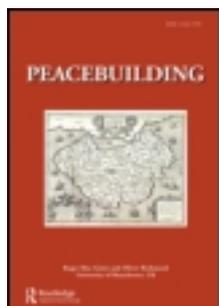


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### International peacebuilding goes local: analysing Lederach's conflict transformation theory and its ambivalent encounter with 20 years of practice

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## International peacebuilding goes local: analysing Lederach's conflict transformation theory and its ambivalent encounter with 20 years of practice

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This article examines how peacebuilding theory has influenced the shift from the international to the 'local' in the practice of international peacebuilding and analyses the consequences for local communities, international peacebuilding practice and critical peacebuilding research. The results demonstrate that transformative peacebuilding theories, in particular John Paul Lederach's work, have enormously influenced the policy discourse and practice of supporting the 'local'. Revisiting 20 years of this theory–practice encounter, this article concludes that peacebuilding practitioners have overwhelmingly recognised the importance of Lederach's shift towards local actors. However, this has failed to result in the desired peacebuilding outcomes. This article identifies three main reasons: (1) particular understandings of the 'local' by the 'international'; (2) narrow international support strategies, ignoring the broader international, regional and local peacebuilding arena, and existing power relations; and (3) the mantra status of Lederach's middle–out approach as an almost unquestioned *theory of change* in civil society peacebuilding that invites reflections on theory–practice encounters and responsible peacebuilding scholarship.

**Keywords:** peacebuilding; conflict transformation; theory; Lederach; policy discourse; practice; local

### Introduction

Although the concept of peacebuilding was first developed in 1975,<sup>1</sup> it only made its way onto the international agenda in the early 1990s. Since then, the field of peacebuilding research and policy practice has seen a substantial shift in focus from international to local peacebuilding. As a result, the recognition that local<sup>2</sup> actors should be in the driving seat of

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<sup>1</sup>John Galtung, 'Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding', in *Peace, War and Defence: Essays in Peace Research*, ed. John Galtung (Copenhagen: Christian Ejlertsen, 1975), 282–304.

<sup>2</sup>I use the term 'local' despite its problems. This includes local actors from within the conflict country but excludes international staff working on the ground. This is conceptually close to Richmond's definition of 'local-local', see Oliver P. Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace* (London: Routledge, 2011).

peacebuilding is now firmly established in peacebuilding research<sup>3</sup> and policy discourse,<sup>4</sup> and has led to a massive rise in peacebuilding initiatives and projects in support of local actors in practice.<sup>5</sup>

Two theoretical frameworks have fundamentally influenced this shift in focus towards the local. First, liberal peace theory has provided an overarching rationale for international support to local actors by considering vibrant civil society as an essential component of liberal democracies.<sup>6</sup> Second, conflict transformation oriented peacebuilding theories (CT) have provided policy practitioners with theoretical guidance for local support. The most influential of these theories has been that of John Paul Lederach.<sup>7</sup> His theory presents not only one of the first comprehensive approaches postulating a shift to the local, but it is also a widely employed guide for the work of practitioner institutions. Although contributions by other scholars and scholar-practitioners followed<sup>8</sup> and the terminology

<sup>3</sup>There have been two main trends in research: (1) the evolution of the conflict resolution and transformation schools in the late 1980s/early 1990s; and (2) the newer debate on the 'local' in critical peacebuilding scholarship in the context of a counter-narrative to the liberal peace. For overviews, see Hugh Miall, Oliver Ramsbotham, and Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999); Oliver P. Richmond, *The Transformation of Peace* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 89–96; and Thania Paffenholz, ed., *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010), 50–6.

<sup>4</sup>This has manifested in numerous policy papers. See United Nations Secretary-General (Kofi Annan), *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Freedom and Human Rights for All* (New York: United Nations, 2005); Reiner Forster and Mark Mattner, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: Potential, Limitations and Critical Factors*, Report No. 36445-GLB (Washington, DC: World Bank, Social Development Department, Sustainable Development Network, 2006); Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations* (Paris: OECD, 2007); United Nations Secretary-General (Ban Ki-Moon), *Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict* (New York: United Nations, 2009); and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-Operation*, Outcome Document of the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, Busan, Republic of Korea (Paris: OECD, 2011).

<sup>5</sup>In 2009–10, 8.9% of all Development Assistant Committee (DAC) official development assistance was channelled to and through civil society organisations as compared to 5% in 2000–2001 and 3.3% in 1994–95. From 2001 to 2010 the European Commission alone disbursed €928m to civil society organisations in support of conflict prevention and peacebuilding which represents 12% of the EC total funds spent during that period. See OECD, *Development Co-operation Report 1997: Efforts and Policies of the Members of the Development Assistance Committee* (Paris: OECD, 1998); OECD, 'Major Aid Uses by Individual DAC Donors', 2000–2001, <http://ebookbrowse.com/2-major-aid-uses-by-individual-dac-donors-xls-d124367987> (accessed October 31, 2012); OECD, 'Ensuring Fragile States Are Not Left Behind: Summary Report', February 2010, <http://www.oecd.org/dacfragilestates/44822042.pdf> (accessed October 31, 2012).

<sup>6</sup>For a good summary of liberal peacebuilding theory and its various critiques see Susanna Campbell, David Chandler, and Meera Sabaratnam, *Beyond the Liberal Peace: Debating Contemporary Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Interventions* (London: Zed Books, 2011).

