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Wholly local? Ownership as philosophy and practice in peacebuilding interventions

Vesna Bojicic- Dzelilovic and Mary Martin

Abstract

This paper engages with the theme of local ownership in peacebuilding from a practice-based perspective which suggests that the way in which the external actors reach out and work with local constituencies shows conceptual and practice gaps that limit the applicability of local ownership in day-to-day peacebuilding operations. We examine how, in the case of EU peacebuilding policies, such gaps impair the potential for effective, inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding. Using a Whole- of-Society lens the paper demonstrates how current modalities of EU engagement fail to embrace the diversity of local society and its authentic forms of mobilisation and action in order to pursue peacebuilding objectives that resonate with locally relevant forms of peace. The paper further reflects on how Whole-of-Society perspective can provide pointers for enhancing peacebuilding practices in this area.

Key words: local ownership; peacebuilding practice; whole-of-society

Introduction

The norm of local ownership of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction goes to the heart of the moral and practical dilemmas of external interventions in civil conflict. The translation from policy ideal to good practice has been observed as a challenge dogged by conceptual confusion and process issues, that continues to intrigue scholarship and defy effective implementation. While an emphasis on local agency and empowerment is seen as a critical, and often elusive factor in ensuring effective and sustainable peacebuilding by major actors such as the UN and the EU, and has featured strongly in reviews of practice (most recently the UN peacekeeping reviews and the EU global strategy), changes are being

pursued predominantly at the strategic level whereas tactical and operational difficulties in implementing local ownership persist.¹

In this paper we start from the assumption that the practice, or problem-solving perspective of local ownership represents the most significant deficit which undermines the normative premise of local ownership that it serves to improve the legitimacy of intervention, ensure the increased involvement and support of local populations, and from this enhance durable outcomes from international peacebuilding policies. Following the observation that practice also lags scholarship on this issue², this paper attempts to reflect the practice implications of the scholarly debate which has problematised the gap between rhetorical commitment and results on the ground, by showing local engagement as essentially a strategy of compliance with externally promoted policy blueprints, and secondly as failure to understand ‘the local’. We seek to build on these conceptualisations to suggest that the practice deficit not only needs to address both these elements, but also tailor implementation more closely to the variegated and dynamic nature of local society at the non-state level, seeing these as creative possibilities and capabilities of external peacebuilding and not a limitation and block on its progress. We propose that a thicker³ form of engagement with local society based on alignments between external policies on the one hand, and non-state

¹ Antonia Does, ‘Inclusivity and Local Perspectives in Peacebuilding: Issues, Lessons, Challenges’, Geneva: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2013, <http://www.gsdr.org/document-library/inclusivity-and-local-perspectives-in-peacebuilding-issues-lessons-challenges/>; Caroline Hughes, Joakim Öjendal and Isabell Schierenbeck, ‘The Struggle versus the Song- The Local Turn in Peacebuilding: An Introduction’, *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015):817-824.

² Timothy Donais, ‘Operationalizing Local Ownership’, in *Local Ownership in International Peacebuilding: Key Theoretical and Practical Issues*, ed. Sung Yong Lee and Alpaslan Özerdem (Abingdon- New York: Routledge ,2015):39-55; Cedric de Coning, ‘Understanding Peacebuilding as Essentially Local’, *Stability* 2, no. 1 (2013):1-6; Oliver Richmond, ‘Beyond Local Ownership in the Architecture of International Peacebuilding’, *Ethnopolitics* 11, no. 4 (2012): 354-375.; Caroline Hughes, Joakim Öjendal and Isabell Schierenbeck, ‘The Struggle versus the Song’;

³ Tobias Debiel, Thomas Held and Ulrich Schneckener, eds., *Peacebuilding in Crisis: Rethinking Paradigms and Practices of Transnational Cooperation* (Abigdon: Routledge, 2016); Bridget M. Moix, ‘Choosing Peace: Local Peacebuilder Perspectives on Agency, Relational Responsibility, and the Future of International Peacebuilding’(PhD diss., George Mason University, 2016) www/mars.gmu.edu

actors, networked relationships and sub-national processes on the other, could address the lag between scholarship and practice.

This is the proposition of a Whole-of-Society (WOS) approach. In the case of local ownership, WOS extrapolates from scholarship to capture local agency and capabilities that shape the dynamics of peacebuilding processes and their outcomes. A Whole-of-Society approach would seek to build ‘the social capital of intervention’⁴ by externals, focusing on leveraging the presence of a diversity of local groups, and their networked and agential character in dense social contexts of conflict spaces. In peacebuilding terms, social capital emanates within group interactions and co-operation initiatives and in the engagements between external and local constituencies, for example where the EU or other entities fund, enable and empower local actors, providing the ‘glue which facilitates, co-operation exchange and innovation’ while also accounting for the tensions and contradictions such interactions may entail.⁵

Empirically, we show how local actors mobilise to respond to multiple vulnerabilities they experience and decide on priorities, as well as their flexibility and ability to tap into diverse local capacities. Within a framework of Whole-of-Society, we also show how local mobilisations respond to opportunities and constraints that international involvement creates. The aim is to suggest new avenues for external engagement which are grounded in both actor and process dynamics within local society. We have grouped these avenues of engagement in terms of (actor) inclusivity, leveraging local relationships and synchronizing with practices of local peacebuilding. We suggest that these forms and avenues of engagement constitute latent

⁴ A similar idea of a social capital of peacebuilding as a relational resource emanating from peace agency is elaborated by Bridget M. Moix, ‘Choosing Peace’.

