

Infrastructures for Peace- From International Need to Context Adapted National Implementation

According to the World Bank statistics from 2013 surveying 186 countries, 526.000 people are killed by armed violence each year. Even though, people being killed in conflict settings represent only 12,2% of people being killed, the rest of 87.8% are killed in non-conflict settings with 75% of them being victims of intentional homicides. [\[1\]](#)

Other statistic, made by Wars in the World, reveals that 65 countries are currently directly involved in a war fighting over 650 militias-guerillas, separatist and anarchic groups in their region, with most of ongoing conflicts in Africa and in Asia.[\[2\]](#)

Reviewing these numbers and the statistics, one can notice that even the international context has changed in the nineties with the end of the Cold War, armed conflicts and violence are still present, impacting societies all over the world. The numbers I have mentioned are just a small part of the effects caused by **direct violence**, the visible effects of violent clashes. But there is always more than that, even if only the tip of the iceberg is visible to us. The willingness of states to get involved into armed conflicts, the eagerness of terrorist, anarchic and separatist groups to fight their enemies, the high death rates of victims of intentional homicides reveal a small part of the most dangerous facet of violence, which is strongly embedded in most societies: **cultural and structural violence**.

One can identify aspects of structural violence in many

societies where authorities and public policies use violent methods to deal with conflicts. Their actions rather encourage the creation of structures which facilitate the escalation of conflicts, being supported by cultural violence, strongly embedded in people's mentalities and mirrored by their behaviors.

When it comes to conflict, every state has largely determined its own mechanisms for solving various types of conflict. Many or maybe most countries face various institutional gaps in order to manage conflicts – they lack tools, resources and structures needed to deal with them. Other states completely ignore the possibility of peaceful settlement and draw on violence based tools, which are deeply rooted in their culture, in their human nature and are justified by the mentalities of the majority.

This is the point where infrastructures for peace are brought in discussion. They are less expensive than wars and can be built on existing structures.

The term infrastructure for peace is most often associated with conflict zones or countries experiencing various forms of direct violence or conflict escalation. The concept itself can be put into practice in countries experiencing tensions within society and that are dealing with other types of violence, such as cultural and structural with the purpose of transforming conflicts at an early stage and consolidating peace.

Infrastructures for Peace (I4P) is a term that knows a wide range of definition proposals although the concept is still in definition phase. Even if it is a new term, abstract and complex it has shown various ways of adapting itself to existing realities and specific contexts. **Jean Paul Lederach** is the first who introduced the concept in the 1980s, assuming that sustainable peace can only be the result of a deep and structural conflicts transformation, including socio-economic

roots and political drivers.[\[3\]](#)

Chetan Kumar, Senior Conflict Prevention advisor at UNDP defined an I4P as a network of interdependent systems, resources, values and skills- shared by the government, civil society and community institutions. A functional I4P is in his opinion based on dialogue, consultation and peaceful mediation among these actors.[\[4\]](#)

Paul van Tongeren, author of many articles related to infrastructures for peace, defines infrastructures for peace as institutional mechanisms, appropriate to each country's culture which promote conflict solving approaches based on dialogue and non-violence within communities.[\[5\]](#)

Summing up some major streams in the literature, one can identify common aspects as key elements to define an I4P which is in fact a structure based on institutional mechanisms, on peaceful mediation, dialogue and networking within communities aiming to prevent or to diminish violent conflicts.

I4P International – an international network of NGOs, local peace committees and peacebuilding practitioners – defines Infrastructures for Peace as following: “a dynamic network of structures, mechanisms, resources and interdependent qualifications contributing to conflict prevention and peace restoration in the society through dialogue, consultation, cooperation and coordination”.[\[6\]](#)

Reviewing the existing literature, one can notice that the majority of examples of implementing infrastructures for peace can be found in Africa, followed by some Asian countries or singular examples in the Middle East and South America. Some components of infrastructures for peace exist also in other contexts but are not gathered under the same umbrella called I4P. Even so, the External Action of the European Union acknowledges the importance of infrastructures for peace also at the European level, in terms of strengthening national

capacities for dialogue, mediation and national dialogue platforms with regards to conflict prevention.[\[7\]](#)

The concept of infrastructures could be translated into reality in peaceful but also in conflict-torn societies with the aim of preventing violence and dealing with conflict. To this purpose, one can have as examples:

- National Dialogues:
- Local Peace Committees
- Mediation

The **National Dialogues** can be implemented as roundtables or national conferences, aiming to ensure platforms for discussions legitimized by the national authority.

The **Local Peace Committees and Councils** represent structures which facilitate the creation of networks of local bodies. Within the network, interaction is encouraged with the goal of strengthening national peace infrastructure, addressing issues of local relevance considered to be a threat to peaceful conditions, supporting the peaceful settlement of disputes and establishing consensus among different parties involved in conflict situation.

Mediation is another component of infrastructures for peace aiming to restore broken relationships between and within communities, where tensions emerge among different ethnic and social groups.

A major remark is that even if infrastructures for peace have some common components, these have to be adapted to each context when implemented. An infrastructure for peace has to be acknowledged and owned by the community and by the civil society but has to be also legitimized by the national authority.