<sup>7</sup>John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup>See *Online Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation* (Berlin: Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management), [www.berghof-handbook.net](http://www.berghof-handbook.net) (accessed September 7, 2012); Kumar Rupasinghe, *Conflict Transformation* (London: St Martin's Press, 1995); A. Betts Fetherston, 'Peacekeeping, Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding: A Reconsideration of Theoretical Frameworks', *International Peacekeeping* 7, no. 1 (2000): 190–218; Thania Paffenholz, *Community-Based Bottom-Up Peacebuilding: The Development of the Life and Peace Institute's Approach to Peacebuilding and Lessons Learned from the Somalia Experience (1990–2000)*, Horn of Africa Series (Uppsala: The Life and Peace Institute, 2003); Lisa Schirch, *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004).

shifted from ‘conflict transformation’ to ‘peacebuilding’, the fundamental understanding of peacebuilding has remained unchanged. Peacebuilding is a long-term multi-track transformative contribution to social change, helping to create a just and sustainable peace beyond the narrow definition of a post-conflict period.<sup>9</sup>

Taking into account the profound influence of CT peacebuilding theory on peacebuilding practice over the past 20 years, this article aims to engage in a critical analysis of how peacebuilding theory – in particular Lederach’s approach – has influenced the shift to the local in international peacebuilding practice and analyse the consequences of this encounter. Using evidence from two large qualitative datasets<sup>10</sup> based on comparative in-depth country case studies that allow for theory–practice comparison, it: (a) examines whether Lederach’s CT peacebuilding theory has been implemented in the practice of peacebuilding and, if so, how; (b) assesses the results of this work and its intended and unintended effects on peacebuilding; and (c) presents consequences for theory–policy practice encounters in peacebuilding.

Although some of the findings on civil society peacebuilding have been discussed elsewhere in the literature, this article is significant in its systematic comparison between theory and evidence in the existing data, its critical findings for both theory and practice and the reflections it provides on research–policy transfer in peacebuilding.

The article is structured as follows: section two provides an overview and contextualisation of CT peacebuilding theory; section three, an overview of the methodological approach employed; section four presents the results of the comparison between theory and practice, focusing on an analysis of actors, activities and implementation; the final section analyses the consequences of this theory–policy–practice encounter for peacebuilding theory and practice.

### **Transformative peacebuilding theory: history, main concepts and critiques**

Theories of CT peacebuilding build on an understanding that conflict is a normal social occurrence and, therefore, focus on the transformation of the violent *conduct* into a peaceful one. This is a core difference to conflict management<sup>11</sup> and resolution theories,<sup>12</sup> and explains the use of the ‘conflict transformation’. As such, it combines a multi-actor

<sup>9</sup>John Paul Lederach and Scott Appleby, ‘Strategic Peacebuilding: An Overview’, in *Strategies of Peace: Transforming Conflict in a Violent World*, ed. Daniel Philpott and Gerard F. Powers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19–44.

<sup>10</sup>Civil Society Peacebuilding Project (2006–2010) and Independent Evaluation of the German Civil Peace Service (2009–2011), see Thania Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*; German Ministry of Development and Co-operation, ‘The German Civil Peace Service: Synthesis Report. Volume I: Main Report’; Volume II Methodological Report; Volume III Case Studies, unpublished reports (2011), <http://www.oecd.org/derec/germany/49139167.pdf> (accessed September 7, 2012).

<sup>11</sup>See Jacob Bercovitch, *Social Conflicts and Third Parties: Strategies of Conflict Resolution* (Boulder: Westview, 1984); I. William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985/1989); I. William Zartman, *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1995); Jacob Bercovitch, *Resolving International Conflicts: The Theory and Practice of Mediation* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996).

<sup>12</sup>See Herbert C. Kelman, ‘Informal Mediation by the Scholar /Practitioner’, in *Mediation in International Relations: Multiple Approaches to Conflict Management*, ed. Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Z. Rubin (London: Macmillan, 1992), 64–96; Ronald J. Fisher, ‘Interactive Conflict Resolution’, in *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques*, ed. I. William Zartman (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 227–72.

and multi-track approach with short-, medium- and long-term perspectives. Although a number of authors discuss transformative approaches to building peace,<sup>13</sup> the most comprehensive and widely recognised approach has been developed by John Paul Lederach. Although his theory has been developed in a number of publications,<sup>14</sup> his most influential and widely used work is the book *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (1997).<sup>15</sup> His theory was developed against existing analyses, current historical developments, his spiritual background<sup>16</sup> and experiences from different conflict contexts, notably Colombia<sup>17</sup> and Somalia.<sup>18</sup>

The conceptual foundations of CT theory can be found in Galtung's theory on violence and peacebuilding,<sup>19</sup> Curle's work on transforming relationships,<sup>20</sup> Azar's work on protracted social conflicts,<sup>21</sup> Kelman and Fisher's work on relationship-building, also known as the 'conflict resolution' school<sup>22</sup> and Paulo Freire's work, notably *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.<sup>23</sup> CT theory was also influenced by the debate on intervention sequencing led by the complementary school bridging conflict management and conflict resolution approaches.<sup>24</sup>

Historically, the development of Lederach's theory in the late 1980s and early 1990s was marked by the end of the cold war. A number of long-term armed conflicts, such as those in Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, Cambodia and El Salvador, were settled using the conflict management approach. However, the recurrence of armed conflict in Angola, the emergence of wars in Somalia and Yugoslavia, as well as the genocide in Rwanda quickly demonstrated the limits of externally driven peacebuilding, putting an end to

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<sup>13</sup>John Galtung, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research', *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91; Galtung, 'Three Approaches to Peace'; Adam Curle, *Making Peace* (London: Tavistock, 1971); Rupesinghe, *Conflict Transformation*; Fetherston, 'Peacekeeping, Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding'; and Hugh Miall, 'Conflict Transformation: A Multi-Dimensional Task', in *Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict: The Berghof Handbook*, ed. Alex Austin, Martina Fischer, and Norbert Ropers (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2004), 2–20.

<sup>14</sup>See John Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995); Lederach, *Building Peace*; John Paul Lederach, *The Journey towards Reconciliation* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1999); John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003); and John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); see also his earlier publications in Spanish.

<sup>15</sup>Although the book was only published 1997, it was mainly developed in the late 1980s/early 1990s.

<sup>16</sup>See Lederach's publications on the spirituality of peacebuilding, such as *The Journey towards Reconciliation* and *The Moral Imagination*.

<sup>17</sup>John Paul Lederach, *La Regulación del Conflicto Social* (Akron: Mennonite Central Committee, 1986).

<sup>18</sup>Lederach, *Building Peace*, 102–6.

<sup>19</sup>Galtung, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research'; Galtung, 'Three Approaches to Peace'.

<sup>20</sup>Curle, *Making Peace*.

