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EX POST PAPER

RAN RVT – How can victims contribute to social cohesion after a period of violence?

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The role of victims in strengthening social cohesion after a period of violence

Recent European history has left a traumatic legacy of vast communities affected by prolonged periods of violence and thousands of victims and survivors who, despite the current absence of violence, have to deal with the rise of severely polarised societies. In addition, victims feel isolated and abandoned after a long period of violence as an added factor to their primary victimisation. They are a permanent reminder of the violence and the terror and are therefore excluded from the community and stranded in no man's land.

Nevertheless, victims and victims' groups can play a relevant role in promoting social cohesion and strengthening the community's resilience to violent extremism, shifting their role from silent violence recipients to peace builders and agents of change within their own communities, becoming owners of this process.

Victims involved in strengthening social cohesion can even collaborate to enhance their own resilience and healing processes, to bridge divisions and to bond the communities themselves as well as with the victims.

However, it is necessary to deal with victims' expectations and ensure their proper well-being, when participating in these kinds of actions and programmes, in order to avoid any sort of secondary victimisation as a result of this involvement.

This paper will 1) explore several possible fields, such as media, communities and policy, to work in or collaborate with to encourage the involvement of victims to promote social cohesion, 2) identify some inspiring practices, some of them from adjacent fields, 3) outline the challenges and needs that victims and victims' groups can face during the implementation of their practices, with 4) possible approaches and recommendations to meet these needs.

1. Societies after violence

Violence can affect a community and the relationships between its members in a wide range of ways. It can be affected even more when violence comes from one fraction of the community, causing hostility and mistrust, which therefore undermines progression of and investment in social cohesion. There are several examples of European communities affected by long periods of violence during the last decades: four decades of conflict in Northern Ireland (UK), with a legacy consistent with the loss of around 3 700 lives and around 50 000 physically or psychologically affected survivors, in a country with a population of 1.7 million; the exposure to violent extremism and terrorism in the Basque Country (Spain) over 50 years, leaving behind 856 casualties, 2 600 survivors and thousands of threatened families that had to flee their homes; and the ethnic war in former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1999, with the result of the total destruction of a multi-ethnic society, and a death toll of 220 000 and 2.7 million displaced people.

Although these examples of violent periods in Europe have very different political and historical backgrounds, and singular ethnic and religious components, their societies share a number of common symptoms:

- Polarisation of society is probably the first consequence of prolonged violence between two or more dominant communities and manifests itself in two main social trends: the “them & us” thinking and, even worse, the “them & us” sense of belonging.
- There is a change in the perception of reality. Communities, affected by violence lasting a long period of time, experience a normalisation of violence and therefore tend to perceive violence as a familiar factor to coexist with. “Violence is normal”.
- The general feeling of fear and lack of trust in civil society and democracy negatively impacts the ability to integrate with other members of the community, neighbours or even family members, becoming an unwritten law. “You can trust no one”. These negative aspects of group behaviour (such as prejudice and stereotypes) can result in hostility and violence, as in the case in Northern Ireland and many other countries affected by conflict. Furthermore, it is transferred down the generations.
- There is a profound “desire to forget” or “draw a line in the sand”, even despite or above other concepts, such as “justice” and “rule of law”, that become abstract and irrelevant irritation agents in order to achieve the desired oblivion. At this point, victims become an obstacle and a living reminder of what happened, and furthermore, they themselves become the perceived barriers to peacebuilding.

Victims and victims’ groups therefore need to work closely to address this terrible scenario and strengthen social cohesion as a unique remedy to heal the society. They should identify the proper fields to work on, be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, the proper partners to join with, and the opportunities and the challenges they will find along this path to healing their communities.

Tip Find inspiring practices carried out in different fields in the blue boxes throughout this paper

2. Victims and the media

The role of the media in strengthening social cohesion after a period of violence is pivotal. In addition to personal experiences and relationships, the media is a really important source of knowledge to confirm the perception of reality. The media’s capability to magnify or reduce fears and grievances confers media the power to become an essential actor in peacebuilding processes: there’s no doubt of its role in escalating conflicts, so a “positive shift” to bridge communities and reduce tensions can logically also be expected, paying also special attention to the wider social media’s scope and reach.

The role of this peace journalism during a period of post-violence should be aimed at describing the past and the reality of what happened, identifying the real causes of violence, and re-humanising all the victims. And it should, in contrast, be avoiding sensationalistic approaches based on exploiting the victims’ suffering.

