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The Concept of Peace Region as Alternative to (Traditional) Political Autonomy: Experiences from the Project Building the Peace Region Alps-Adriatic

The point of departure are experiences from a dialogue project aimed to contribute to the development of a Peace Region Alps-Adriatic (PRAA) by attempts to reveal and overcome the deep-rooted historic conflict lines between the various minority and majority populations in that specific geographical area. Such a concept of peace region can prove a strategy for the inclusion and integration of national minorities. It can reduce secessionist tendencies by establishing a framework which serves as an alternative to (traditional forms of) autonomy. The task of such a framework of a peace region is to enable the coexistence of autonomous or alternative (historical) narratives to the dominant (nation-based) mainstream narrative(s). By doing so, the concept of peace region can also act as a basis for the realization of further economic and political cross-border cooperation.

Key words: autonomy, dialogue, inclusion, integration, minorities, peace region, Alps-Adriatic.

Koncept mirovne regije kot alternativa (tradicionalni) politični avtonomiji: izkušnje projekta oblikovanja Mirovne regije Alpe Jadran

Izhodišče so izkušnje dialoškega projektao razvoju mirovne regije Alpe-Jadran. Odkriva in poskuša presegati globoko zakoreninjene razlike, delitve, različne interpretacije in konflikte med večinskimi in manjšinskimi populacijami v tej regiji. Takšen koncept mirovne regije predstavlja strategijo za vključevanje in integracijo narodnih manjšin ter strategijo proti secesionističnim tendencam. Pri tem presega tradicionalne oblike pravno utemeljene avtonomije z vzpostavitvijo družbenega okvira, ki predstavlja možno alternativo tradicionalnim oblikam avtonomije. V tem okviru mirovna regija omogoča sobivanje avtonomnih in/ali alternativnih (zgodovinskih) naracij, ki so drugačne od prevladujočih naracij, utemeljenih na narodu oz. naciji. Na ta način koncept mirovne regije predstavlja tudi temelj za uresničevanje in razvoj prihodnjega ekonomskega in političnega čezmejnega sodelovanja.

Ključne besede: *avtonomija, dialog, vključevanje, integracija, manjšine, mirovna regija, Alpe-Jadran.*

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1. Introduction: The Text's Context[1]

A hundred years after the end of World War I and nearly eighty years after the outbreak of World War II, we face a situation in which the project of European integration is questioned in its fundaments. For the first time, we are confronted with the factum that a country is about to leave the EU; which is even worse regarding the fact that the imminent Brexit could still take place in the form of a hard exit – with unpredictable consequences for both sides.

Such developments are – not only but – not least due to the ideological exploitation of the so-called migration crisis of 2015 by populist and most often right wing (oriented) parties across Europe. This has led to a revitalization of old European ideologems, such as xenophobia and islamophobia or antisemitism as well as romaphobia.

Interestingly, after the end of World War I, it was also the migration flows, which led to a radicalisation and finally also escalation of the political situation in Europe. Until now, the beginning of the 21th century, we are still confronted with the cultural heritage of that time. However, so far mainstream politics and public opinion tacitly have shared the assumption that resentments and prejudices, rooted in past conflicts, will gradually disappear. At first sight, this may sound plausible. However, the experience from the Yugoslav Wars shows that simply waiting that the tensions, still present on and under the surface, disappear cannot be sufficient. The change of specific variables of the political system often lead to a breakup of (intra-)national conflicts; especially in the case of collapsing dictatorial systems. Even years after the end of the Yugoslav Wars and the establishment of democratic systems, we can still observe the eruption of unresolved historic conflict lines; e.g. protests against Cyrillic writing on signs in Vukovar, at the Croatian border with Serbia in 2013. As is known, in Austria a similar issue, the so-called Carinthian signpost-dispute, took about 56 years to be settled; without ongoing border issues, as still being the case between the countries of former Yugoslavia. Even after the settlement of the signpost dispute, there are many examples of the younger history in Carinthia which showed how easily such deep-rooted conflicts can escalate, if not properly addressed by a transformation on the level of (collective) attitudes: f.e. the publication of the so-called historian's report Titos langer Schatten (Elste & Wadl 2015) in 2015 (about terrorist activities in Carinthia in the 1970s), the discussion about the appointment of headteachers in Carinthia's bilingual regions in 2016, or the revision of the Carinthian state constitution in 2017. This is to say that even though in countries like Austria, which are usually regarded as peaceful and politically stable, violent attitudes regarding historic conflict lines are still present.