⁵ OECD Insights: Human Capital p102 <https://www.oecd.org/insights/37966394.pdf>. N.d.

possibilities of current peacebuilding practice, which can complement and enrich the international-local interaction.

The paper aims to contribute to debates on local ownership by providing a practice-based perspective and by adding to the pool of empirical evidence on the implementation of local ownership at operational level. The analysis draws primarily from empirical data collected during field work in Ukraine in September 2016, which involved a roundtable discussion with local and international practitioners, policy-makers, academic experts and civil society activists, 11 individual semi-structured interviews with the representatives of the business sector, faith groups, civil society, informal groups providing humanitarian aid to occupied territories, think tanks and academic experts in Kiev, and one focus group with civil society organisations. This data is combined with empirical observations from other cases of international interventions in peacebuilding and conflict resolution collected as part of the research project on EU Civilian Capabilities in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding and through desk studies.

Local ownership: Conceptual- practical contention and the value- added of a Whole-of-Society approach

A recurrent theme among scholars of peacebuilding and development during the last 25 years, local ownership has gone through several iterations of conceptual development whose consequences for peacebuilding practice have been ambivalent at best. In the mid-1990s, the main preoccupation was with a problem of noncompliance with externally supported programmes and policies among the intended beneficiaries of peacebuilding efforts. A lack of take-up and affiliation was attributed to a combination of local resistance to externally prescribed programmes and the fact that policies had limited relevance to realities on the

ground, as well as to absent capacities on the recipient side.⁶ Questions were raised about how to fix the gaps between the rhetoric and practice of local ownership, and in particular what was needed to bring about greater engagement of the beneficiaries of international interventions.⁷

Scholarly attempts to address the latter by injecting more clarity and practical utility into the concept of local ownership by pairing it with a range of synonyms, namely participation, inclusion, consultation, dialogue, self-reliance, responsibility, and accountability, turned ultimately into an exercise akin to unpacking a Russian doll. Since some of those concepts, notably inclusion and participation which became themselves new norms in peacebuilding, proved no less difficult to operationalize.⁸ On the interveners' side the implementation of local ownership with such variable meanings was challenged by a myriad of practical and process issues. These included the difficulties of coordination in a multi-actor peacebuilding context, the prevailing organisational silo mentality, poor operational guidelines, international actors' pragmatic, short-term stabilisation outlook with a focus on discrete (preferably quantifiable) outputs, a lack of sustained effort, and more generally the tensions created by approaching essentially political issues in a technocratic manner. For example, a commitment to more participation clashed with a pressure for more control, stricter reporting and donor accountability that practitioners faced.⁹ But all together those practical and process issues were confounded by a lack of conceptual clarity regarding

⁶ Jens Narten, 'Dilemmas of Promoting "Local Ownership" in the Case of Post-war Kosovo', in Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk, eds., *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations* (London- New York; Routledge, 2009): 252-285; Hannah Reich, 'Local Ownership" in Conflict Transformation Projects: Partnership, Participation or Patronage?', (Berghof Occasional Paper 27, Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management 2006).

⁷ Simon Chesterman, 'Ownership in Theory And In Practice: Transfer of Authority in UN Statebuilding Operations', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 1, no. 1 (2007):3-26.

Daniel Bendix and Ruth Stanley, 'Deconstructing Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform: A Review of the Literature', *African Security Review* 17, no. 2 (2008):93-104.

⁸ Timothy Donais, 'Dayton +20: Peacebuilding and the Perils of Exclusivity', *Peacebuilding* 5, no. 1 (2017):7-21. See also a paper by XXX in this volume.

⁹ Bodille Arensman, Margit van Wessel and Dorothea Hilhorst, 'Does Local Ownership Bring about Effectiveness? The Case of Transnational Advocacy Networks', *Third World Quarterly* 38, no 6. (2017):1311

the local of peacebuilding interventions and the meaningful content of the peacebuilding exercise ingrained in the notion of local ownership. The UN and the EU for instance approached local ownership as primarily about engaging with national government elites in contrast to international non- governmental organisations' focus on the societal grass root level and its actors. As to the substance of peacebuilding, it reflected the interveners' liberal peace variant of market, democracy and good governance as a way to resolve the conflict and sustain peace.¹⁰ Various interpretations of local ownership aside¹¹, 'implementing' it on the ground was characterised by partial, superficial, often shallow, and ad hoc engagement with a predefined set of local actors.¹² The foremost concern on the interveners' side was how to overcome resistance, and ensure local buy- in for their enterprise by engaging the 'right' local constituencies rather than taking issue directly and systematically with the latter's concerns.¹³

This phase of local ownership scholarship was criticised for its focus on external interveners¹⁴, and as deficient in its account of 'the local' component of peacebuilding, and by extension local ownership. The charge was that inadequate conceptualisation of the local resulted in a lack of ontological relevance of local ownership in practice and intractable problems in translating the conceptualisation of the local into programming concepts.¹⁵ The

¹⁰ Vesna Bojicic- Dzelilovic, Denisa Kostovicova and David Rampton, 'Statebuilding, Nationbuilding and Reconstruction', in *The Handbook of Global Security Policy*, eds. Mary Kaldor and Iavor Rangelov (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014): 265-282.