Possible approaches to reinforce this peace journalism’s role could be focused on spotlighting voices and initiatives aimed at bridging communities and speaking out against violence. The role of victims and victims’ groups feeding into and collaborating with the media is essential. However, this never lacks quite a few challenges and there are risks stemming from this “partnership”:

- Victims become a very attractive issue for the media in the aftermath of an attack, during periods of escalated violence and during anniversaries, but they remain forgotten in the long term.
- Although victims are a really important part of reality and a main actor of *what happened in the past*, their existence is frequently erased from the topical daily issues for traditional media and even more in social media, always chasing “the immediacy”. This absence from the social and political landscape can be a real pitfall for reconstruction of the community’s relationships after a period of violence, and therefore an obstacle to strengthening the social cohesion. In addition, their feelings of abandonment and oblivion on a daily basis and their punctual instrumentalisation by the media during anniversaries or other events can generate a secondary victimisation.
- Sometimes, journalists approach survivors and families in a very “direct” and not really sensitive way, being focused on the loss and suffering of the victims. This approach can without doubt generate great interest among the public, but can also cause stress and anxiety in the interviewers.
- Social media can entail specific risks for victims and victims’ organisations. The trivialisation of the content they share, the absence of the proper contextualisation, and the so called *eco-chamber* that can provoke negative interactions between the users and the victims are some of the challenges that victims and victims’ associations can face. Therefore, the use of social media to share victims’ testimonies should be carefully planned and assessed, informing the victims and the associations about the risks and challenges that these strategies entail ⁽¹⁾.
- Addressing issues such as terrorism and political violence can sometimes be challenging for journalists, in terms of identifying the proper terms that don’t tend to give a romantic vision of the violent groups, their goals or even the use of violence by itself.
- The victimisation process entails a shift in the victim’s personality. Families and survivors need to adapt their lives to the new situation. Dealing with the media can be a sensible issue. Some victims who start punctually being interviewed by media become usual contributors in mainstream media and there is a risk of “professionalising” these experiences, with a subsequent deterioration in their complete recovery process.

In order to address these and other challenges, victims can take on a really proactive and relevant role in collaborating with the media, paying special attention to some recommendations:

- In order to avoid a one-sided vision, and show objectivity, testimonies from diverse groups and origins should be collected, including testimonies of former combatants who have abandoned their extremist or violent mindset. Sharing victims’ testimonies that show the positive side of the story as well as their contribution to society can benefit the reception of this news by the public and contribute to reduction of tensions and bridging of communities.
- It is important to provide journalists with the proper training on how to approach victims during the interviews, to avoid additional victimisation during these encounters ⁽²⁾. Also, it is crucial to raise awareness on proper use of the terminology linked to terrorism and political violence, avoiding the romantic perception of the phenomenon.
- It is necessary that the victims and the victims’ groups realise how the media “works”, understanding the requirements of social media and general media pitfalls. When possible, the presence of a “media” professional within the victims’ groups or associations is an asset. Victims interested in collaborating with general or social media can also receive specific training on these issues and how to deliver their testimonies in a safe and successful way ⁽³⁾.
- It is advisable to combine different media to reach out to the largest audience, paying special attention to the specifics and requirements of each one of them, and the necessary strategy to success.

⁽¹⁾ Denoix de Saint Marc, G., Guglielminetti, L., Netten, J., Lacombe, S., van de Donk, M., Galesloot, J, & Woltman, P., [Handbook: Voices of victims of terrorism](#). RAN VVT Paper, 2016.

⁽²⁾ See: [How to approach victims of terrorism: Guidelines for the communication media when dealing with and approaching victims of terrorism](#).

⁽³⁾ Davies, L., [Delivering effective testimonials](#), Ex Post Paper. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: RAN Centre of Excellence, 2018.

#WordsMatter was launched on Tuesday 25 September 2018 and consists of eight survivors of incidents, including London 7/7, Bataclan Paris, Manchester and London Westminster Bridge, talking about their experiences of the media, press and public figures speaking and reporting after events, and calling upon them to show responsibility in the way they report and commentate about terrorism. All films are open source and free to broadcast and promote. #WordsMatter is a campaign promoted by the Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Peace Foundation.