Although the emergence of new minorities partly overlays old conflict lines between old (autochthonous) minorities and majority populations (not least in the sense of the creation of new enemies), this does not mean that old conflict lines have been vanished.

The currently discussed independence endeavours of Catalonia are just another example for deep-rooted historic conflict lines, which easily emerge; at least if they get properly triggered by media or politics. Of course, there are also other issues , such as economic ones, which play a crucial role in Catalonia and elsewhere. However, to utterly grasp the intensity of this current conflict formation we have to adequately take into account its historical aspects. In this sense, nobody knows what the consequences of the Brexit, especially regarding the deep-rooted conflict between Ireland and Northern Ireland, will be; albeit in weakened form the same is true for Scotland. It is rather unlikely that questions about how to deal with the Irish border are not going to be mixed up with historical issues. The same applies to the Brexit-phenomenon as a whole. It would not meet the complexity of the Brexit if we did not also take into account the fact that it never really worked out to merge Great Britain with continental Europe in an ideological sense. From a continental European point of view someone could say that Britain, due to its identity as empire, never could fully become (just a) part of the European Union. That would have needed an intensive process of work at the level of collective attitudes on both sides of the English Channel – of course on equal terms.

That is why there is a vital need for new, respectively alternative strategies to cope with such deep-rooted conflicts by transforming the people's collective attitudes – in order to enable constructive ways of dealing with conflicts instead of entrenching oneself in historically ideological positions. A carefully managed, open and inclusive dialogue about the diverse experiences and interpretations of past conflicts can provide the right setting and tools to collectively make sense of the past and its recent effects – beyond exclusivist, nation-based narratives.

Crucial in this context are activities of cross-border cooperation, as Europe's borders are the tangible heritage of its wars and (armed) conflicts of the 20th century as well as older ones. We must not forget that boundaries have been administered by the political caste of the victorious powers; quasi arbitrary without paying (adequately) attention to cultural issues. The emergence of national (autochthonous) minorities has been one of the logical outcome of those new borders; as well as conflicts alongside the new internal ethnical conflict lines.

Already at the beginning of the new millennium, approximately 105 million people, or 14 per cent of the total population of the European continent, belonged to ethnic minorities (see Pan & Pfeil 2002). Past and current migration flows further add to the diversity of Europe. A united and cohesive Europe depends on the recognition of the social, cultural and ethnic diversity of its members, and an inclusive, sustainable management of its cultural heritage of wars. Thus, managing diversity and interethnic relations, as well as dealing with ethnic conflicts have increasingly become important tasks in Europe. The current situation of Europe in general and the European Union in specific can definitely be regarded as a consequence of not having adequately taken into account these tasks.

This paper argues that the endeavour of realizing the vision of Europe as a continent of peace would benefit greatly from continued strengthening of European cross-border cooperation by dialogical initiatives. In this regard, the establishment of transnational regions of peace seem to offer an appropriate means to come to terms with the past and to create conditions for the coexistence, participation and cooperation of all individuals and communities – thus promoting and developing a culture of peace.

2. Point of Departure: The Concept of Peace Region

In order to define the term peace region one could refer to the concept of zones of peace. Although zones of peace often refer to safe zones for the protection of civilians within an armed conflict, it has a multiplicity of uses and definitions:

> Many of these zones of peace have aimed to achieve more than just 'withdrawal' or 'mitigation' of existing conflicts. Some of the more intensive efforts /.../ attempted to create social change, social justice, or social development and to expand the principles of positive peace (Hancock 2010, 496).

Going in the same direction, peace region in this context is understood as the institutionalization of diversity and the successful (cross-border) implementation of strategies for diversity management. The concept of managing diversity is not just about prevention, early warning, management and settlement of present or potential conflicts, but it tries, with the development of human and institutional potentials and resources, to establish an environment which reduces the probability of escalation of conflicts and in the long run stimulates a cooperation with individuals as well as with different communities.

