

Unconditional Spaces in Dialogue Processes – A Case Study on Interethnic Dialogue at the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue in Norway

Abstract:

Within this paper, I deepen the understanding of Unconditional Spaces in the context of interethnic dialogue processes. The case study at the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue in Lillehammer, Norway, hence provides inspiring insights into the process design of reconciliation efforts on the Western Balkan.

While taking part in a one-week dialogue seminar with a group of teachers from Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, I discovered elements of unconditionality in diverse process settings. I identified four main Unconditional Spaces within the seminar structure and perceived the whole dialogue process in Lillehammer as a comprehensive unconditional experience.

Throughout this paper, I therefore describe the core qualities, benefits and limitations of these phenomena in peace building. In order to convey a clear picture of Unconditional Spaces in dialogue processes, I call the four categories “ice breaker”, referring to the Olympic ski jump, “new horizon”, talking about an open school, “uniting bond”, pointing at a family dinner, and “laughing smile”, comprising experiences at a fun park. These four seminar components, among others, compliment the core dialogue sessions and support the facilitation effort of creating a protected group spaces. They provide simultaneous experiences of a “safe shelter” and “spirit of freedom” and promote relaxation, emotional openness and visibility. The latter are crucial for sustainable dialogue and

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reconciliation work, as they constitute the foundation for the ability to relate to oneself and others.

Through participatory observation and personal interviews, I consequently convey diverse perspectives onto the process and from within the seminar group. I highlight the strengths of the Nansen approach and open up the room for further discussions on Unconditional Spaces in peace building initiatives. As unconditionality embraces a variety of forms, I whole-heartedly invite the audience, to adapt Unconditional Spaces according to their respective needs and appropriate their benefits.