<https://www.peace-foundation.org.uk/terrorism-survivors-urge-media-report-responsibly-following-terror-attacks/>

3. Victims in the policy field

The role of national governments and local authorities in strengthening social cohesion and bridging communities is essential after a long period of violence. There is no doubt about the capability of national and regional governments to reduce tensions and social polarisation through their institutional communication strategy, but also by adopting executive measures aimed at bonding the society by including all victims' needs in their agenda, ensuring the proper restitution schemes, funding and boosting peacebuilding initiatives, and ensuring the memory of the victims. Even when national governments can, for instance, foster general educational programmes including victims' testimonies or deliver national compensation schemes to victims, the local authorities are the ones that are in the proper position to really bridge their own communities, as they are the closest government to citizenship, understand the community's needs, and have the services and structures to meet them.

Transparency, social participation and good governance are just some tools of a public policy aimed at strengthening social cohesion. For this purpose, the involvement and collaboration of victims' organisations in this public policy is crucial. There are relevant benefits for national and local governments when engaging victims and their groups in these policies.

Victims' groups have detailed knowledge about their current situation and the needs of victims that must be met, and can therefore feed into the government's (national or local) policy, to draft the proper restorative schemes and help to monitor the success of these initiatives among the community. Furthermore, they have strong credibility among a large part of the community and can help to identify *credible and local voices* to involve in any initiative aimed at strengthening social cohesion. In addition, victims' groups are used to working closely with other civil society organisations and other sectors of the community. Involving victims in the implementation of these public policies will also foster the collaboration with other community organisations belonging to their networks.

In other words, victims and victims' groups can have a really relevant role collaborating with national governments and local authorities to strengthen this social cohesion after a period of violence. However, they can face some challenges during this process:

- Victims and victims' associations don't necessarily count on the knowledge and understanding of how the policy field functions. It is therefore necessary to provide them with the proper information before encouraging their engagement and contribution to this field.
- Victims' issues remain a sensitive matter on the political agenda, and there is still some reluctance to address their needs. In some occasions, *oblivion* appears as an easy solution to social conflicts. Victims keep being perceived in some places as a *bothering agent* to social reconstruction in the communities.
- Depending on the different geographical scenarios and the specific conflict's causes or period of political violence, there is still some reluctance to social reconciliation from one side of the conflict, and even more to include victims on the agenda. This is the case in places where the former perpetrators, who have abandoned the violent tactics, are now in power.
- Victims can in some cases be instrumentalised with political objectives, ensuring their presence in political events, but keeping them apart from the real victims' policymaking.

In order to facilitate the collaboration of victims and victims' groups restoring social cohesion, there are some successful approaches that should be taken into consideration:

- National and local authorities should involve all victims' groups in the compensation and reconciliation schemes' drafting processes, identifying priorities, needs and possible approaches to meet them, and engaging them in the political debate.
- National and local authorities should support peacebuilding initiatives led by victims, in terms of funding but also in terms of institutional support. Other initiatives aimed at providing emotional support to victims, in collaboration with the local or national schemes, are also extremely important (also in terms of peacebuilding and transgenerational trauma) and must be reinforced.
- National and local authorities should support and set up the commemoration of anniversaries and remembrance days for victims, highlighting their relevance in bonding the community.
- Victims and victims' groups should be engaged in any reconciliation and peacebuilding commission or working group led by national or local authorities, from the very first moment until the adoption of any practical measure, on a regular and active basis.
- In general terms, victims and victims' groups should have a proactive approach. This includes sharing and proposing initiatives to national and local authorities aimed at strengthening community cohesion and highlighting their relevant role in this process, advocating and lobbying in a measured and positive way.

Council of Victims of Terrorism. Basque Government, Spain.

The Council of Victims of Terrorism was launched in 2010 to channel the relationships between the associations of victims of terrorism and the Basque regional government, relating all issues concerning their situation.

The Council is currently formed by 15 members: a president, seven representatives from different areas of the regional government, and seven civil society representatives belonging to different victims' associations (AVT, COVITE, ASERFAVITE, ZAITU, APAVT, Fundación Fernando Buesa y Pacifist Associations Forum).

Among other functions, the Council is tasked with providing the Basque Government with suggestions and proposals related to grants and funding criteria for associations and victims' groups. It is further tasked with building up participation channels to listen, assist, support and counsel victims of terrorism personally, in order to take into consideration their suggestions, address their requirements and meet their needs.