One of the main challenges we face today in creating a region of peace through recognizing and appreciating diversity is to deconstruct the myth of ethnic homogeneity of nation-states, which is still of relevance; not least for the Alps-Adriatic region. The intended outcome of such an endeavour is that existing (ethnic) diversity is perceived as a value that "offers numerous possibilities /.../ which might also constitute comparative advantages of such an environment" (Žagar 2008, 311).

This refers to the need to address the cultural conditions of a peace region by changing the predominant attitude from a culture of war to a culture of peace. The concept of Culture of Peace was developed in the 1980s and 1990s within the context of peace movements. Later it was adopted by the UNESCO as addressing one of the guiding principles of the UNESCO Constitution: "That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" (UNESCO Constitution 1945). As stated by Elise Boulding, a peace culture is "a culture that promotes peaceable diversity", including "lifeways, patterns of belief, values, behavior" in order to conclude that

"peaceableness is an action concept, involving a constant shaping and reshaping of understandings, situations, and behaviors in a constantly changing lifeworld, to sustain well-being for all" (Boulding 2000, 1). In this sense, the concept of Culture of Peace refers also to a technique for detecting and analysing implicitly violent patterns of culture, often referred to as cultural (Galtung 1990), symbolic (Saner 1982; Bourdieu 2005) or epistemic (Brunner 2016) violence. However, there is quite a big difference between such concepts as cultural or epistemic violence; and, there are of course also additional aspects of violence to be addressed in the course of building a region of peace, such as structural or systemic violence, referring not least to political and economic dimensions, such as oppression and exploitation (Brousek 2017, 134–186).

In the Alps-Adriatic region, the slogan of a peace region has gained certain attention during the past decades. First propagated by the peace movements of the respective countries, the idea was quickly linked to the co-operation between the provinces, regions and *Länder*, started in a formal way in 1978, with the founding of the then so-called Alps-Adriatic Working Community (now: Alps-Adriatic Alliance).

However, this paper focuses on more recent experiences on the development of such a Peace Region Alps-Adriatic, made in the course of a dialogue project that aimed to contribute to such a region of peace, by attempts to reveal and overcome the deep-rooted historic conflict lines between the various minority and majority populations in that specific geographical region.

The project, started in 2013, was originally named Building the Peace Region Alps-Adriatic (PRAA) – Envisioning the Future by Dealing with the Past. Promoting Open and Inclusive Dialogue and Public Discourse within Austria and Slovenia and between the Countries".[2] Of course, PRAA focused on a cold conflict which nevertheless has the potential of coming back in some form. The current status as a cold conflict makes it relatively easier to talk about traumata, to speak openly to adversaries on both sides of the border. Furthermore, it gives the chance to work on the still contradicting narratives of the different societal groups. On the other hand, some tasks are more challenging to address, since it may seem less obvious why the past should be dealt with now, in order to bring a better future. It is more difficult to understand that the work for a culture of peace is still necessary; and especially, that there are still some open and many hidden conflicts in the Alps-Adriatic region going on that have to be addressed (see Brousek & Pirker 2016; Graf & Brousek 2014, 2015; Graf et al. 2014).

3. The Focus: The Alps-Adriatic Region as a Microcosm of Europe

In defining the AA-region, one could look to the members of the aforementioned Alps-Adriatic Alliance or back then also called ARGE Alpen Adria. The

Alps-Adriatic Alliance has facilitated more than 600 projects since its establishment in 1978. These projects have not only addressed economic and political but also social, cultural and ethnic as well as pedagogic issues. The founding members were Slovenia and Croatia as well as provinces from Italy, Austria and Germany: Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto, Carinthia, Styria, Salzburg, Upper Austria and Bavaria (see Wohlmuther et al. 2014, 324). Over time, the membership of ARGE Alpen Adria, respectively the Alps-Adriatic Alliance has changed significantly: Firstly, the Italian and German provinces Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto and Bavaria left the ARGE; secondly within Austria, Burgenland joined instead of Salzburg and Upper Austria, and Croatia is not any more member as a state, but in the form of seven – mostly northern – provinces, and finally the Hungarian province of Vas, located at the border with Slovenia and Austria, joined the Alps-Adriatic Alliance (2018).