<sup>21</sup>Edward E. Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict* (New Hampshire: Dartmouth Publishing, 1990).

<sup>22</sup>Kelman, 'Informal Mediation by the Scholar/Practitioner'; Fisher, 'Interactive Conflict Resolution'.

<sup>23</sup>The author would like to thank John Paul Lederach for this addition. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

<sup>24</sup>Ronald J. Fisher and Loreleigh Keashly, 'The Potential Complementarity of Mediation and Consultation with a Contingency Model of Third-Party Intervention', *Journal of Peace Research* 28, no. 1 (1991): 29–42; Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, eds., *Mediation in International Relations: Multiple Approaches to Conflict Management* (London: St Martin's Press, 1992).

earlier optimism. In southern Somalia, all external peacekeeping and conflict management interventions failed to put an end to the violence and bring peace to the country. Concurrently, however, a long process of locally owned, bottom–up consultations led to successful peacebuilding and reconciliation in northern Somaliland. Lederach had been actively involved in these processes.

Overall, Lederach views peacebuilding as a long-term process of systemic transformation from war to peace. Key dimensions of this process are changes in the personal, structural, relational and cultural aspects of conflict, brought about over different time-periods and affecting different system-levels, or ‘tracks’.<sup>25</sup> Lederach’s theory places reconciliation at the heart of developing long-term infrastructures<sup>26</sup> for peacebuilding within societies. For Lederach, reconciliation comes from truth, justice, mercy and peace. Consequently, he stresses the need to rebuild destroyed relationships, focusing on reconciliation within society and strengthening its peacebuilding potential.

Although earlier scholarly work on conflict transformation and resolution referenced reconciliation and peacebuilding, Lederach’s focus on locally owned peacebuilding has been considered ‘significantly different’, representing ‘an important departure and development in the idea of peacebuilding’.<sup>27</sup> Paffenholz<sup>28</sup> identified this shift from international to local actors as the largest contribution of the conflict transformation school. Miall<sup>29</sup> regards the strength of Lederach’s model to be in its broader view of conflict transformation, drawing peacebuilding resources from wider society. In Lederach’s theory, the role of external peacebuilders is limited to supporting internal actors, co-ordinating external peace efforts, engaging in a context-sensitive way, respecting local culture and applying a long-term approach. These notions are further developed in Lederach’s later works on strategic peacebuilding.<sup>30</sup>

A core element of Lederach’s focus on society’s peacebuilding resources is his ‘middle–out’ approach that divides the conflict society into three tracks of actors: (a) Track I – the top leadership; (b) Track II – the middle level leadership; and (c) Track III – the grassroots (see Figure 1). This approach has been widely used in theory and practice.

Although three levels of leadership, or ‘tracks’, are presented in Lederach’s theory, he argues that it is the middle level leadership (Track II) that holds the ‘greatest potential for establishing an infrastructure that can sustain the peacebuilding process over the long term’,<sup>31</sup> in addition to serving as ‘a source of practical, immediate action’, sustaining ‘long-term transformation in the setting’.<sup>32</sup> This is because support to the middle level (Track II) alongside that from the outside is assumed to influence peacebuilding both at the top (Track I) and at the grassroots (Track III) levels.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>25</sup>The track terminology has been used prior to Lederach; see Louise Diamond and John W. McDonald, *Multi-Track Diplomacy: A Systems Approach to Peace* (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1996).

<sup>26</sup>In his later works, Lederach refers to ‘platforms’, rather than an ‘infrastructure’.

<sup>27</sup>Fetherston, ‘Peacekeeping, Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding’, 205.

<sup>28</sup>Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*, 54.

<sup>29</sup>Miall, ‘Conflict Transformation’, 6–7.

<sup>30</sup>Lederach and Appleby, ‘Strategic Peacebuilding: An Overview’.

<sup>31</sup>Lederach, *Building Peace*, 60.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 60–1.

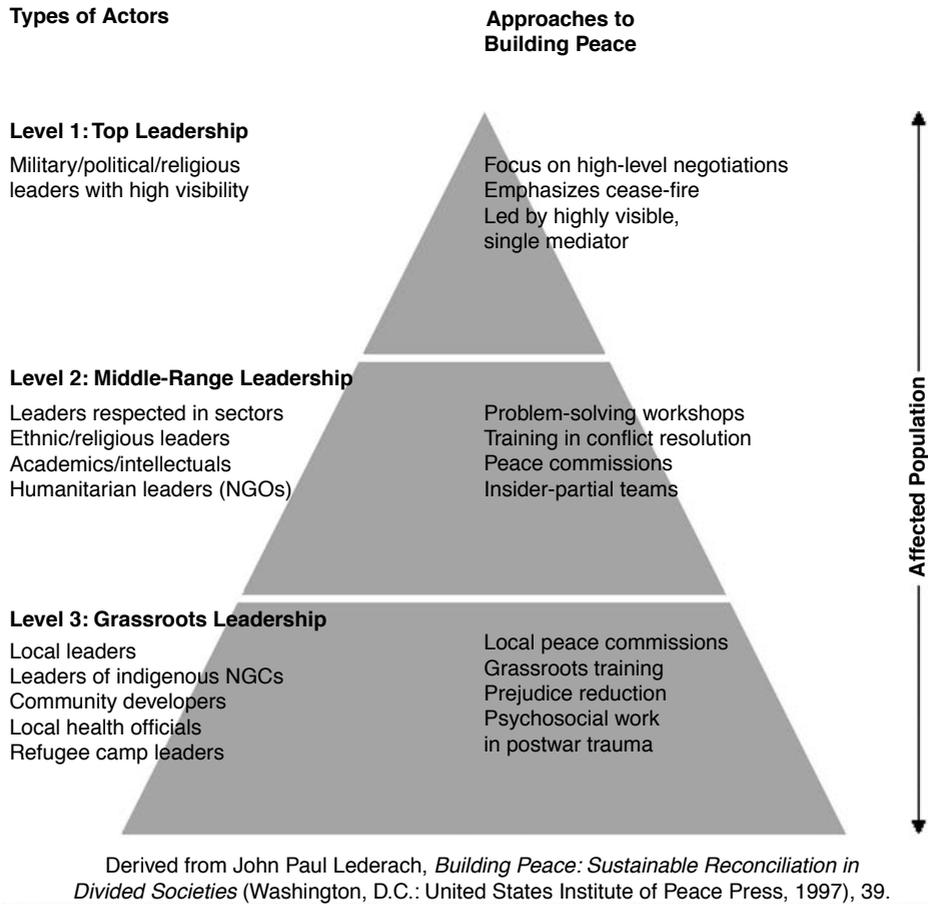


Figure 1. Lederach's Peacebuilding Pyramid.