<http://www.euskadi.eus/gobierno-vasco/-/eli/es-pv/d/2016/05/17/75/dof/spa/html/>

The Peace IV Programme. Northern Ireland.

The PEACE IV Programme is a unique cross-border initiative, financed through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) of the EU and managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). It has been designed to support peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland. In addition to supporting peace and reconciliation, the ERDF also contributes to the promotion of social and economic stability, in particular through actions to promote cohesion between communities.

On issues of good relations and reconciliation, civil society organisations also continue to deliver programmes on behalf of government departments and strategies (including Together: Building a United Community). This programme is delivered within both the six counties of Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Ireland (Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo). This fourth iteration of the programme (2014-2020) is worth EUR 270 million. It has four core objectives: Shared Education; Children and Young People; Shared Spaces and Services; and Building Positive Relations. While some actions are being delivered by local authority-led partnerships, the PEACE Programme continues to be a significant source of funding for community and voluntary sector organisations, within an overall constricted funding environment.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/0dbc6f-irish-border-counties-peace-programme/>

4. Civil society and the community field: A close and successful collaboration

The role of community and civil society organisations is essential in terms of peacebuilding to strengthen social cohesion after a long period of violence. Working separately or in conjunction with local and regional authorities, they can monitor the real situation in the community, needs and grievances, as well as the gaps in communication policies, and provide advocacy to the authorities on the proper approaches to face these challenges.

Their active involvement in peacebuilding processes can restore trust and confidence within and between the communities. It can also enhance real local citizenship participation in these initiatives, recovering the ownership feeling among community members. This chapter will outline the most important challenges in this field for victims, the different possibilities in the community field, and also, outline the many inspiring practices that are already running.

Nevertheless, this involvement is sometimes linked to quite a few challenges:

- Any initiative requires institutional support from the national and regional governments. Funding these initiatives very often becomes a challenging aspect that is difficult to address for the victims' associations and groups.
- Institutional support must also be aimed at boosting collaboration between different civil society organisations and victims' groups, preventing the reluctance of involving victims in these initiatives and avoiding conflicts between former opponents.
- The involvement of victims in these kinds of initiatives, be it individually or as a group, should also be based on the principle of preventing any sort of secondary victimisation derived from this participation. Special attention should be paid to their emotional situation, avoiding an overexposure of them in the media and seriously taking into consideration other safety issues.

In any case, the collaboration of victims and victims' groups with other civil society organisations is pivotal after a period of violence, and must be fostered, employing different approaches, techniques and goals and bearing in mind some recommendations:

- Fostering community engagement in the peacebuilding process, involving different civil society organisations and groups from different sectors and fields, will result in a multi-perspective understanding of what happened, strengthening the credibility of these initiatives and the ownership feeling for all members of the community, and boosting the socialisation of a culture of peace.
- Reconciliation initiatives, highlighting the relevant role of victims in these processes, assuming a victim-centred approach, and involving the rest of the community members, from an individual and collective perspective, can be an asset in this sort of initiative.

We have the choice

We have the choice has grown out of a voluntary citizens' initiative by Kristin Verellen — who lost her life partner in the attacks of Maelbeek on 22 March 2016 — and a circle of friends. In a world where harshness, polarisation, extremism, blind violence and terror lead to traumatising situations, they want to build a culture of inclusive togetherness, inclusion and dialogue.

Circles

The Circles, guided by professional facilitators, offer a qualitative moment in which we become still and quiet, then share with each other in words or in silence what is going on inside of us.

In addition, We have the choice also develops other projects to support its mission.

<http://wehavethechoice.com/?lang=en>

- Working with youth organisations is critical, not only as mere recipients of any reconciliation initiative, but as main actors of the society, boosting a necessary intergenerational dialogue. The use of different channels such as arts, music, sports and camps has turned out to be an excellent approach to achieve this youth and intergenerational involvement.

Cross Cultures is a politically independent, non-profit organisation that exists for the purpose of promoting peaceful coexistence and social cohesion between people of different cultures and backgrounds.

Our vision — “Bringing people together” — builds on the basic premise that peace and stability is not an issue between nation states and governments alone. We believe that peace and stability is something civil society is practising through dialogue and interaction. On this basis, we exist with the objective to develop, participate in and implement culture and sports cooperation across ethnic, national, social, political and religious boundaries.