An example of a partly successful I4P can be considered the case of Nepal. This country found its path towards democracy

in 1990, having free parliamentary elections one year later. Unfortunately, the high expectations of the population regarding social and economic change were not met, escalating into the Maoist insurgency from 1996, which had cost over 16,000 lives and had led to a large amount of internally displaced people. After the bloody conflict, due to the eight-party negotiations a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed and ambitious plans for an infrastructure for peace were made.

The components of the Nepalese infrastructures for peace were implemented at national and local level. On the national level the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) was established having as major tasks to coordinate the implementation of the Peace Agreement, to set up local peace committees (LCPs) and to manage the Nepal Peace Trust Fund. At the local level, local peace committees were established in almost every district. These LCPs had the role to link the national peace process to the communities, to run programs on conflict prevention, to have activities related to domestic violence and psychological healing. Even the infrastructures for peace have had a comprehensive design and accordingly established institutions^[8], the Nepalese model was not as successful as expected. It has been criticized that LCPs were not efficient in addressing core issues because they were not really owned by the communities and civil society due to high implication of the government, which had a too political oversight. Moreover, the infrastructure itself lacked capacities in terms of funding and skilled staff, which burdened the achievement of its goals.

Having the example of Nepal in mind, one can learn from its experience and before establishing an infrastructure for peace in an apparently peaceful society, former communist country starting to answer the question: why do we need I4P here?

The main argument why we need I4P in Romania is not because each of us is confronted every day with direct violence and we experience war, but because:

-structural and cultural violence are strongly embedded into every structure within the Romanian society and dominate the mainstream mentalities and behaviors

-Romania has a history in approaching conflictual situation with violence (the Revolution from 1989, violent uprising of the miners in 1990, the inter-ethnic conflicts between Romanian- Hungarian minority, Romanian- Roma minority)

-externally, due to contemporary interactions at the global level and to the synergies we are directly affected by the war in Ukraine, the wars in the Middle East and the existing tensions and instability within the European Union

-internally we face increasing numbers indicating cases of violence in schools and domestic violence, with measures taken to address the effects and not the causes of violence

– internally, we experience very often political instability, inter-ethnic tensions due to the lack of inter-ethnic dialogue

-hate speech and violent speech is present in everyday life and promoted in the media

– lack of methods and instruments for transforming conflicts in a non-violent way, in order to prevent cases of violence.

In other words: we have perfect conditions for nurturing violent conflicts. With regards to the needs, challenges, gaps and threats identified, a new chapter on I4P starts to be written by AIDRom – the Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania and PATRIR – the Peace Action, Training and Research Institute of Romania.



AIDRom in partnership with PATRIR have started on the 1st of March 2015 the implementation of a 14 months project called **I4P Romania- “Establishing Infrastructure for Peace Romania”** financed by the EEA Grants 2009-2014, through the NGO Fund Romania. The project

aims to create a network of organizations in Romania, to build and transfer capacities for conflict transformation to these organizations. Beside training NGOs and fortifying their capacities to deal with different conflict typologies, the project also aims to develop advocacy skills with the purpose of acknowledging the importance of infrastructures for peace from national authorities.

Within these 14 months, the organization team organizes trainings on Complex Conflict Analysis, Reconciliation and Restorative Practices and on Design Intervention in Conflict Transformation Processes. Moreover, in order to achieve one of its goals and change mentalities with regards to approaching conflict, three Good Practice Guides providing examples for conflict transformation for different conflict typologies will be elaborated. These Guides will be presented within workshops and will be disseminated to the Romanian NGOs to fortify their capacity to deal with different conflicts. Another component of the project is related to developing a White Paper and create legislative proposals to consolidate the NGOs position towards dealing with conflict at the national level. The peak of the project is represented by the network of organization, which will have the legitimacy to come together and develop activities related to conflict prevention and conflict transformation in their communities, being in a constant dialogue with public authorities.

Through this project, one will set up the basis for an

infrastructure for peace inspired by I4P internationally but designed in accordance to the specificities of the Romanian context, according to the existing needs and to the surrounding internal and external factors.

Being aware of the high rates of direct violence but also of the prevalence of structural and cultural violence embedded in the most of the existing structures, establishing an infrastructure for peace in Romania means raising awareness about the importance of peaceful settlements, changing mentalities and behaviors, challenging diverse actors, communities and authorities to have a dialogue and work efficiently on conflict prevention and conflict transformation.

To impact the Romanian society peacefully and change people's lives. To maintain peace and prevent violence. To shift the terrifying statistics.

[1] Geneva Declaration: Global Burden of Armed Violence, <http://www.genevadeclaration.org/measurability/global-burden-of-armed-violence.html>, (25.09.2015).

[2] Wars in the World, <http://www.warsintheworld.com/?page=static1258254223>, (25.09.2015).

[3] Jean Paul Lederach in Embedded Peace. Infrastructures for Peace: Approaches and Lessons Learned, by Hans J. Giessmann (Berghof Foundation), 2015, p.6.

[4] Ibid., p.7.

[5] Ibid.,p.7.

[6] I4P International- The International Civil Society Network on Infrastructures for Peace, <http://www.i4pinternational.org/>, (25.09.2015).

[7] External Action- European Union,

http://eeas.europa.eu/cfsp/conflict_prevention/docs/2013_eeas_mediation_support_factsheet_peace_infrastructures_en.pdf ,
(1.10.2015).

[8] Hans J. Giessmann : Embedded Peace- Infrastructures for Peace: Approaches and Lessons Learned, the Berghof Foundation, 2015, p. 31-33.

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