

Collaboration versus Cooperation: Grassroots Activism in Divided Cities and Communication Networks

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I. INTRODUCTION

Abstract—Peace-building organisations act as a network of information for communities. Through fieldwork, it was highlighted that grassroots organisations and activists may cooperate with each other in their actions of peace-building; however, they would not collaborate. Within two divided societies; Nicosia in Cyprus and Jerusalem in Israel, there is a distinction made by organisations and activists with regards to activities being more ‘co-operative’ than ‘collaborative’. This theme became apparent when having informal conversations and semi-structured interviews with various members of the activist communities. This idea needs further exploration as these distinctions could impact upon the efficiency of peacebuilding activities within divided societies. Civil societies within divided landscapes, both physically and socially, play an important role in conflict resolution. How organisations and activists interact with each other has the possibility to be very influential with regards to peacebuilding activities. Working together sets a positive example for divided communities. Cooperation may be considered a primary level of interaction between CSOs. Therefore, at the beginning of a working relationship, organisations cooperate over basic agendas, parallel power structures and focus, which led to the same objective. Over time, in some instances, due to varying factors such as funding, more trust and understanding within the relationship, it could be seen that processes progressed to more collaborative ways. It is evident to see that NGOs and activist groups are highly independent and focus on their own agendas before coming together over shared issues. At this time, there appears to be more collaboration in Nicosia among CSOs and activists than Jerusalem. The aims and objectives of agendas also influence how organisations work together. In recent years, Nicosia, and Cyprus in general, have perhaps changed their focus from peace-building initiatives to more environmental issues which have become new-age reconciliation topics. Civil society does not automatically indicate like-minded organisations however solidarity within social groups can create ties that bring people and resources together. In unequal societies, such as those in Nicosia and Jerusalem, it is these ties that cut across groups and are essential for social cohesion. Societies are a collection of social groups; individuals who have come together over common beliefs. These groups in turn shape the identities and determine the values and structures within societies. At many different levels and stages, social groups work together through cooperation and collaboration. These structures in turn have the capabilities to open up networks to less powerful or excluded groups, with the aim to produce social cohesion which may contribute social stability and economic welfare over any extended period.

Keywords—Collaboration, cooperation, grassroots activism, networks of communication.

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JERUSALEM and Nicosia are two cities divided by conflict that have dominated international news for decades. The two cities of interest are in similar geographical areas, one a stepping stone from Europe to the Middle East and one, a corner stone of the Middle East. While the two cities within the East Mediterranean have developed differently in many ways, they however share certain origins and traditions. Jerusalem and Nicosia are two cities that are divided by national wars, not just social conflicts. With Nicosia not having experienced outright violence and conflict in over two decades, Jerusalem on the other hand experiences almost daily outbursts. Conflict within cities range from micro levels such as neighbourly conflicts over parking spaces to macro levels societies divided and once shared spaces becoming tense areas of mistrust and threat. Citizens became refugees in their own cities, having to leave their homes and move to the safety of elsewhere. This distinction is important when considering conflicted cities and what to study within them. While each conflict is unique, similarities can be mapped and examined, the theme of this paper is a similarity of opinions that was discovered during fieldwork within the named cities.

The comparative study of conflicted cities is one that can be found throughout the academic discourse of conflict research, with ethno-national and religious conflicts existing all over the world. While each conflict is unique, similarities such as parallel structures within these ethno-national communities can be identified, mapped and examined. By comparing these two cities from the grassroots activism level of civil society, there is a possibility to further understand and highlight whether communication networks and working relationships between grassroots activists influence the efficiency of peacebuilding initiatives. This paper looks to further understand how communication networks between grassroots actors can transform a conflict. It aims to highlight this distinction between the terms ‘collaboration’ and ‘cooperation’ that influence the efficiency peacebuilding activities in two divided societies.

II. CIVIL SOCIETY

“The public like to see people working together and although it takes mental and emotional energy - collaboration can bring rewards in the short-term, let alone the longer-term” [1].

When societies are divided and have limited, controlled

movement between communities, an open dialogue is key to a shared future. Without an open dialogue and the opportunity to communicate, work together, socialise or know each other, wide chasms form between communities, civil society and civic organisations look to bridge the gap [2]. Urban conflicts and the formal attempts made to try and resolve them have become institutionalised in many settings. Responses to conflicts have in turn created a new sector within cities which can be termed as ‘civil society’.

“The different understandings of the cause of conflict... may in turn lead to the formation of civil society actors...” [3].