It is within this framework that Cross Cultures is using Open Fun Football Schools as a tool for peace education, facilitating intra- and intercommunity communication and collaboration in order to provide alternative stories and positions to the ones of conflict. Through education of volunteers we wish to help populations include rather than exclude each other, to fight exceptional thinking and to stimulate peaceful coexistence. It is a fundamental principle to Cross Culture’s concept that all our activities challenge any division of people into ethnic, political or religious affiliations, by providing an alternative.

They work in the Balkans, Asian countries, Caucasus, MENA region and South Sudan, and other areas affected by long periods of violence.

<https://ccpa.eu/programs/open-fun-football-schools/>

Run for life

The French Association of Victims of Terrorism organises a race in honour of all victims of terrorism, inviting all the society to participate and pay tribute to French victims.

<https://www.afvt.org/14308-2/>

Fighters for Peace is the only organisation in Lebanon that unites former fighters from different political, religious and social backgrounds. We are not only ex-combatants; among our members are journalists, filmmakers and psychologists. What unites us is the will to work for a more peaceful country and region.

Playback theater is a form of improvisational theatre where audience members tell stories from their lives and see them instantly re-enacted by a group of actors. Since its inception in the 1970s, Playback theater has created a place for itself within community building as a tool for raising awareness, fostering reconciliation and initiating dialogue. Its therapeutic effects were put to use by Fighters for Peace in collaboration with Laban – Live Lactic Culture, the group that introduced Playback theater to the Arab world in 2011. Former fighters shared their war stories, which were acted out by a group of actors who were specifically trained for the event. It was emotional, engaging and moving to see the stories performed on the spot, bringing the audience and the former fighters who shared their stories closer together.

<http://fightersforpeace.org/Home/WarStories>

Manchester Survivors Choir

This is a choir made up of survivors of the Manchester terrorist attack. It is a cross-generational group that meets together in solidarity and supports those affected by the attack.

<https://twitter.com/survivorschoir?lang=es>

- It's crucial to work on "history education", addressing the real factors conducive to violence and the needs and grievances perceived by all sectors of the society, building up moral barriers to prevent youngsters from the use of violence to gain political objectives in the future, and spreading universal values such as democracy and human rights through educational resources or bringing victims' testimonies to schools.

AROVITE. Online Archive on Terrorist Violence in Euskadi.

AROVITE is a source of references on terrorism in Euskadi, caused by the different branches of ETA, as well as by the GAL, the extreme right wing and the Autonomous Anticapitalist Commands.

AROVITE has a double function. On the one hand, it is a content repository: virtual library, photo gallery, bibliography search engine and, in a more summarised form, a reading suggestions section. They also publish several graphs, a chronology of terrorism in Euskadi, a list of films that have addressed this issue, and other resources from entities such as Bakeaz and Euskobarometro, etc.

On the other hand, AROVITE is an online scattered content manager. In this field they provide direct access to the main online resources: archives, research groups, websites of associations of victims of terrorism, international references, etc.

AROVITE is an initiative of the Institute of Social History Valentín de Foronda, of the University of the Basque Country – Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, an institution that has a long research tradition on the contemporary history of Euskadi. AROVITE is the result of one of the lines of work of this Institute: memory and victims of political violence in the Basque Country, 1936-2011.

<https://www.arovite.com/en/>

22 July Centre. My Story Project.

The 22 July Centre is a learning centre that works with the mediation of memory and knowledge about the terror attacks in Oslo and on Utøya on the 22nd of July 2011. The story is told on the site where the attacks began, namely the High-rise Building in the Government Quarter in central Oslo. The Centre's educational programme invites school pupils and teachers into the discourse about the 22nd of July, and encourages active participation in the negotiation of the attack's significance both at present and in the future. Their website is developed with a particular focus on digital resource materials, as an offer to schools to strengthen education on the topic of the 22nd of July and related topics.

My Story Project

How did it look outside the Høgblokka when the bomb went off in the Government Quarter? What memories do the youths from Utøya sit with from the attack on AUF's summer camp? How is losing their loved ones in a terrorist attack and how are survivors, survivors' families and others affected by 22 July today? What do they think we should talk about when discussing 22 July 2011 — and what can we learn from what happened?

"My story – personal stories from and about 22 July" presents some of the stories of those who in various ways experienced 22 July 2011 up close.

Through meetings between pupils and witnesses in the 22 July Centre, and in video clips and written testimonies published here on our website, the respondents even relay experiences about 22 July 2011.