¹¹ In practice, local ownership is understood in different ways by local and international actors. See: Beatrice Pouligny, 'Supporting Local Ownership in Humanitarian Action' (Berlin: Global Policy Institute, 2009); Paula Pickering, *Peacebuilding in the Balkans: The View from the Ground Floor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

¹² de Coning, 'Understanding Peacebuilding as Essentially Local'; Does, 'Inclusivity and Local Perspectives'.

¹³ Ursula C. Schroeder and Fairlie Chappuis, 'New Perspectives on Security Sector Reform: The Role of Local Agency and Domestic Politics', *International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 2 (2014): 133-148; Volke Boege, Patricia Rinck and Tobias Debiel, *Local- International Relations and the Recalibration of Peacebuilding Interventions: Insights from the 'Laboratory' of Bougainville and Beyond*, NEF Report 112/2017 (Essen: University of Duisburg Essen 2017).

¹⁴ Richmond, 'Beyond Local Ownership', 1311; Arensman, van Wessel and Hilhorst, 'Does Local Ownership Bring about Effectiveness?'

¹⁵ Lauren Hutton, 'South Sudan: From Fragility at Independence to a Crisis of Sovereignty', (The Hague: Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2014): 9.

ensuing scholarship of the so called ‘local turn’ reconceptualised the local to capture its plural, fluid, dynamic and agential quality- in other words to identify the ‘true’ local- and proposed to put the local as everyday practice at the centre of peacebuilding practice.¹⁶ Instead of relying on pre-defined prescriptive frameworks and the local as given, from this perspective external interveners and scholars are invited to engage contextually with the local forms of agency and their unexpected capacities.¹⁷ The most notable practice response was a change in the approach to inclusion that extended outreach to ‘atypical’ local interlocutors including prominently women and youth as well as other traditionally marginalised categories, notably internally displaced population and minority groups. Another practice change was more systematic engagement of civil society organisations in preparations and evaluations of strategic documents evident in the UN, the EU and other major actors engaged in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. This still myopic interpretation of inclusivity in practice echoed a criticism some scholars expressed that the local turn perspective engaged insufficiently with local agency, and that this in turn generated another set of practice problems.¹⁸ As a result, peacebuilding practice continued to be poorly equipped to deliver on the normative promise of local ownership.¹⁹

¹⁶ Oliver Richmond and Jason Franks, ‘Liberal Hubris? Virtual Peace in Cambodia’, *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 1 (2007):27-48.; Caroline Hughes, Joakim Öjendal and Isabell Schierenbeck, ‘The Struggle versus the Song, 82; Elisa Randazzo, ‘The Paradox of the ‘Everyday’: Scrutinising the Local Turn in Peacebuilding’, *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 8 (2016):1351-1370.

¹⁷ Stefanie Kappler and Oliver Richmond, ‘Peacebuilding and Culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Resistance of Emancipation?’, *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 3 (2011): 274; Joakim Öjendal and Sivhouch Ou, ‘The ‘Local Turn’ Saving Liberal Peacebuilding? Unpacking Virtual peace in Cambodia’, *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015):23.

¹⁸ Andreas T. Hirblinger and Claudia Simons, ‘The Good, the Bad, and the Powerful: Representations of the Local in Peacebuilding’, *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 2 (2015):422-439; Landon E. Hancock, ‘Agency & Peacebuilding: The Promise of Local Zones of Peace’, *Peacebuilding* 5, no. 3 (2017):255-269; Tania Paffenholz, ‘Unlocking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment Towards and Agenda for Future Research’, *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015): 857-874; Pickering, ‘Peacebuilding in the Balkans’; Graeme William Young, ‘Conceptualizing Resistance in Post-Conflict Environment’, *International Peacekeeping* 22, no. 2 (2015):169-185; Jerry McCann, ‘Local Ownership- An Imperative for Inclusive Peacebuilding’, *Development Dialogue* (2015):16-27.

¹⁹ Isabell Schierenbeck, ‘Beyond the Local Turn Divide: Lessons Learnt, Relearnt and Unlearnt’, *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 6 (2016): 1023-1032. Hirblinger and Simons, ‘The Good, the Bad and the Powerful’.

The source of this enduring difficulty to operationalise local ownership is ultimately a cognitive one. While the first phase of local ownership scholarship highlighted the problems of insufficient agency, local turn scholars go further in viewing agency as not only a premise of locally owned peacebuilding but also a challenge to the international community's liberal peace project. Both phases see local agency in terms of resistance, but on different grounds. In the early local ownership debates, resistance was about a misfit between the external and local understanding of peace; in the more recent accounts, the emphasis is on 'resistant agency'²⁰ whereby resistance is imbued with emancipatory potential. This assumption of local agency as either a deficit or a problem to overcome,²¹ has been tackled by a more recent process-centred, relational perspective on peacebuilding and local ownership, which foregrounds interactions, processes and practices in the local peacebuilding context.²² Of particular note is the emphasis on pragmatism which 'directs attention to the everyday practices, strategies and institutions as a basis for addressing concrete problems at hand'²³ and the importance of 'how practices work in a particular context'.²⁴ In contrast to the rather abstract tenor of much of the scholarship on local ownership, a focus on relations and processes is seen as way to 'reach out into the everyday and pragmatically support local practices in addressing context specific challenges'.²⁵

The notion of Whole-of-Society (WOS) offers one way of approaching the existing practices and processes of peacebuilding as a starting point to arrive at more constructive, peace inducing relationships among the plethora of actors and agencies in the conflict space.

