make a difference. It is very easy to sympathize with them, and lots of people will do that. They will gather together with the Roma people and cry with them for the whole project, they will write a report, and that’s it. So how could we do this? They had been through many different seminars, and nothing would come from it. I was even called by a mayor from a town in Southern Serbia and he said to me: You have developed some credibility here through your work – don’t spend it on the Roma! That is one of the reasons I decided to go through with it. So I said to them: I will not sympathize with you. I know that it is a very important human thing to do, but nothing ever came out of it.

- We spent three and a half years together, and then they formed a political party - the first Roma political party, to my knowledge – by simply participating in elections. In the meantime, I had given up being a tough bastard with them. I developed emotions far beyond sympathy. I was thinking: what happened? How did I develop this relationship with them? And then I realized: In dialogue, you cannot be the third party. What does it mean, anyway? Who is the first party? Do we only have two parties in conflicts and war? All these notions about impartiality, standing outside, being the third party are simply rubbish. If you are intellectually engaged, emotionally involved and you are physically present – you are participating! You are in dialogue with your participants – and this gives you credibility and trust that you later can use in the recruitment process – to recruit difficult participants. At the beginning of a dialogue process, you won't get difficult participants, which is good for you. But if you want to make some sort of bigger change, you need to work with people who are ideologically not your friends.

24 hours a day

Lojancic then talked about his work with the International Committee for Missing Persons (ICMP). This organization works with the families of people who were kidnapped and allegedly killed during the war (in the former Yugoslavia).

- I was working with them as Serb. They were divided on practically everything, even on victims, so I was working with the Serbs and my Albanian colleague with the Albanians. After two years, we decided to bring them to the Nansen Academy to do some joint activities. It is very difficult to bring these people together, because for all the misery they have encountered in life, they blame the other side. This group ended up taking a part of my heart and changed it with something else – it is one of the most difficult groups I have worked with. It is very difficult to move them. They were so bitter, so angry, so locked in their emotions. They didn't even go out for drinks. As one of them put it: How can I go out for a drink when my son is missing?

- We were working slowly. It was one of those seminars where if you were to make a mistake, that would be it – you could just give up on the group. On the third day, we travelled to Oslo to meet some organizations, among others the Red Cross and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We had a beautiful dinner with a prominent Norwegian Peace Worker.

- As we drove home in the late, Norwegian winter night, somewhere between Eidsvoll and Hamar, it was completely silent in the bus. It was one of those nights when you can easily believe that the whole world is inside the bus, that there is nothing outside. It was that dark.

- At one moment, a woman started to laugh. And that was a big surprise, because they never laugh. But yet, she was laughing. She was a big woman, her laughter came like an avalanche, and it was a laughter that you couldn’t resist! You simply had to join – so we did! Her friend started to laugh, and then the guy in front of them, and it spread through the bus. And suddenly we found ourselves all laughing.

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- They were laughing all the way from Hamar to Lillehammer, which is a one hour drive – all the way through. When we left the bus, I said to Stein- ar: What was this? And he said: It was a ten years’ old laughter.

- When we came into the room the morning after, everything had changed. They started to cooperate, having realized that they were all vic- tims of the same logic – of the same gun, fired with a different finger. The rest of the seminar was very, very easy – they almost ran it by them- selves. As far as I know, they are still cooperating.

- The point is: You cannot intel- lectualize everything. You have to wait for things to happen, and you need the character to recognize it when it happens. You have to be there all the time to recognize these moments, when everything cracks down and a new logic is introduced in the room. Don’t expect dialogue to happen only in the room! Dialogue happens all the time, also outside the room. If you will work with a group for three days, it means three days, 24 hours, everyday!

The difficult participants

- What do you do with difficult partici- pants? In this dialogue in Southern Serbia, we had all the political parties but the most radical one. We invited them, but they said they would not come because we were traitors, we were international bastards, what- ever they could come up with. And this is OK. We did not insist, we con- tinued our work, and said that the invitation is open. After four years, they joined. One extremely radical Serbian party asked their headquar- ters in Belgrade to change their stat- utes, because those stated that they would not cooperate with interna- tional organizations. But they asked for an excuse because they wanted to cooperate with us, and they got one.