<https://22juliseret.no/information-in-english/>

Teaching Divided Histories is an innovative 3-year project that introduces new, curriculum-linked, digital approaches to the study of conflict into schools in Northern Ireland.

Funded by the ERDF under the PEACE III programme, the project is led by the Nerve Centre in conjunction with the British Council, the Curriculum Development Unit of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board, CCEA and a range of other partners.

The aim of Teaching Divided Histories is to transfer knowledge and expertise between Northern Ireland and other conflict-affected societies on how the delivery of education and learning can be developed to promote shared societies.

Harnessing the potential of moving image and digital media, Teaching Divided Histories brings together post-primary teachers from across Northern Ireland and border counties to develop and pilot innovative education programmes using film, digital imagery, animation, comic books and webcasting to enable young people to explore common experiences of conflict and peace building.

Teachers and educators are trained in a range of creative and critical skills to use moving image and digital technologies within the classroom to liberate and empower young people to engage practically with issues of conflict and division.

<https://www.nervecentre.org/teachingdividedhistories>

Education model Adi-adian. Basque Government, Spain.

Learning on human dignity, coexistence and empathy through active listening to victims' testimonies in schools in the Basque Government.

Educational resources and active involvement of youth in the preparation and aftermath of each victim's participation.

http://www.eskolabakegune.euskadi.eus/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=7320f549-9583-47b5-854a-80eb7dbd4a88&groupId=2211625

Omagh Support & Self Help Group (OSSHG) was founded in the aftermath of the Omagh Bomb in August 1998 to act as a source of support and solace for those adversely affected. Widely acknowledged as the worst single act of terrorism in the last 30 years, on Saturday 15 August 1998 at 3.10 pm a car bomb exploded in Omagh, County Tyrone, killing 29 people plus 2 unborn children, and physically injuring over 200 others. The victims' group has expanded to incorporate victims and survivors of terrorism from other atrocities and incidents throughout the world.

"Our mission is to promote, advocate for, and address the needs of victims of terrorism. In this respect, we are expressly committed to addressing the practical needs of those impacted by terrorist activity."

The group's current objectives are: relief of poverty, sickness and disability of victims; advancement of education and protection; raising awareness of needs and experiences of victims; raising awareness of the effects of terrorism; welfare rights advice and information; to support truth and justice for victims of terrorism; improving conditions of life for victims.

<https://omaghsupport.co.uk>

- Victims' groups, jointly with other civil society organisations, can also provide practical and emotional support to other victims and to other members of the community, meeting their needs and also addressing transgenerational trauma processes.
- Civil society forums: Victims' groups or victims' organisations have the ability and the legitimacy to gather a wide range of society's sectors, working together to bridge divisions among the community and *open the door* to a different perspective.

The value of the word

FUNDACIÓN FERNANDO BUESA BLANCO / FERNANDO BUESA BLANCO FUNDAZIOA is a non-profit organisation founded in Vitoria-Gasteiz on 3 November 2000 in memory and honour of Fernando Buesa, assassinated by ETA together with his bodyguard on 22 February 2000. *Our goal is keeping his example of supporting the culture of peace, democracy and social progress alive. Our vocation is to be a participatory Foundation that is open to different sensibilities that exist and coexist in the Basque Country; for any citizens in the world who believe in and actively defend the right to life and human rights, and the values of freedom, equality and solidarity.*

The group of people behind this Foundation want to transform this forum into a place for calm reflection and a meeting point but also provide positive proposals for paving the way towards the consolidation of democratic values. Our activities: "In memoriam" events, seminars (in collaboration with the Basque Country University), talks, book presentations and cinema-forums, exhibitions, books & publications, video games, documentation center & archive on line, web page & social networks, cooperation with other entities of victims, cooperation with governmental institutions.

<http://www.fundacionfernandobuesa.com>

- Victims can play a role in memorial work, for example in museums or photo exhibitions. The role of victims' groups collaborating with both public and private institutions, and mainly civil society organisations, is important. It can foster the setting up of memorial centres and remembrance activities. It is principal to provide society with real historical and political contexts on the causes and factors that triggered the use of violence. As a result of a terrorist attack, victims become dehumanised. Remembering them with photo exhibitions, museums, and virtual or physical memorials will re-humanise them and bring their dignity back, providing them with their proper position in history.