²⁰ Erin McCandless, Eric Abitbol and Timothy Donais, 'Vertical Integration: A Dynamic Practice Promoting Transformative Peacebuilding', *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 1, no. 3 (2015):1-9.

²¹ Schroeder and Chappuis, 'New Perspectives on Security Sector Reform':137.

²² Wren, Chadwick, Tobias Debiel and Frank Gadinger, eds., *Relational Sensibility and 'The Turn to the Local: Prospects for the Future of Peacebuilding* (Duisburg: Centre for Global Cooperation Research, 2013).

²³ Louise Wiuff Moe, 'Relationality and Pragmatism in Peacebuilding: Reflections on Somaliland' in *Relational Sensibility and 'The Turn to the Local: Prospects for the Future of Peacebuilding*, eds. Wren, Chadwick, Tobias Debiel and Frank Gadinger, (Duisburg: Centre for Global Cooperation Research, 2013), 46.

²⁴ David Chandler, 'Resilience and the 'Everyday': Beyond the Paradox of Liberal Peace', *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 1(2015):27-48.

²⁵ Chandler, 'Resilience and the 'Everyday'.

It is a pragmatic and positivist- in a sense of objective and fact based- take on local agency as enacted through interactions of actors and process in a conflict space. A Whole-of-Society approach suggests that intervention practice can acknowledge and reflect local responses to conflicts not only by attempting to engage with a greater diversity of local stakeholders, but also through identifying combinations of significant non-state actors , taking account of relationships and interactions among local groups, and by recognising the breadth, depth and relevance of indigenous practices. This is to think about not only who constitutes local society, but also how social actors exercise agency both individually, in conjunction with other locals and with internationals. Going further, the explicitly normative aspect of a Whole-of-Society approach sees the presence of external intervention itself as a creative site of local conflict responses, providing additional dynamism and also glue for interactions at the grass roots, capturing elements of pragmatic engagement which are currently obscured. The shift in practice implied is to move away from a problematic view of local ownership and the local as something to be overcome and transformed, to recognising the resources inherent in how local actors respond to multiple security needs. It is also about crafting a capability out of recognising and building on the strategies they use to respond to the interconnected nature of vulnerabilities in the conflict space. Working with all these elements of inclusivity, the importance of relationships and the relevance of local practice responses to conflict, WOS seeks to shift policy mechanisms away from a dominant focus on elite bargains, programmatic interventions or capacity and institution building towards supporting and leveraging patterns of actorship and organisation in a local space.

Figure 1 Whole-of-Society perspective on local ownership

In the following sections we examine examples of local ownership in peacebuilding practice applying Whole-of-Society as a prism which highlights three aspects: how inclusivity is pursued (both in terms of actors and processes); what kinds of relations are mobilised; and what kinds of practices and processes local actors engage in to deal with multiple vulnerabilities of the conflict-affected population. We identify two particular social groups, namely private sector and faith groups which merit investigation as neglected sites of local agency and provide lens for tracing different aspects of local ownership in practice.

Inclusivity

A tendency in external peacebuilding to focus on and privilege a relatively narrow group of locals, which can be characterised as government and non-government elites, is also characteristic of EU practices. There are many reasons for this, to do with process and conceptual issues that can lead to marginalisation of constituencies which may be integral to constructing a representative picture of local society and sites of agency, and that are relevant in terms of building social capital of intervention. Sometimes, important constituencies are invisible and bypassed because, as Mac Ginty suggests, the internationals are simply not equipped to see the local;²⁶ or because of physical and conflict geography of the locality; or because of the rules and regulations international actors follow in engaging with local constituencies such as funding priorities and procedures which delimit target beneficiaries to those who are able to apply for and implement external donor programmes; or excluding certain actors on ethical grounds.

We identified two types of groups in particular, namely private companies and faith groups which are under-acknowledged by external interventions. Yet they are significant in

²⁶ Roger MacGinty, 'What Do We Mean When We Use the Term 'Local'? Imagining and Framing the Local and International in Relation to Peace and Order' in *Peacebuilding in Crisis. Rethinking Paradigms and Practices of Transnational Cooperation*, eds. Tobias Diebel, Thomas Held and Ulrich Schneckler, (London: Routledge 2016):193-209.

terms of representing an important aspect of agency in the conflict space, either through their own identities and efforts within local society and /or their abilities to mobilise other social groups. Their marginalisation (while not being acknowledged within a category of ‘marginalised’ actors as typically understood in the mainstream peacebuilding theory and practice) illustrates persistent gaps in peacebuilding practice that operates on an implicit rationale of ‘sufficient and inclusive enough’²⁷ engagement with local actors. This limited horizon of vision²⁸ undermines the effectiveness of intervention, and stymies more substantial and dynamic forms of interaction between locals and internationals. In this sense, our focus on these two particular groups is illustrative of the gaps and missed opportunities for external peacebuilders to engage both vertically and horizontally with local society.

The private sector

The private sector is on the whole disconnected from mainstream peacebuilding interventions and its contribution is conceived as an indirect one through its role as a driver of economic growth and a provider of jobs. The private sector is however uniquely embedded in local society, with links across multiple societal levels that can be harnessed for peacebuilding goals or equally whose tendency to pursue particularistic interests needs to be addressed to prevent them undermining peace.²⁹ Companies are often primary providers of security in contexts where there is an absence of government or international governance. Examples of

²⁷ Does, ‘Inclusivity and Local Perspectives’.