There may be many different reasons to explain how and why organisations interact with each other if at all. Shared issues do not necessarily mean there are agreed methods, expectations or priorities within these issues. Differing audiences and scales of projects are impacting factors. Between the two cities, these differences of focus and interest have been documented. Jerusalem has many organisations focused on the quality of life of citizens, there are many different approaches and working at different scales. These range from youth groups mapping their own neighbourhoods with the objective to assess their needs; to city-wide recycling schemes which branch across all communities. Nicosia, on the other hand, is bringing various groups of people, of all ages together on environmental issues such as ‘fracking’, beach conservation and sewer systems. Arguing that environmental issues do not stop because there is a wall, and as a small island, everyone needs to work together. But to what degree does civil society expect communities to rely on each other?

“It is increasingly recognised that civil society has an important role to play in conflict resolution by involving and educating grassroots and granting legitimacy to top-level peace processes” [4].

With regards to peacebuilding, it is important that the active agents, such as NGOs, are inexpensive, accessible and flexible in their methods [5]. NGOs within this arena are considered better equipped and available to interact directly with grassroots populations. Due to their lack of governmental ties and structural confinements this also has the ability to retain their credibility among several parties who may be bias against top-levels [6]. Civil society is about active citizenship. Building communication networks between communities and organisations, activists and grassroots organisations can act as a counterbalance at a time to overbearing political decisions. Active participation of citizens is required [7].

Civil society is a concept that stems from political theory and is commonly used to describe a social sphere within societies, where people voluntarily organize themselves apart from structures already embedded by the state, market and personal spheres. This realm is constructed by social groups to protect interests and values that may not fall in line with the status quo [8]. It has been highlighted that civil society organisations (CSOs) are frequently organised along ethnic lines, this has the ability to contribute to increased ethnic polarization, which in a conflict resolution setting, may not be considered ideal [9]. An argument in response to this however

is that mono-ethnic civil society organisations may have more credibility at a grassroots level, as they can better represent the populations they interact with. These populations are directly linked through the sharing of similar cultures, histories and political frameworks. Within the civil society realm, groups may work together in parallel or separately for ultimately a very similar goal. It is with this idea in mind that the theme “Collaboration vs. Cooperation” can be explored.

III. DEFINITIONS

These words are often used interchangeably; however, each term comes with its own power structures and dynamics. These terms represent how working relationships may vary and in turn this has the ability to influence the outcomes of work.

A. What Is Collaboration?

1. “Collaboration is working together to solve a problem or to achieve a goal. Collaboration takes place between individuals, organisations and even governments to tackle shared goals and objectives. Sharing of knowledge, expertise and manual labour may be required in any collaborative venture or endeavour” [10].
2. Working in a group to achieve a common goal, while respecting each individual’s contribution to the whole [11].
3. Collaboration “implies direct interaction among individuals to produce a product and involves negotiations, discussions and accommodating others’ perspectives” [12].

B. What Is Cooperation?

1. “Cooperation refers to working in unison to achieve an objective rather than to work independently to compete with each other” [10].
2. Working to accomplish shared goals by division of responsibility [13].
3. Cooperation has been described as a protocol that allows individuals to work separately towards a shared objective [14].

Cooperation between parties can be considered formal and informal; formal in terms of interactions regulated by contracts or attending official meetings to share information and political points of view. Informally, where members of parties meet unofficially/off the record to share information or discuss a project they deem important.

C. What Is the Difference between Collaboration and Cooperation?

1. Collaboration involves a shared strategy between different parties to achieve a common objective, whereas cooperation involves separate approaches to a common objective.
2. The two terms are similar; however, there is active participation of all members in collaboration and select participation in cooperation.
3. Reference [15] considers cooperative methods as an

objective reached through the division of problem-solving areas and coordinated responsibility. On the other hand, collaboration is “the mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve the problem together”.

4. Cooperation is focused on a shared goal, while collaboration requires participants to share in the process of knowledge creation [16], [12].

Table I makes an interesting observation that as CSOs translate their work and goals into the international arena, and therefore, use English as the language to communicate, the distinction becomes most prominent. Both cities have two main languages, with English being the third non-native but important language of communication. Within Israel, the languages are Arabic and Hebrew, Cyprus uses Greek and Turkish, along with a Cypriot dialect. Within these four languages, there is no distinction between the two terms, they are the same word. While there may be no distinction in the word, there is a difference in the type of working relationship they expect. This is discussed through the definitions already discussed.

TABLE I
USE OF LANGUAGE IN CITIES

Language	<i>“the situation of two or more people working to create or achieve the same thing.”</i>	<i>“the activity of working together with someone or doing what they ask you to do.”</i>
English	Collaboration	Cooperation
Arabic	تعاون	تعاون
Hebrew	שיתוף פעולה	שיתוף פעולה
Greek	συνεργασία	συνεργασία
Turkish	işbirliği	işbirliği

IV. INTELLECTUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Grassroots activism and CSOs are essential components within the public sphere, “a network of communicating information and points of view” [17]. They work within this space, facilitating, organising and encouraging citizens to voice their views with the hopes to influence the political institutions of society [18]. Without an effective civil society capable of structuring and channelling citizen debates over diverse ideas and conflicting interests, the interactions and efficiency of state/citizen relationship is considerably reduced.