National Victims of Terrorism Memorial Centre in Spain

This is a public foundation, primarily aimed at preserving and disseminating the democratic and ethical values embodied by the victims of terrorism, building the collective memory of the victims, and raising awareness among the population as a whole for the defence of freedom and human rights and against terrorism.

Some of their activities: Awareness-raising, educational and pedagogical activities; Exhibition activities, through a permanent exhibition and temporary exhibitions; Research activities; Archive, library and publication activities; National and international dissemination activities

<http://www.memorialvt.com/en/home-presentation/>

The Kazerne Dossin

Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on Holocaust and Human Rights is a museum in Mechelen, Belgium established next to the former Mechelen transit camp from which Belgian Jews and Romani were sent to concentration camps during the Holocaust in World War II.

<https://www.kazernedossin.eu/EN/ContactPages/Pers>

- The field of restorative justice approaches is extremely relevant in terms of bridging divisions and healing communities after a period of violence. According to the restorative justice approaches, the community, the victims and the perpetrators can have a more active and relevant role than the one they usually have alongside a criminal process. The community's response to violence can also be assessed, and therefore deliver the proper approaches to bond the community, the perpetrators and the victims. A victim-centred approach is always a requirement for the success of these initiatives.

European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ)

The EFRJ focuses on the application of restorative justice to criminal matters, but other areas, such as family, school and community mediation, are not excluded.

The EFRJ does not defend any one "best practice" model of restorative justice, but recognises that restorative justice is an evolving approach.

The general aim of the EFRJ is to contribute to the development and establishment of victim-offender mediation and other restorative justice practices throughout Europe.

To achieve this aim, the EFRJ:

- promotes international information exchange and mutual assistance;
- promotes the development of effective restorative justice policies, services and legislation;
- explores and develops the theoretical basis of restorative justice;
- stimulates research;
- assists in the development of principles, ethics, training and good practice;
- pursues other objectives determined by the General Meeting.

<http://www.euforumrj.org/>

ALTERNATIVE project

Developing alternative understandings of security and justice through restorative justice approaches in intercultural settings within democratic societies.

The ALTERNATIVE project aims to provide an alternative and deepened understanding based on empirical evidence of how to handle conflicts within intercultural contexts in democratic societies in order to set up security solutions for citizens and communities.

In its methodology, it will combine theoretical research [on three large topics, namely: 1) alternative epistemologies of justice and security, 2) conflict intervention in intercultural contexts, and 3) existing methods of restorative justice and their relevance in intercultural conflicts] with action research carried out in four countries with different types, levels and settings of conflicts:

- involving local and migrant residents in social housing neighbourhoods in Austria;
- Roma and non-Roma inhabitants in a small town in Hungary;
- conflicts between Serbs, Albanians, Muslims and Croats in Serbia;
- three different kinds of conflicts with gangs, immigrants and different religious groups in Northern Ireland.

These parts together produce a spectrum of theoretically grounded and empirically tested models of dealing with conflicts in intercultural settings through restorative justice processes.

<https://projectalternative.wordpress.com/>

Key messages:

After a long period of violence, societies share a number of common symptoms, such as the polarisation of their communities, the perception of violence as a normal factor in their lives, the lack of trust in civil society and democracy, and the “desire to forget” or “draw a line in the sand”, even despite other concepts such as “justice” and “rule of law”.

Victims and victims’ groups can play a relevant role to bridge the communities, promoting social cohesion and strengthening the communities’ resilience to violent extremism.

The involvement of victims and victims’ groups to promote social cohesion can be encouraged in different fields:

Media: highlighting the presence of credible voices and initiatives from the victims’ field aimed at bridging communities and speaking out against violence, but also advising journalists on the proper use of victims’ testimonies and terminology.

Policy: adopting political measures aimed at bonding the society by including all victims’ needs in their agenda, ensuring the proper restitution schemes, funding and boosting peacebuilding initiatives, and ensuring the memory of the victims.

Civil society organisations: working separately or in conjunction with local and regional authorities, they can monitor the real situation in the community, the needs and grievances, as well as the gaps in communication policies, and provide advocacy to the authorities on the proper approaches to face these challenges.

Even when the involvement of victims’ groups in each of these fields is necessary to promote social cohesion after a period of violence, and therefore must be supported, victims will find challenges and needs along the process that must also be faced and met, always avoiding any sort of secondary victimisation and ensuring their complete respect and well-being on this path.

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