However, Lederach's theory has not been without its critics. Fetherston<sup>34</sup> points to the lack of power analysis in his approach and Paffenholz<sup>35</sup> problematises the limited role of outsiders and uncritical discussion of 'the local', stressing the need to focus on direct support to Track III actors. Miall<sup>36</sup> further highlights the limited attention given to the political system of the conflict-affected society and the specific regional and international context of peacebuilding. Interestingly, Lederach has (indirectly) criticised his middle-out approach in his later works. In *The Moral Imagination*<sup>37</sup> he replaces the 'middle-out' approach explicitly with a 'web-approach'. The latter both integrates the focus of the

<sup>34</sup>Fetherston, 'Peacekeeping, Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding', 207.

<sup>35</sup>Thania Paffenholz, 'Thirteen Characteristics of Successful Mediation in Mozambique', in *Peacebuilding: A Field Guide*, ed. L. Reyhler and Thania Paffenholz (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 121–7; Paffenholz, *Community-Based Bottom-Up Peacebuilding*; Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*, 53–5.

<sup>36</sup>Miall, 'Conflict Transformation', 7.

<sup>37</sup>Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, ch. 8.

'middle-out' approaches on the Track II level, but includes the importance of Track I and Track III in their own right.

Despite criticism and further development of the theory, Lederach's original theory has emerged as one of the main peacebuilding theories that both integrates other conceptual works<sup>38</sup> as well as exerting a considerable impact on peacebuilding policy and practice. The nature and consequences of this impact are analysed in greater detail in sections four and five.

## Methodology

This section describes the article's general methodological approach, presents a brief summary of the methodologies applied to the two empirical datasets and describes the analytical framework within which this evidence has been evaluated.

### General approach

In order to assess the effects of Lederach's conflict transformation theory on peacebuilding policy practice, two major qualitative datasets were analysed: (a) the Civil Society Peacebuilding Project;<sup>39</sup> and (b) an independent evaluation of the German Civil Peace Service (CPS).<sup>40</sup> These findings were subsequently evaluated against a set of questions, further outlined below.

### Dataset 1

The four year Civil Society Peacebuilding Project (2005–2010) assessed the relevance and effectiveness of civil society in four phases of peacebuilding – war, armed conflict, windows of opportunities for peace and post large-scale violence.<sup>41</sup> A comparative case study approach<sup>42</sup> was adopted, based on a joint analytical framework<sup>43</sup> comprising seven civil society functions (protection, monitoring, advocacy, socialisation, social cohesion, facilitation and service delivery).<sup>44</sup> In each case study, the level of all civil society activities (clustered into high, medium, low) in the seven functions for peacebuilding were

<sup>38</sup>Some representatives of the conflict resolution school may disagree with this statement, as they do not see a large difference between the two schools. See Johannes Botes, 'Conflict Transformation: A Debate over Semantics or a Crucial Shift in the Theory and Practise of Peace and Conflict Studies?', *International Journal of Peace Studies* 8, no. 2 (2003): 1–28. Nevertheless, this argument has not been taken up by the mainstream discourses.

<sup>39</sup>Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*.

<sup>40</sup>German Ministry of Development and Co-operation, 'The German Civil Peace Service'.

<sup>41</sup>See the methodology and results in Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*.

<sup>42</sup>Guatemala, Northern Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Kurdish conflict in Turkey, Tajikistan, Cyprus, Israel/Palestine, Afghanistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Nigeria, and Democratic Republic of the Congo, see: Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*, 79–377.

<sup>43</sup>Thania Paffenholz and Christoph Spurk, *Civil Society, Civic Engagement and Peacebuilding*, Social Development Papers, Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Paper No. 36 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006); Thania Paffenholz and Christoph Spurk, 'A Comprehensive Analytical Framework', in *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Thania Paffenholz (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010), 65–76.

<sup>44</sup>The projects included a review of the literature, hence existing case study evidence has also been considered, built into the framework and referenced separately; newer research is also referenced.

assessed against the peacebuilding needs in the respective context and across all phases of conflict. The effectiveness of civil society activities was assessed against their contribution to four peacebuilding goals: (1) reducing violence; (2) negotiating an agreement; (3) ensuring medium- to long-term sustainability of the peace agreement; and (4) establishing conditions for treating the conflict constructively within society at large. For each of these goals different methodologies were applied to assess effectiveness.<sup>45</sup>

### ***Dataset 2***

The second dataset used stems from an independent evaluation of the German CPS that explicitly employs a conflict transformation-oriented approach following Lederach's theory. The CPS was founded in 1999 as an instrument of the German government to support civil society peacebuilding. At the end of 2009, the CPS had been operational in 50 countries with a budget of €194 million mostly in support of local peacebuilding organisations. The evaluation covered the period from 1999 until 2009/2010, assessing the CPS both in Germany and eight other countries – Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala, Israel/Palestine, Niger, Serbia and Uganda. This article predominantly focuses on the results on effectiveness (three levels of outcomes). A detailed evaluation methodology is given in the methodological report.<sup>46</sup> Overall, the results of the evaluation overwhelmingly confirmed the results of the Civil Society Peacebuilding Project.

### ***Analytical framework***

The results of the above studies have been analysed against the following questions:

- Has the conflict transformation 'theory of change' and its main elements been recognised and applied in policy practice?
- How have local communities been affected, both positively and negatively?
- Are these affects related to Lederach's theoretical assumptions or the particular way in which the theory has been applied?