According to Paffenholz, the reviews of two decades of peacebuilding show no genuine advance towards meaningful inclusion. Tania Paffenholz, ‘International Peacebuilding Goes Local: Analysing Lederach’s Conflict Transformation Theory and its Ambivalent Encounter with 20 Years of Practice’, *Peacebuilding* 2, no. 1 (2014):14.

²⁸ In Ukraine context, the case of internally displaced people joining the groups of activist working with war-affected population illustrate the external actors’ misconception that the internally displaced are simply helpless victims of conflict.

²⁹ Brian Ganson and Achim Wennmann, *Business and Conflict in Fragile states: The Case for Pragmatic Solutions* (London: Routledge 2016); Nicke Killick, VS Srikantha and Canan Günduz, *The Role of Local Business in Peacebuilding* (Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 2005).

this include Yemen where the only international representatives on the ground after the Arab Spring were the security officials from oil companies; or in Ukraine where companies have continued operating in the territories controlled by separatists from which government and many civil society actors have withdrawn.³⁰

Highlighting the multiple identities of the private sector which are shaped by the locally contingent social processes of conflict and deep social transformation unfolding in Ukraine, are new forms of private sector activism geared towards governance reforms and broader socio-economic development objectives. The conflict that at the level of official politics and diplomacy is couched in terms of separatist movements and Russian occupation, is internally also about transforming the economic and political model based on the rule of powerful oligarchs. Businessmen were among the leading figures of the Maidan ‘revolution’³¹ that predated the conflict; hence possessing a dual identity as both commercial and social/political actors embedded in dense social networks. The European Business Association Ukraine³² has taken up to improve governance standards and to counter corruption, as part of a broad agenda of national renewal outlined in the New Vision Statement, which emerged in response to the Maidan citizens’ mobilisation. Formally separated into two opposing political camps- one under the formal jurisdiction of the Ukraine government, the other belonging to the separatist government- business on both sides of the divide, share a concern over rising criminality which is a consequence of disruption to the legal economy. Rising criminality which deforms Ukraine’s economic and social fabric as

³⁰ Hubert de Bremond, Total - Civil Society Dialogue Network, (presentation, ‘*Private Sector and Conflict*’ 29 October 2012, Brussels).

³¹ Maidan ‘revolution’ refers to mass gathering of citizens at Kiev’s Maidan square in February 2014 at the height of the Orange Revolution to democratise Ukraine.

³² Interview with Oleksii Chiuev, September 8, 2016, Kiev. Interview with Oleksandra Romancova September 7, 2016, Kiev.

After the Maidan events, around 2,000 businessmen worked together on a document Vision New Ukraine that sets a comprehensive reform agenda for the country. Businessmen also take up voluntary work with the non-governmental organisations.

well as compounds everyday insecurity is a problem with potential for long lasting consequences on governance and economic development. However its pernicious impact on the everyday life of Ukraine's communities has been largely ignored by the political elites and its international interlocutors focused on finding political solution to the conflict.³³ At the same time the private sector's awareness of and responsiveness to the immediate needs of the conflict-affected population in Ukraine are manifested in their proactive role in securing employment for internally displaced people with women and older workers as priority categories by using a government tax facilitation scheme .³⁴

³³ Interview with Vadym Fomin, September 8, 2016 Kiev.

³⁴ Interview with the staff of the employment centre for internally displaced people, September 9, 2016, Kiev. Interview with Sergeiy Solodkyy, September 9, 2016 Kiev.

Faith groups

Among scholars and peacebuilding practitioners religion tends to be framed predominantly in terms of a conflict driver, rather than treating religious groups as a category of socio-political actor with peacebuilding potential.³⁵ Their comparative advantage associated with long term presence and commitment, and their spiritual and moral authority, often combined with economic resources, are insufficiently acknowledged in peacebuilding practice. Experience of peacebuilding shows many examples where faith groups have assumed a public profile in formal (and informal) processes of multi-track diplomacy and somewhat less so in other policy areas such as SSR and governance reform. The civil authority of faith groups has been successfully leveraged in processes of reconciliation, access to justice and conflict mediation as illustrated by the role of the local religious groups in Mozambique, Sudan and Uganda.³⁶

In Ukraine and Georgia the involvement of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church in political debates and the behaviour of church officials in disputed territories has contributed to defining the external analysis of those conflicts, whereas the church's ongoing everyday responses to the conflicts are also interesting in revealing its role in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.³⁷ In Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church is an influential socio-

³⁵ Katrien Hertog, *Complex Reality of Religious Peacebuilding: The Conceptual Contributions and Critical Analysis* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010); Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith, eds. *Religion and Peacebuilding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

³⁶ Joshua Haynes, 'Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace-building: The Role of Religion in Mozambique, Nigeria and Cambodia', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 47, no. 1 (2009):52-75. Tjesard Bouta, S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Faith- based Peace-building: Mapping and Analysis of Christian, Muslim and Multi-faith Actors* (The Hague: Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2005).