Those changes within the Alps-Adriatic Alliance make it difficult to define the exact geographical dimensions of the Alps-Adriatic region. Referring to former and current members of the Alps-Adriatic Alliance, the Alps-Adriatic region extends from Croatia in the south, Austria as well as Slovenia and even parts of Hungary in the east, to parts of Italy and Austria in the west and Germany as well as Austria in the north.

In this sense, we could almost talk about an Alpine-Adriatic-Pannonian region. According to the editors of Treatises and Documents, The Journal of Ethnic Studies, an Alpine-Adriatic-Pannonian area comprises "the Alpine arc, the hinterland of the eastern Adriatic and Pannonian Basin". The editors further specify that "this area includes the following countries: Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Italy, Germany (especially the southern part), Hungary, Kosovo, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia" (Guidelines for Contributors 2018).

However, it would be nearly impossible, respectively not reasonable to address the various current and historic conflict lines between the several minority and majority groups of such a huge macro-region within one project. Further on, from a geographical point of view, it still remains unclear why to define the Alps-Adriatic-(Pannonian)-region in such a dimension. If Alps-Adriatic region means all the countries touching the Alps or the Adriatic Sea, it is not justifiable why not to include Switzerland and France or Monaco and Liechtenstein. On the other hand, it is not obvious why the Czech Republic should be included in the framework of an Alps-Adriatic-Pannonian-region, as it is neither located at the Adriatic-Sea nor part of the Alpine states and not even part of the Pannonian Basin. If we talk only about the Alps-Adriatic (and not Pannonian) area the same would be true for Hungary. We see that the definition of such areas is usually not only dependent on geographical but also – or even more – on historical aspects. In this sense, it is obvious that all these given definitions make only sense by taking into account that most of them have been part of multi-ethnic states, like the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Otherwise, talking about the Alps-Adriatic region in a strict sense, such a region would only comprise Italy and Slovenia, the only Alpine states with access to the Adriatic Sea. However, still in its smallest definition, the "core" of the Alps-Adriatic region "is located in the so-called 'three-country corner', which spreads to cover distances of 20–50 km from the point at which – since 1918 – the countries of Austria, Italy and Slovenia /.../ have converged" (Wohlmuther et al. 2014, 321–322; cf. Moritsch 2001, 13–16; Moritsch 2006, 12). Such a definition makes sense when we regard the historical and political characteristics of that region. Defining such areas beyond borders of nation states, we are always confronted with a mixture of geographical and historical aspects; what makes the situation quite complicated considering the fact that the countries, we are talking about, are historically quite complex and linked to each other. On the other hand, the existing and historically tangible manifoldness of cross-border transactions on different levels is at the same time a precondition for the successful establishment of regions (cf. Deutsch 1972, 102–105).

In order to relate the Alps-Adriatic region to other – geographically more or less precisely defined – regions, we could describe it as the specific and historical region at the crossroads of three European macro-regions: the Danube region, the Alpine region and the Adriatic-Ionian region. This would mainly comprise Austria and Slovenia as well as parts of Croatia and Italy – i.e. the Italian northern region Friuli Venezia Giulia, the Austrian Länder Carinthia and Styria, as well as Slovenia and Croatian Istria. The point that makes this region somehow special, and a role model for other regions at the same time, is its involvement in almost all of Europe's wars and totalitarian regimes in the 20th century, the presence of all three major linguistic groups in Europe, and still lingering ethno-political tensions. In this sense, the region can be regarded as a microcosm of Europe (cf. Lowe 2014, 249–265).