In order to answer these questions, the core elements and theoretical assumptions of Lederach's CT peacebuilding theory were critically addressed, including:

- (a) the role of *actors* – insider and outsider roles and tracks;

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<sup>45</sup>This was done in an explorative way using existing data from previous case study research; surveys and opinion polls; evaluation studies; content analysis of peace agreements to verify whether themes advocated or discussed by civil society groups or during conflict-resolution workshops had been taken into account; and interviews and surveys conducted especially for the project. For assessing effectiveness across cases, the case study findings for effectiveness of each function were analysed by identifying patterns and respective explanations. The context-specific supporting and hindering factors for effective civil society work were jointly identified by the researchers during a workshop and then analysed systematically across cases.

<sup>46</sup>Methods were: civil society and peacebuilding needs analysis; reconstruction of baselines and theories of change; recall of the past in analysing stakeholders' narratives and perceptions of the interventions; analysis of project reports and other results documents, existing project evaluations; self-evaluation reports of the CPS executing agencies at headquarters and in the eight countries under evaluation; surveys and use of outcome plausibility based on both theory/research evidence as well as a summarised continuation of result chains.

- (b) the *activities* supporting sustainable reconciliation in societies – rebuilding destroyed relationships and supporting infrastructure for peacebuilding;
- (c) their mode of *implementation* – sensitivity to the local culture and a long-term approach.

## Results

### *Role of actors*

One of the principal theories of change (impact assumptions) within CT peacebuilding theory is its focus on local Track II actors. Supporting their peacebuilding potential is believed to trickle up to Track I and down to Track III and, therefore, has the greatest potential to sustain infrastructure for peacebuilding processes.<sup>47</sup>

The case study evidence demonstrates that international peacebuilders now recognise the importance of local actors, leading to the massive support of international and local civil society groups, in particular urban peacebuilding NGOs.<sup>48</sup> The consequences of this support show that some local actors have been supported while most others have been left out. Local Track II actors' contributions to peacebuilding also differ tremendously according to the types of actor, calling for more distinction as to who constitutes the 'local'. Moreover, outsiders have a bigger peacebuilding potential as outlined in Lederach's approach. Furthermore, Track I actors have the biggest change potential and Track III actors are important in their own right. These findings challenge the way Lederach's approach has been understood and implemented by international peacebuilders. These results are presented in more detail below.

### *Local peacebuilders in the driving seat*

All case studies confirm that there is now a general acceptance among international actors of the key role of local actors in peacebuilding, as argued by CT theory. This is also exemplified in numerous donor policy papers that emphasise the importance of local civil society peace initiatives.<sup>49</sup> With increased funding, there has been a tremendous rise in civil society initiatives over the past 20 years. This has enabled many new initiatives and given many local civil society organisations unprecedented opportunities in peacebuilding work.<sup>50</sup>

### *Track II actors (mostly urban elite-based NGOs) receive the bulk of outside support*

When assessing activities and support for different tracks, the case study evidence shows that external funding and capacity-building for civil society has mostly focused on Track II actors, especially urban elite-based NGOs.<sup>51</sup> This is explained in the scholarly literature as

<sup>47</sup>Lederach, *Building Peace*, 60–1.

<sup>48</sup>See figures in footnote 5.

<sup>49</sup>See footnote 4 for references.

<sup>50</sup>See also Pamela R. Aall, 'What Do NGOs Bring to Peacemaking?', in *Turbulent Peace*, ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen O. Hampson, and Pamela R. Aall (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 365–83.

<sup>51</sup>NGOs are only one part of civil society that includes a wider set of actors such as professional associations, faith-based organisations, traditional entities, research institutions, youth clubs, etc.

a result of the ‘monetisation’ of peace work. While peacebuilding used to be mostly voluntary work, the on-going professionalisation of the field requires more funding. As with development co-operation, support from Northern to Southern non-governmental partners tends to go directly to international NGOs and, subsequently, to their national partner organisations. Case study evidence (including and beyond our two datasets) shows that donors tend to support mainly moderate, middle class groups due to their ability to speak, write and work in the donor language and their capacity to provide the required services in a perceived apolitical way.<sup>52</sup>

#### *Overly important role of outsiders*

The role of outsiders in Lederach’s theory is mainly limited to supporting local actors and co-ordinating peacebuilding efforts.<sup>53</sup> Supporting this impact assumption, many case studies from our two datasets demonstrated that the link between local and international actors has tremendously strengthened the impact of local actors. This was particularly true for the functions of protection, monitoring and advocacy. For example, the churches in Guatemala had more impact because they enjoyed the support of their respective international networks for targeted human rights advocacy.

However, there is also strong evidence in the case studies that the role of outsiders is much more dominant than highlighted in the CT theory. Outsiders – and here the evidence from the civil society peacebuilding project especially points to the importance of powerful regional actors – have crucial influence over issues of peace or war. Their action can create enabling or hindering environments for Track II and Track III actors, as demonstrated in the case of Nepal. Here, 2001 citizen mobilisations had little impact on peacebuilding. However, when the government of India put strong political pressure on the Nepali King to engage in direct negotiations with the Maoists and other political parties in 2004, it created a suitable environment for the citizens’ mass mobilisations that paved the way for a comprehensive peace agreement. Without this Track I support from the outside, earlier citizens’ mobilisations failed to achieve such a powerful change.

#### *Negative impact of Track II support: agency for the ‘local’?*

Whether support to Track II has enhanced local people’s agency and brought more quality into peacebuilding is questioned by many authors (including and beyond our

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<sup>52</sup>Michael W. Folley ‘Laying the Groundwork: The Struggle of Civil Society in El Salvador’, *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 38, no. 1 (1996): 67–104; Jenny Pearce, ‘From Civil War to “Civil Society”: Has the End of the Cold War Brought Peace to Central America?’, *International Affairs* 74, no. 3 (1998): 587–615; Ian Patrick, ‘East Timor Emerging from Conflicts: The Role of Local NGOs and International Assistance’, *Disasters* 25, no. 1 (2001): 48–66; Roberto Belloni, ‘Civil Society and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina’ in Paffenholz 2010, 129–152; Roberto Belloni, ‘Civil Society in War-to-Democracy Transitions’, in *War-to-Democracy Transitions: Dilemmas of Democratization and Peace-Building in War-Torn Societies*, ed. Anna Jarstad and Timothy D. Sisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 182–211; Camilla Orjuela, ‘Building Peace in Sri Lanka: A Role for Civil Society?’, *Journal of Peace Research* 40, no. 2 (2003): 195–212; Paffenholz, ‘Thirteen Characteristics’, 8–9; Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*, 428; Christoph Spurk, ‘Understanding Civil Society’, in *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Thania Paffenholz (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010), 3–28.