“It is the interaction between citizens, civil society, and the state, communicating through the public sphere, that ensures that the balance between stability and social change is maintained in the conduct of public affairs” [18].

Before a civil society can truly influence the political sphere, it is important that civil society organisations have strong foundations within the communities. Within divided societies CSOs have, not only gaps to bridge between citizens and the political arena, but also they work to bridge the gap between communities.

To build bridges across divided communities, it has to be understood that “people of different ethnic backgrounds possess different attitudes, values and norms that reflect their cultural heritage” [19]. Cultural differences between ethnicities have been extensively researched, and within that,

the contrast between individualism and collectivism has been highlighted. In past literature, it has been found that individualism-collectivism accounts for the greatest variance in work goal priorities [20]. Within societies all over the world there are differences between community goals within divided societies like Jerusalem and Nicosia, the variances in goals between communities can be quite extreme due to separate histories, cultures and expectations. Therefore, before CSOs can act as engines for communication and change at the political level, they must first work from a bottom-up approach within the communities, creating networks of communication and understanding to improve efficiency within their agreed goals.

It is this variance in community goals alone that may attribute to the difference in cases of cooperation vs. collaboration, where priorities lie and how they are shared/distributed amongst a group. These variations stem from shared histories of violence, mistrust and victimhood mentalities along with different cultural, as well as, religious foundations and identities. Individualists have been compared against collectivists like this study is comparing cooperation and collaboration [21]. Such a comparison highlighted the similarities:

1. Collectivist cultures, like collaborative measures, place emphasis on the needs and goals of the group above personal interests.
2. Collectivists, similar to collaboration, focus on reaching the shared objective through a sharing network of knowledge and responsibility.
3. Individualist cultures are more in line with the idea of cooperation where there is a shared objective with parallel systems working to achieve such things with little overlap.

It is with this in mind, Jerusalem and Nicosia CSOs and grassroots activism can be analysed through this lens of collaboration vs. cooperation. There are four approaches for joint activism in general; Cooperation Approach; Solidarity Approach; Reconciliation Approach; and Coordinating Together, which could be described as Collaboration Approach. The approaches are carried out in two forms, top-down and bottom up. Top-down approaches are not primarily concerned with citizen’s active participation like bottom-up is. Top-down approaches also do not consult populations about their needs and concerns, stemming from the political arena they often incur bias, and so, participation numbers are not as great as they have the potential to be in bottom-up approaches. While cooperation and collaboration can be found in both top-down and bottom-up, for this paper, it is the bottom-up approaches that have been the focus; concerned with active citizenship and opening communication networks between the divided communities.

From fieldwork research, it has been highlighted that there are many shared goals within both cities in line with peace-building ideologies. However, it is how these goals are reached and communities facilitated that creates cooperative and/or collaborative networks between activists. Grassroots activists create levels of collaboration vs. cooperation amongst

communities as well. Building relationships of empathy and trust from a starting point of cooperation or perhaps in the future collaboration as relationships grow. Cooperation could be considered the first step, getting communities to acknowledge and understand each other. There is not the immediate expectation of acceptance due to the history of violence within these cities, but by acknowledging and making an effort to understand the other brings the possibility of a working relationship in some form. As time goes on, objectives may be shared, different approaches, in turn parallel structures, may be the easiest way to reach a goal, but success and positivity has the ability to mean organisations may look to work together again in the future; maybe in a more involved and responsibility sharing capacity, transforming their relation of cooperation to collaboration.

V.CONCLUSION

There are many reasons as to why there is a distinction made in terms of working relationships. Things such as economic differences between CSOs play a role in the distinction made, because if both parties have funding it helps. This can reduce the tension and challenges that can occur if one part is dependent on the other for funding. Funding for organisations, especially within divided societies, is challenging to come across as it is commonly linked to the political situation. While NGOs and activists try and distance themselves from politics, especially within these two cities, if funding is available they are likely to accept. The differences in working relationships, particularly in the early stages of a project may be due to differing styles of leadership. From a 'cooperative' to a 'collaborative' approach, organisations may retain their own independence and agendas perhaps because a more dependent working relation may insight power struggles as hierarchies' form through the need of authority. How they form and resolve themselves within new working structures is an important part of these networks.

A more collaborative approach involving everyone in the process may mean a wider range of skills are readily available. Also individual networks can be accessed and shared, improving efficiency and creating the possibility for increased impact. These communication networks can also be accessed in the future for other projects and creating a new culture of shared power and knowledge, strengthening civil societies influence.

It will be interesting to see over the course of the study what more comes to light. There are many advantages; however, for a more collaborative than cooperative relationship between grassroots activist, these advantages need to be made more visible to improve the efficiency of peacebuilding.

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