³⁷ Serhiy Zdioruk and Olexiy Haran, 'The Russian Orthodox Church as an Instrument of Russia's Foreign Policy towards Ukraine' in *Religion as the Instrument of Russian Foreign Policy towards Neighbouring Countries Georgia, Latvia, Ukraine*, ed. Tengiz Pkhaldze (Tbilisi: International Centre for Geopolitical Studies 2012): 54-101.

economic actor with an economic portfolio in agriculture, tourism, and construction as well as a provider of education; it also has a stake in over 400 print and electronic media which affords it multiple channels of influence in local society.³⁸

As well as an ambiguous political actor, at another level of action the Russian Orthodox Church has supported the work of volunteer brigades consisting of churchgoers and civil society organisations in providing humanitarian assistance in Eastern Ukraine and psychosocial care for internally displaced people. The brigades also provide practical advice on relocation, employment opportunities and other needs of displaced population. ‘Save Ukraine’ is a fusion of religious and secular groups that operate a brigade style system in providing humanitarian aid in 24 locations across the borderline between government and separatist territories; they also provide moral and spiritual support to internally displaced and former fighters; it also runs a hot line for any citizens needing advice and help .³⁹

From a Whole-of-Society perspective, besides reaching out to ‘hidden’ and overlooked actors, the process of inclusion itself is consequential in ensuring more locally relevant peacebuilding by supporting existing capabilities and resources. Gaining ground in the development aid community, and much less so among peacebuilding practitioners despite theoretical advances pointing in that direction, is an approach of ‘locally- led’ initiatives intended to tap into latent local capabilities.⁴⁰ By way of illustration, in Kenya the Danish government development agency supported a combination of religious- based and development organisations, some of which were informal groups of volunteers, to work on conflict resolution and terrorism prevention so that they were able to define the priorities and main lines of actions. Such an approach enables those organisations to engage with a range of

³⁸ Zdiouruk and Haran ‘The Russian Orthodox Church’, 60.

³⁹ Interview with Igor Nebava, Save Ukraine, September 7, 2016, Kiev.

⁴⁰ Rosie Pinnington, ‘*Local First in Practice: Unlocking the Power to Get Things Done*’ (London: Peace Direct, 2014).

actors including armed youth, religious preachers and terror suspects whose participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding is fundamentally important and yet sidelined in official peacebuilding and conflict prevention practices of the EU and most key international players.⁴¹ Here the different qualities of faith- groups, in particular their moral and spiritual authority in some contexts, that allow them to mobilise for peace often the most unlikely of social groups, are important and yet underutilised aspect of local agency.

A relational perspective

For peacebuilding practice, one of the most pertinent issues around local ownership is identifying ‘the right’ interlocutors within a host society who could take on board peacebuilding, and preventing the ‘wrong’ type of actors from being empowered.⁴² Such a simplistic understanding downplays the local complexities associated with a plurality of actors, actors’ multiple identities and the dynamic aspects of agency due to continuously changing interests, motives and priorities of those actors. In reality aggregated groupings such as confessional associations, and even more, the private sector, are diverse in nature and harbour different agendas. This diversity within ‘black boxes’ of corporate actors, implies opportunities for multiplier effects, as individual organisations’ agendas coincide and cross other interests in society, including other companies, and alternative religious affiliations. Both the potential and the pitfalls of such diversity can be neglected by a tunnel view towards local actors which overlooks their composite identity and dynamic relationships among different actor groups.

A different approach has been tried in Colombia, where peacebuilders attempted to capture the versatile role of the private sector at the sub-national level through the Peace Laboratories project which encouraged various forms of partnering with other social actors,

⁴¹ Pinnington, ‘Local First in Practice’, 32.

⁴² Pinnington, ‘Local First in Practice’, 26

namely local government officials, civil society and the church in a grass-root initiative that addressed multidimensional insecurities in Colombian regions. The Colombian government has historically had an uneven territorial presence and such grass root initiatives that mobilise local capacities throughout society are of vital importance for the prospect of so –called ‘territorial peace’. Such ‘partnerships’ challenge the idea of the unitary state which informs the approach to local ownership in peacebuilding practice in favour of working with different components of Colombian society and their indigenous forms and drawing on synergy between secular and religious peacebuilding processes.

In Ukraine, the ability of the European Business Association to draw on support from diaspora, is an example of how a diverse geography of peacebuilding and diverse relationships are being mobilised and deployed to create new sites of activism and authority. In responding to conflict developments on the ground, the Association has expanded its international contacts and collaboration in order to strengthen its standing with the government and establish its credibility as a peacebuilding actor. The Association has taken advantage of the EU presence to secure EU backing to increase its own international profile. This emboldened status is seen as a step towards the Association eventually getting a seat at the table to formally participate in the dialogue with the government over the future peace settlement.⁴³ Simultaneously, at a different level of interaction, companies in Ukraine, some of which are the members of the Association- particularly in Kiev which has a large internally displaced population- have been actively involved in tri- partite relations with the government, civil society organisations and volunteer groups in supporting aforementioned work placement schemes for the internally displaced population.⁴⁴

⁴³ Interview with Oleksii Chiuev, September 8, 2016, Kiev.

⁴⁴ Interview with the staff of the employment centre for internally displaced people, September 8, 2016, Kiev.