<sup>53</sup>Lederach, *Building Peace*; Lederach and Appleby, ‘Strategic Peacebuilding’.

datasets).<sup>54</sup> The main critique comes with respect to urban NGOs. In particular, the findings point to: (a) the crowding out of local efforts and actors; (b) the weak membership base of these NGOs; and (c) the lack of transparency and accountability vis-à-vis local constituencies. This leads the critics to the conclusion that donor-driven NGO civil society initiatives have limited the capacity to create domestic social capital and ownership of the peace process. The fact that urban NGOs have often been supported at the expense of other civil society actors further supports this argument.

*Distinctiveness and differentiation needed: impact of different Track II and III actors*

Looking at the broad range of Track II and Track III civil society actors (including NGOs), case study evidence points to the fact that traditional mass-based organisations, despite a patchy record to date, have a far greater potential to promote socialisation and social cohesion than NGOs. This is because non-membership-based NGOs rarely have the power to socialise people due to their weak membership base and insufficient social legitimacy. Looking at mass-based organisations, such as religious groups (e.g. the Orange Order in Northern Ireland, the Buddhist Monks in Sri Lanka or the Catholic Church in Uganda), all these entities influence their members almost from birth to death; in families, schools and parishes, temples or associations. Whether they work against or in favour of social cohesion with other groups, this overwhelmingly affects the entity of their membership. Despite the weakness of urban non-membership-based NGOs in promoting social cohesion, they are nevertheless very strong in other functions, such as providing protection and conducting targeted advocacy campaigns. Traditional and local entities are effective in facilitation and have shown positive results when providing protection; furthermore, eminent civil society leaders can be very effective in preparing the ground for national negotiations, in addition to helping parties break stalemate in negotiations. Women's groups performed well in all case studies in their support of gender, women's and minority issues, and are often very effective in bridging existing divides. Women's groups in Nepal, Guatemala and Sri Lanka, for example, have promoted gender issues, women rights and minority rights for indigenous groups or lower castes. The findings clearly show that broader change requires the uniting of all available change-orientated mass movements. Aid organisations, if they are aware of their peacebuilding potential and make systematic use of it, can also effectively support protection, monitoring and social cohesion.<sup>55</sup> Yet, interestingly, most donor support for these functions goes to NGOs.

<sup>54</sup>See also Folley, 'Laying the Groundwork'; Pearce, 'From Civil War to "Civil Society"'; Patrick, 'East Timor Emerging from Conflicts'; Belloni, 'Civil Society and Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina'; Belloni, 'Civil Society in War-to-Democracy Transitions', 21; Tobias Debiel and Monika Sticht, *Towards a New Profile? Development, Humanitarian and Conflict-Resolution NGOs in the Age of Globalization*, Report No. 79 (Duisburg: Institute for Development and Peace, 2005), 16–17; Béatrice Pouligny, 'Civil Society and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Ambiguities of International Programmes Aimed at Building "New" Societies', *Security Dialogue* 36, no. 4 (2005): 495–510, quote at p. 499; Paffenholz and Spurr, 'A Comprehensive Analytical Framework', 25–6; Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*, 58–61 and 425–30.

<sup>55</sup>Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*, 429–30.

*'Uncivil' society*

It is important to note that civil society is not always the 'good society' in support of peace<sup>56</sup> but, rather, reflects the society as a whole, acting as a mirror. Its composition and the existing power relations and hierarchies therefore help determine its impact, as well as the particular effect it will have on the peace process.<sup>57</sup> Cases such as the Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka or the Orange Order in Northern Ireland, both of whom launched massive anti-peace negotiation campaigns, demonstrate the power of these actors. Nevertheless, outside support to CT goes primarily to like-minded NGOs, ignoring the counteracting forces in civil society that have the power to make or break the peace process. Indeed, only a few organisations work with 'hardliners' such as the settler movement in Israel.

*Lederach's middle-out approach challenged or misinterpreted?*

A core element of Lederach's original conflict transformation theory is the middle-out approach. It stipulates a high impact potential of Track II actors due to their ability to automatically trickle up to Track I and down to Track III. Results obtained from the case studies do not confirm such a clear correlation.

In almost all case studies, Track I actors (i.e. the conflict parties, political parties and powerful regional actors) have had the biggest impact on peacebuilding. Their action can enable or hinder Track II activities, showing a clear trickle-down effect from Track I to Track II. For example, in Turkey, the state's perspective on peace has set the stage for continuing violence over Kurdish rights. The Turkish state considers security and territorial integrity non-negotiable and sees military victory as the path to peace. Its refusal to recognise Kurdish demands therefore contributed to the support among the Kurdish population for the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)'s violent acts. The general dependency of Track II on Track I is also exemplified in the numerous peace processes between Israel and Palestine since the Oslo Accords. Here, whenever a Track I process failed, Track II activities (mainly with regards to dialogue initiatives) stalled as well. The same has also been true the other way around; whenever Track I dialogue restarted in a more promising way, the Track II dialogue initiatives were also (re-)launched.

At the same time, case study evidence found that Track III activities had impact on their local contexts even without a trickle-down effect from Track II. Instead, Track III activities can have an impact on local peacebuilding efforts without having been supported by Track II. For instance, local protection and facilitation initiatives were often very effective in saving lives. In Afghanistan during the Taliban rule, for example, traditional mediation was the only resource for facilitating between the Taliban and the various Afghan communities.<sup>58</sup>

These findings challenge the main theory of change underpinning the middle-out approach. A narrow reading of Lederach's description of the approach in the original text of his book *Building Peace* allows for such an analysis, as the arrows in the pyramid are

<sup>56</sup>Under the label of 'uncivil' society many authors discuss that civil society actors do not necessarily support peacebuilding, see Spurk, 'Understanding Civil Society', 18–19, for an overview.