- What I am trying to say is that you have to be there for everybody. You have to give options to everybody, because if dialogue is about change, the option to change must be given to everybody. It must be as inclusive as you can make it. Don’t insist, but leave the invitation open – it can take years to get people to join the dia- logue process. Dialogue can maybe create fatigue, but it is the absence of dialogue that creates misery. Dia- logue is like air – you can see that it is there only in its absence.

The story I would like to forget

- The seminar with the ICMP group ended after seven days, and part of the tradition is that Steinar is handing over the certificates to the participants, one by one. They will usually say a few words. At one mo- ment, an Albanian woman came up and received her certificate, and she turned and said: Before this thing happened to me – “this thing” mean- ing her family being killed while she watched by Serbian paramilitaries, leaving her alive because it would be more difficult for her than to die.

- I always thought that that all peo- ple are the same. I was taught by my parents that there is no difference between Serbs and Albanians or whomever, that the only difference was between good and bad peo- ple. When this happened, I changed in spirit, and I started to hate all Serbs. All the time, I knew that I was not right, that this wasn’t me, but I couldn’t help myself.

- And she turned to us and said: Thank you for giving me my life back.

- If I ever had a dilemma about the work I am doing, at that moment it disappeared completely. The reward you get in this job is something you will have to keep in your heart for the rainy days. There will be rainy days, when nothing works for you. But the reward is so big that it is very difficult to measure.

Trying, failing and succeeding

- When I see something that works again and again, I start to repeat it. When I see something that doesn’t work, I don’t do it again. We devel- op some kind of intuition. Stein- ar Bryn said of his dialogue work. He told of the evolution of the Nansen Dialogue seminars, how they had, over time, excluded el- ements that did not work well with the participants – lecturers under- estimating them, psychologi- cal sessions addressing imagined trauma among them, as well as the paternalistic attitude of Bryn himself and his coworkers in the beginning. Of the somewhat remote location of the Nansen center for Peace and Dialogue he said:

- Why Lillehammer? When you or- ganize a dialogue seminar, the devil is in the details. The place you choose is very, very important. Always check out the place first. Are the rooms invi- ting? Are there group rooms available? How is the menu? And if there is a band, can they play all kinds of music? I have experienced, one time in Macedonia, that half the group got up and left very early because of the repertoire of the band. They played only Macedonian music, not anything from the other side.

- Lillehammer is a neutral place. I am strong believer in that – a neutral place gives so much to the dialogue process. People simply relax more. Also, if you are close to the homes of the participants, they will just go home if they get mad. If there is a ten hour bus ride, that will not happen. They also tend to build a new group identity. In Lillehammer, lots of things are new to the participants, and they start building a new group identi- ty which is not “Lillehammerish.”

The importance of breaks

- When I try to make a program for a seminar, I very often think – what kind of breaks does this program make? The breaks may be equally important to the sessions. And the breaks are maybe where the opening comes.

- Think about everything sur- rounding the building you are in.
I would be very reluctant to have a dialogue seminar in Oslo. I don’t think what we have done the last twenty years would have been possible in Oslo at all. There are too many distractions. In Lillehammer, we have had the peace needed to make peace.

Bryn conveyed the importance of every little detail:

- The small things are really important. I used to meet people at the airport. I don’t do that anymore, but I always try to meet them at the school when they arrive or leave.

I invite all groups to my home – because it is much easier to go into their home afterwards. The most important thing is to build relationships between them, and between us and them. Evaluators often ask what they can learn from a short trip to Lillehammer, but that is beside the point. They are not here to learn, but to get to know each other.

Part of the Nansen strategy is to involve people with power in their local communities.

- It is important to invite people in power. When we started, we didn’t have a name, we were nobody. The biggest challenge was to make people show up when the bus was about to leave. We had to call them several times the last week, and there were lots of excuses. If six people cancelled from one of the sides, we would end up with an imbalance in the room. If the balance was very bad when the bus was leaving, we would try to recruit those coming to say goodbye to those who left. At one point we even picked up a guy at a red light after the bus had left! But as the years went by, we got a name, and we now feel unsuccessful if we don’t get the mayor or someone in power. At one point we even drove a mayor from Macedonia to Lillehammer, as he was afraid of flying, Bryn said to much acclaim.