As regards faith groups, the comparative advantage of religious leaders has been noted in conducting conflict mediation by working in concert with a range of other stakeholders constituting a form of relational asset which offers the chance to advance more integrative peacebuilding. Excluding faith groups from internationally sponsored dialogues, for example because of a locally declared government commitment to secularism, can have detrimental effects on the relationships among different groups in societies where spiritual and confessional orientations within the local population are significant.⁴⁵ One example of this kind of tension between the secular framing of international intervention and local practices are Somalia and Nigeria where the role of religious groups in peacebuilding over the secular channels has been particularly pronounced.⁴⁶ In Ukraine, the Orthodox-dominated Ukrainian Council of Churches is an established interlocutor of government but other faith groups including Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist are denied representation in the Council.⁴⁷ As a result, the members of Ukraine's Army of Islamic faith are not provided with spiritual assistance, which closes a potentially creative channel of representation and communication while creating further grounds for social tensions.⁴⁸

The significance of diverse groups being able to forge diverse types of relationships is illustrated by the aforementioned example of volunteer brigades in Ukraine, which originated in an initiative started by a cohort of churchgoers-initially only three-⁴⁹ who were able to leverage their personal relations on both sides of Ukraine's conflict to organise and work collaboratively to assist local population according to their own assessment of needs and priorities. In this particular example, a potential for building diverse and multilevel

⁴⁵ Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, Religion, *The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ Bouta, Kadayifci-Orellana and Abu-Nimer, Faith- based Peace-building.

⁴⁷ Interview with Said Ismagilov, Mufti of Ukraine, September 8, 2016, Kiev.

⁴⁸ Interview with Said Ismagilov, Mufti of Ukraine, September 8, 2016, Kiev.

⁴⁹ Interview with Igor Nebava, September 8, 2016, Kiev.

relationships reflects the ability of faith groups to mobilise for peace beyond their own communities, and to work both in concert with as well as in parallel to other faith and secular groups, locally and transnationally, that remains insufficiently integrated with other peacebuilding efforts.

Complementary practices

Plural constituencies in the conflict space reflect not only different geographies and experiences but imply a diversity of attitudes to the conflict, different expectations regarding outcomes and anticipated results of external intervention. As a result, there are multiple opportunities for conflict responses, and a range of peacebuilding activities both independent of and in conjunction with external actors which reflect local understanding of problems and community needs.

The issue of sequencing of civilian peacebuilding has been identified as a key policy and practice challenge to local ownership.⁵⁰ Locally organised groups of activists, whatever their motivation (for example religious or business), are particularly effective in providing bridging activities between humanitarian assistance at the sharp end of active conflict and underlying reforms to embed peace as well as between medium and longer-term assistance. The ability of small local actors to implement transitional activities is illustrated by the case of ‘Save Ukraine’ group. Mobilised initially around humanitarian and emergency assistance, the group has established its credibility through access to constituencies with extreme human security needs through timely and local intervention. Subsequent activities and services were adapted through a proximate knowledge of next steps required which included for example livelihood strategies for the conflict-affected population that led to ‘Save Ukraine’ developing a programme to assist individuals with setting up bakery businesses.⁵¹ This is an example of pragmatic sequencing of interventions, which illustrates how coordination of different actors and activities takes place on the ground as the peacebuilding process unfolds in contrast to pre-existing protocols and frameworks drawn by the interveners.⁵² Furthermore,

⁵⁰ Alan Bryden, Timothy Donais and Heiner Hänggi, *Shaping a Security Governance Agenda in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) Policy Paper, no.11 November, 2005). Adam Moore, *Peacebuilding in Practice . Local Experience in Two Bosnian Towns* (New York: Cornell University Press. 2013).

⁵¹ Interview with Igor Nebava, September 7, 2016, Kiev.

⁵² Moix, ‘Choosing Peace’.

this example illustrates how such small, local indigenous forms of engagement and practices are able to respond to a range of problems from food insecurity, lack of livelihoods, lack of dignity, and governance issues. In contrast, the interconnected nature of such multiple vulnerabilities facing conflict-affected populations is poorly addressed by operational practices characterised by silo mentality among different peacebuilding organisations along with poor adaptive⁵³ and coordination capabilities. A similar example of complementary local practices that approach peacebuilding and conflict resolution holistically is that of the Centre for Resolution of Conflicts (CRC) in DRC which works on reintegration of demobilised soldiers, by relying on a large pool of volunteers who work across different policy areas and with different community groups to ensure peaceful reintegration and support social cohesion. This approach contrasts with fragmented process of reintegration in the context of institutionally- focused DDR reforms.⁵⁴

The fluid and highly connective nature of local activism not only shapes the universe of local counterparties, including the emergence of ‘new’ actors. It also has a bearing on the type of practices in the conflict space and different combinations of actors involved. In Ukraine, the volunteer phenomenon is not only present among religious groups, but stems from civic engagement with the 2014 Maidan Euro-revolution, based on common feelings of national identity across multiple social groups. Technology and social media have provided the means of permanent and ongoing connections between different groups, and increased the level of mobilisation within local society. This has facilitated the formation of ad hoc groupings and alliances of local actors, which shift according to circumstance and whose objectives are a complex mix of addressing the impact of conflict while working towards societal transformation. They have become a feature of the conflict landscape, responding in immediate ways, with not only quick response times but a high degree of adaptability which is an essential aspect from a local ownership perspective. The funding

⁵³ Comparing the slow response of key international organisations involved in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Ukraine with the flexibility and adaptability of the volunteers groups, the head of the umbrella organisation of volunteers described those organisations as ‘tankers on the sea’ in contrast with the nimbleness of the local activist groups. Interview with Igor Nebava, September 7, Kiev, 2016.