<sup>57</sup>Thania Paffenholz et al., 'Enabling and Disabling Factors for Civil Society Peacebuilding', in *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Thania Paffenholz (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010), 405–24, quote at pp. 414–20.

<sup>58</sup>See also the in-depth case of the application of Lederach's approach by the Life and Peace Institute with similar findings in Paffenholz, *Community-Based Bottom-Up Peacebuilding*.

clearly directed from the middle to Tracks I and III, and do not allow space for alternative positionings of the arrows, for example from Track I to Track II, or directly from Track I to Track III without any linkage to Track II. Analysing Lederach's works over the past two decades, his further development of the approach in *The Moral Imagination*<sup>59</sup> it is possible to take a wider perspective and view Lederach's middle-out approach as advocacy for Track II in a historical period of overwhelming focus on outsider-driven, Track I peacebuilding. Evidence from the two case study datasets suggests, however, that most implementing NGOs interpreted Lederach's approach in the narrow way ignoring further developments with the 'web' approach.

### *Supported activities and their impact*

CT highlights the importance of supporting activities that are specifically geared towards reconciliation in the society at large.<sup>60</sup> Lederach mentions problem-solving workshops and training efforts<sup>61</sup> as examples for transforming a war into a peace system, characterised by just and interdependent relationships of the involved local actors. Evidence across all case studies shows an extremely high level of implementation of activities related to the functions of socialisation and social cohesion in peacebuilding practice, such as dialogue projects, conflict resolution and transformation trainings and peace education independently of the context and phase of peacebuilding. The following general conclusions with regards to supported activities and their impact have been reached.

#### *Mixed impact of socialisation and social cohesion work*

Overall, socialisation and social cohesion activities scored relatively low on effectiveness in most phases of the peace process, particularly during war and armed conflict. Two general explanatory factors can be identified: first, the difficult context in which these initiatives operate in and; second, deficiencies in the way initiatives are implemented.

Regarding contextual challenges, high levels of violence were found to reduce the effectiveness of initiatives across cases. Moreover, many strong institutions of socialisation exist in divided societies, including families, schools, professional associations, military groups, workplace groups and religious organisations. When these institutions preach hatred and formulate enemy figures over long periods (usually generations), the existence of a few social cohesion initiatives fails to compensate for and effectively counterbalance such negative messages and the resulting segregated lives. In Northern Ireland, for example, the two communities may live in different parts of town, send their children to different schools and follow associations that preach segregation and spread images of the enemy. The same holds true for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus and Israel and Palestine.

Regarding strategies of implementation, initiatives tend to be top-down, implemented outside of strong socialisation institutions and conducted by actors that do not possess the power to socialise people, such as Western NGOs and their partners. The limited impact of social cohesion initiatives is also criticised on political grounds. In Northern Ireland,

<sup>59</sup>Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 79.

<sup>60</sup>This focus is also continued in Lederach's later works, see, for example, *Journey towards Reconciliation*.

<sup>61</sup>Lederach, *Building Peace*, 107–27.

critics of community-relations initiatives argue that naming the problem ‘bad community relations’ fails to take into account economic deprivation and other grievances experienced by marginalised communities.

Nevertheless, social cohesion activities have proved to have more positive effects in the phases after large-scale violence has ended, especially when they are work- rather than reconciliation-focused and contribute significantly to the strengthening of marginalised groups. For example, in Bosnia-Herzegovina any project labelled with ‘bridging’ experienced resistance from local communities. Therefore, initiatives have since changed their labels and tried to bring people together for reasons other than reconciliation and dialogue. Interestingly, these initiatives showed better results – people expressed positive experiences working with other groups, often producing concrete outcomes and common work initiatives. Although years of dialogue projects in the Israel–Palestine case did not produce the intended impact, they nonetheless contributed to the building of Palestinian human capital. Likewise, in Guatemala, a generation of indigenous leaders has been empowered through various socialisation initiatives.

### *Mode of implementation*

The way in which CT peacebuilding initiatives are implemented is an important aspect of Lederach’s theory. Lederach sees peacebuilding as a process of social change<sup>62</sup> that requires a visionary and context specific approach. Peacebuilding should therefore be sensitive to the local culture and adopt a long-term approach.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, establishing mechanisms for responsibility and accountability on the ground are considered as important as the funds themselves.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, inclusive implementation, building on local resources, is crucial for a CT peacebuilding approach. Yet, analysing the evidence presented by the case studies, the practice of peacebuilding has failed to be context sensitive, oriented towards the long term, inclusive or accountable to local constituencies.

### *Support to civil society is not context sensitive*

Many of the aforementioned examples demonstrate that context is not the starting point of outside support as claimed in the policy discourse. Instead, a predefined set of activities, such as dialogue, training and other reconciliation-oriented activities, have been implemented regardless of their relevance in the context and phase of peacebuilding in question. This shows that some elements of Lederach’s theory, such as his main theory of change with regards to the importance of Track II actors, have been taken for granted without recognising the other elements of his theory, namely context sensitivity and local ownership. Dataset 2 from the evaluation of the German Civil Peace Service confirms this observation. The evaluation teams in all case studies found that there was ‘automatic’ support of social cohesion and socialisation projects with local partners, regardless of whether these partners had been simultaneously implementing very relevant advocacy or monitoring activities. The same evaluation also showed that there has been a systematic lack of linkage between conflict analysis and project implementation. Overall, regardless

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<sup>62</sup>Lederach, *Building Peace*, 84.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 85; Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*; Lederach and Appleby, ‘Strategic Peacebuilding’.

<sup>64</sup>Lederach, *Building Peace*, 97.

of how the context was analysed, the main activities conducted were overwhelmingly socialisation and social cohesion, even in cases when local partners demanded other activities to be supported.