- Dialogue in itself does not solve conflicts, but rather increases the understanding of why the conflict is so hard to solve. We need the other tools – diplomacy, negotiations – we are not replacing that with dialogue. We are adding it as a component. It can change the aggressor-victim narrative and unite people in joint action to change oppressive structures. I have experienced that again and again, said Bryn.

But as for what really is the most important factor in a successful dialogue seminar, there was no doubt in Bryn’s mind:

- The most important part of dialogue is the follow up.

Questions and answers

- The most successful exercise we have is taking time to carefully formulating questions to the other side. A basic seminar will almost always start with people sharing their stories about what the conflict did to them. The sharing of these stories creates a closer relationship between the participants. Talk about the inter-ethnic communication and cooperation in your community. Ask them – what are the advantages of segregation? What are the disadvantages? One of the biggest challenges is to shut up – because they must see for themselves what is going on. Trust your participants. Identify the obstacles to peace!
CLOSING SESSION
— By Ingvild Tanke Nygård
At the last session Christiane Seehausen raised the question; how can we work for more acknowledgement of dialogue in our societies?

Main speakers Aziz Naderi, Zahra Hassan, Sushobha Barve and Tatjana Popovic all reflected around that question and the challenges in their own societies.

“It’s a difficult question”, was the main agreement among the speakers whom stood before various challenges in their home countries, ranging from the government lack of interest in dialogue as a tool in conflict resolution to the problems with having to keep the dialogue behind closed doors and to not let the government know what people were talking about.

On the other hand, is this a bad thing? Should dialogue be open to everyone or do the closed doors give the participants room to express themselves without other people spoiling the dialogue? Barve was of the opinion that dialogue does not necessary need public acknowledgement, it needs to be based on people’s confidence and trust.

- Public acknowledgement comes after the people trust you, she said, and the people can choose when or if to go public.

- We haven’t cracked the code on how to get people to live together, said Steinar Bryn, maintaining his view that peace is possible if only one uses the right means – which would be dialogue.

- Billions have been used in peace-building without results - is it something wrong in how we build peace? Bryn asked rhetorically.

Aziz Naderi did not adhere to the idea that dialogue is not recognized as important:

- Dialogue does not need to be acknowledged, it’s already implemented in our society and most people understand dialogue. The government does not acknowledge their people’s work. We need to increase the impact of dialogue. Good things are going on without the government!

Ellen Rykkja Gilbert from the Norwegian Red Cross addressed the problem with the increase in extremism in youth all over the world, and how we should work with this through creating space where generations can meet.

- Peace begins at home! This was Zahra Hassan’s message to the closing session.

- We need to build a bridge across generations. Instead of giving the children rules and orders, we need to talk with them and explain why we do it. Children in segregated societies have more hatred and less contact with other than their own group, because they have never experienced anything else. The children only learn how to live separately, not together. Segregation is a lack of dialogue, said Hassan.

- We have a responsibility - terrorists grow everywhere – but so do peace workers, said Norunn Grande in her closing remarks, maintaining that there is hope:

- We need to connect as humans. This is where dialogue is necessary!

Then flowers were given to all involved in arranging the seminar and goodbyes were said.
REFLECTIONS ON THE SEMINAR
Koenraad Van Brabant hosted the reflections sessions, asking the participants to share one experience they would bring with them from the seminar. The following are some of these reflections:

„I did not have to fight for space to talk during this seminar“
„It is so encouraging to hear that people share your values“
„Like a big spiritual meal we have to digest“
„The energy from this group reminded me why I am in this business“
„How hard it is to find a common language - the words were broad and did not mean the same to all present“
„The key element is understanding first“
„There is so much hope!“
„Dialogue and peacebuilding - I feel it in my heart!“
„It is not a bad thing to be positive“
„What you have planted in us will not go to waste“
„Inspiring!“
„I finally understand the concept of global warming - my heart is warmed globally“
„This is the first peace conference I have been to where I can see that there is a difference“
„We were given the opportunity to speak from the heart“
„Finally a seminar that was practical, not theoretical“
„Now I will have dialogue instead of just persuasions!“