⁵⁴ Kate McGuinness, ed., *Local First: Development for the Twenty- First Century* (London: Peace Direct ,2012.)

and strategic priorities of these groups tend to have a short life-cycle, and this limits their possibilities to secure financial backing from large donors which cater to more established civil society organisations with capacity to administer large grants over longer period of time. Yet these groups are better able to adapt to the rapid evolution of events on the ground and changing priorities, and develop small and short-term but nevertheless often vital projects which target specific groups; for example older women, disabled former combatants or those traumatised by conflict and requiring psychological as well as practical help to re-enter the workforce. Local groups, such as the ‘Save Ukraine’ volunteers, are also more present in small towns and villages than international organisations typically focused on larger population centres, leading to a variable geography related to issues such as social justice, human rights and economic opportunities.

The issue of funding local counterparties in peacebuilding is often at the forefront of the scholarly debates and practical concerns including a risk of propping up the ‘wrong local’. And yet in Ukraine, because of the specific context in which many types of civil organisations have emerged inspired by a national rejuvenation agenda, there are examples of local civil society organisations that have declined financial support from big donors, the EU included. The employment center for internally displaced people in Kiev, established by a group of Maidan activists, as a Facebook page, and with initial financial support from the EU, took a view that the EU programme limited to Eastern Ukraine was not appropriate and that supporting internally displaced people throughout the country better reflected local priorities which led it to turn down the EU funding.⁵⁵ Instead, the centre asked the EU officials to publicly endorse its work which gives it more leverage in pressuring the government to participate in some of the center’s initiatives. The center also took advantage of the USAID assistance in the form of free office space which it shares with three other indigenous

⁵⁵ Interview at the employment centre for internally displaced people, September 8, 2016 Kiev

organisations working on different areas of peacebuilding. Sharing premises has been conducive to collaboration among the four groups of activists in designing programs that are more effective in responding to the impact of conflict and resulted in new opportunities for joint fundraising. Thus here the question is less about local ownership of international initiatives and more about how effectively external policies grasp dynamics on the ground, recognising diverse modalities of interactions among the international and local actors. This includes the fact that internationals are able to play both a direct (funding) and indirect role (in this case political support which improves the finance-raising abilities of local actors) in encouraging the diversity of local conflict responses that can be mutually beneficial.

Unofficial and ad hoc coalitions between different groups create entry points for external actors to penetrate remote locations and areas where access is difficult and communications fluctuate, either as a result of ‘hot’ conflict or because of cultural barriers around marginalised groups, and in this way these entry points serve to complement activities that tend to be biased towards urban centres. In contemporary conflicts, where active conflict is confined to particular parts of the country, while the capital may be relatively stable, the physical and affective distance between external practitioners, with few field offices or outposts and nuclei of conflict, constitutes a gap in the possibility for more encompassing and mutually beneficial peacebuilding interactions. This makes activists an important and topical sounding board for international peacebuilders to test both the extent and depth of needs, achieve real time, bottom-up analysis of the conflict and its impacts, and to develop appropriate responses. Religious groups in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, which suffer persistent human rights harassment by the local Russian-backed authorities, have for example served as early warning posts for international peacebuilders of confrontation and for particular sites of social tension.

Particularly in cases where there are huge movements of population – such as in Georgia, Ukraine and Yemen as a result of the conflict, the challenges of engaging with rapidly changing demographics as well as being adaptable to a shifting reality on the ground is an important aspect of local ownership in practice, which determines the effectiveness of traditional interventions by the EU and other actors. For example the task of holding elections in eastern Ukraine is hampered by the organisational problem of 70,000 unregistered voters and over 100,000 registered voters who in September 2016 when this research was conducted were on the Russian side of the border.

Conclusions

Rather than viewing local ownership in instrumental terms by one side to bring about greater engagement with and by local actors, we have sought to analyse local ownership as part of a capability to leverage positive social attributes of external-local (including local-local) relations in a context of conflict and post-conflict. Where existing practices of local ownership enact an imprecise combination of process and goal orientated strategies, this perspective led us to investigate the social relationships and connections within interventions as well as indigenous capacities for action in addition to simply focusing on which groups are engaged by externals, and the modes for encouraging their involvement. From this starting point, a Whole-of-Society approach offers an analytical view of local ownership, not as an instrumental process of mitigating negative perceptions of intervention, or reifying the local, or for that matter another version of a bottom-up peacebuilding. Foremost, it sees local ownership in terms of developing a new capacity. The combination of horizontal and vertical axes introduced in the introduction to this collection of papers to capture multilevel, multiactor dynamics (vertical axis) and processes and practices across different fields of peacebuilding action (horizontal axis) offers an operational perspective based on leveraging

the density and complexity of conflict responses. This includes those responses which are generated at sub-national levels often in informal ways and in geographies traditionally unmarked by conventional peacebuilding through multilevel processes of interactions characterising conflict space. As such, WOS perspective on local ownership addresses two criticisms of the local ownership in peacebuilding which concern the identification of the local and the local/ international dichotomy. As a practice perspective, it serves to enhance inclusivity as well as to make visible relational dynamics and reveal a process dimension to the local which incorporates agency but also indigenous customs, cultures and responses to conflict which offer constructive entry points for engagement by external peacebuilders. Taken together, these additional elements of a Whole-of-Society approach explained in the introductory article to this collection of papers, constitute a thicker dialogue between interveners and local populations which can inject new meaning and clarity to the norm of local ownership.

Figure 1