### *Timeframe of interventions*

With regards to the long-term approach of CT peacebuilding, echoed in many policy documents, case study evidence suggested that the way most initiatives were planned was not creating sufficient preconditions for achieving impact in the long term. Indeed, the overall lack of long-term impact for most social cohesion initiatives could be largely attributed to the scattered, short-term and fragmented nature of most initiatives. The examples presented above further highlight this tendency.

### **Conclusions**

Giving agency to local actors has become a widely agreed principle in peacebuilding research and practice. John Paul Lederach's transformative peacebuilding theory developed in the early 1990s has had a substantial influence on this major paradigm shift in peacebuilding from the 'international' to the 'local'. His thinking has also influenced a whole generation of peacebuilding practitioners.

Revisiting 20 years of practitioners' work demonstrates a very ambivalent encounter between theory and practice. Though practitioner organisations largely claim to operationalise Lederach's theory in their discourse, the findings presented here show very narrow and inflexible interpretations that have granted the middle-out approach the status of an unquestioned mantra in civil society peacebuilding. Its relevance in differing contexts has been largely untested, thereby greatly ignoring other central elements of Lederach's original theory, its further development, his critiques as well as other developments in research.

The impact of this narrow application on peacebuilding is at best mixed, as international support to the 'local' has largely failed to produce the envisaged peacebuilding outcomes. The analysis presented here identifies three main reasons: (1) the particular understanding of the 'local' by international actors; (2) narrow support strategies, ignoring the broader international, regional and local peacebuilding arena and the power relations therein; and (3) the mantra status of the middle-out approach as an almost unquestioned *theory of change* in civil society peacebuilding.

The first problematic feature is the 'romanticisation' of the 'local' as a homogenous and necessarily good entity.<sup>65</sup> There has also been a tendency to support the change potential of the 'good local'. Actors that do not fit this model, such as Islamic charities in Somalia or Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka, have been placed largely outside of civil society support and are seen as 'spoilors'.<sup>66</sup> Instead, outside support continues to be largely directed to moderate, like-minded, urban, non-membership, elite-based peacebuilding NGOs at the expense of other civil society actors. This ignores existing power relations and hence the local actors that might be more powerful to influence wider social change.

<sup>65</sup>Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace*.

<sup>66</sup>Desirée Nilsson and Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, 'Revisiting an Elusive Concept: A Review of the Debate on Spoilers in Peace Processes', *International Studies Review* 13, no. 4 (2011): 606–26.

Second, and related, civil society support strategies are seen mostly as a technical undertaking<sup>67</sup> in capacity building, disconnected from donor politics and NGOs' advocacy work. This has been reflected not only in the choice of partners but also supported activities. As a result, support goes primarily to apolitical NGOs in support of a limited set of activities mainly centred around socialisation and social cohesion, such as peace education, conflict resolution training or dialogue projects. Moreover, civil society support strategies are mostly ignored and excluded from comprehensive regional or country-wide peacebuilding strategies.

Third, the analysis found that the mantra status that had been given to Lederach's middle-out approach by practitioner organisation turned the underlying impact assumption into an unquestioned theory of change. This is highly problematic for peacebuilding in practice as the validity of the theory has hardly been questioned with problematic implications for local communities and peacebuilding impact. Above all, little empirical evidence supports the theory of change that lies at the heart of his middle-out approach: it is not Track II actors that have shown the biggest transformative potential of violent conflicts; rather, Track I actors – both from within and outside of the conflict-affected countries – were found to be the most influential in supporting war and peace. Numerous cases also demonstrated the dependency of Track II activities on Track I developments. Additionally, Track III has been found to have a substantial impact on local peacebuilding independent of Track II developments.

In consequence, these findings call for different support strategies in civil society peacebuilding that also include the importance of local and outside Track I actors. However, in no way do these findings suggest that Track II actions have had no impact on peacebuilding, nor that they are irrelevant; on the contrary, the findings show that Track II actors are also important players in peacebuilding. However, both the regional and local contexts in which they operate in are of extreme relevance and the way certain civil society actors are prioritised over others is problematic.

What then are the consequences for policy practice and theory? Above all, policy practitioners should start to practise what they preach. As suggested by Lederach 20 years ago, international peacebuilders should take the local context as a starting point of long-term engagement. In addition, they need to address openly and accept the political nature of peacebuilding with all its complexities. Indeed, support to civil society is inevitably a political endeavour and one that should be part of a comprehensive strategy. Civil society can no longer be seen as a homogenous local 'do gooder'. Rather, its diversity and conflicting roles that help to generate its potential for peacebuilding should be taken seriously by external actors, as well as the change potential of different actors in different phases of peacebuilding.

The recent development of a more strategic approach to peacebuilding,<sup>68</sup> as well as current debates within critical peacebuilding scholarship on assessing local-international peacebuilding encounters and bringing the political back into peacebuilding, present a welcomed step towards broadening theoretical understandings of peacebuilding. However, there remains a need to further the dialogue between the different research strands, as well as between peacebuilding research and policy practice. While the current

<sup>67</sup>See also Tobias Hagman and Laurent Goetschel, 'Civilian Peacebuilding: Peace By Bureaucratic Means?', *Conflict, Security & Development* 9, no. 1 (2009): 55–73.

<sup>68</sup>Lederach and Appleby, 'Strategic Peacebuilding'.

debates within critical peacebuilding scholarship contribute to a better understanding of peacebuilding realities on the ground by confronting discourse and practice, they should not become part of a self-referential system. Rather, more critical scholarly engagement with the real world is needed in light of challenging theory–practice encounters. After all, peace research has always held the goal of being policy relevant and acting as a bridge between different academic worlds.<sup>69</sup> It is time to revive this tradition and move towards responsible peacebuilding scholarship.

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<sup>69</sup>Herman Schmid, 'Peace Research and Politics', *Journal of Peace Research* 5, no. 3 (1968): 217–32; Matti Jutila, Samu Pehkonen, and Tarja Väyrynen, 'Resuscitating a Discipline: An Agenda for Critical Peace Research', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 36, no. 3 (2008): 623–40.