From a historical point of view, World War I had major impacts on that region. It led to the breakdown of the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire and therefore to the independence of many peoples. In the Alps-Adriatic and the Balkan region, a new state – the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later renamed Yugoslavia – emerged, while Italy extended its territory to the North and the East, including German and Slavic language speaking regions. Minority issues and struggles for minority rights were the logical consequence. During the Second World War, Yugoslavia was attacked and occupied by the Nazi and Fascist regimes in 1941 and Slovenia was divided among Italy, Hungary and the former German Reich. Especially in Italy, present-day Austria and Hungary, this quartering of the Slovene people raised political, cultural, and economic questions that still resonate in Slovenia and the broader region, particularly in the neighbouring countries inhabited by Slovene minorities (see Kardelj 1951). After World War II, new frontiers were established between the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (respectively today's Slovenia) and Italy which led to new tensions, both between the respective governments and in the Alps-Adriatic

region as a whole. The Cold War also had a strong impact on the region, with NATO state Italy, neutral but western-oriented Austria, and non-aligned but communist Yugoslavia. The historically regional conflicts were overlapped by the ideological confrontation between the Eastern and the Western block and the Grey Zone, with non-aligned Yugoslavia in between. Although the geopolitical situation has changed considerably since the end of the Cold War, we are still confronted with the consequences of the First and the Second World War, as well as the Yugoslav War: the emergence of a multiplicity of new nation-states and – as a consequence – the presence of multiple minority groups on the new states' territories. From the German- and Ladin-speakers of South Tyrol (Italy), to the Slovene minority in Carinthia and Styria (Austria) and Italy, as well as the Italian minorities in Slovenia and Croatia, large numbers of peoples not sharing the national language or culture live in the territory of the Alps-Adriatic region. From such a point of view, it becomes evident why borders are often perceived as gaping wounds, or at least as "scars of history", as Robert Schuman refers to them (AEBR 2011, 3). Therefore, cross-border cooperation represents an important means to heal these wounds or scars of history. In this context, the aim of such a therapy is to transform the meaning of borders from barriers or exclusive symbols of identity to resources, especially in the sense of bridges (cf. O'Dowd 2002). If borders are regarded as bridges, they can even become important resources for building a region of peace and cooperation.

Today, all countries of the narrower Alps-Adriatic region are members of the European Union, and many of them are even linked by formal cross-bor-der cooperation structures such as the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC 2018) with state borders losing some of their dividing functions. This may facilitate attempts to overcome exclusivist and nation-based interpretations of past conflicts. However, the case-by-case eruption of cold conflicts show that putting the focus on or even reducing legal questions is not sufficient enough to deal with the multitude of conflicting experiences, interpretations, and memories of past conflicts.

4. The Problem: Contradicting Heritage, Memory and Narratives

The past and particularly historical events in the context of wars and armed conflicts are often remembered in completely different ways by different groups. That means, we are still confronted with profoundly contradicting experiences of the past not only between different countries but also within them. Although these different narratives relate to each other and influence each other, there are usually dominant narratives, silencing counter-narratives. Thus, the way we remember the past is always the outcome of negotiation processes. However, these processes are not necessarily open and inclusive. Decisions on how to

interpret and remember the past are rather taken by those in power – f.e. the state. In this sense we can speak about an "authorised heritage discourse" (Smith 2006), which means that such a discourse is coined by power relations. Power in this context means not least to have the ability to judge about the legitimacy of narratives, heritage and memory. Put this way, it becomes clear why remembrance of the past always happens from a perspective of the present. It serves as an instrument for the self-reassurance of societies and groups, and by doing so, it is needed for identity construction and determines guiding principles for the future.

Meaningful concepts for identity construction are the ones of collective and cultural memory. Because, as Eviathan Zerubavel (2003, 4) points out, a collective memory unites the remembering collective. Maurice Halbwachs (1966, 7) stated already in the early 20th century that individual memory has to refer to a certain social frame and emerges in interaction with social groups, forming the trans-individual "store of memories" called "collective memory". However, the side effect of such a process, in which a group refers to certain memories and the memories of a group refer to each other, is that some memories remain excluded (see Halbwachs 1967; Olick 2003, 6). Aleida and Jan Assmann further developed the concept of collective memory and proposed a fundamental distinction between communicative and cultural memory: while communicative memory is transferred orally and plays a significant role in families, cultural memory is not personal, but rather connected to symbolic media like *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1998), memorials, monuments and museums as well as language and art (see Assmann 2010, 13; cf. 1988). Such a concept of cultural memory is important in order to better understand that the question that remains part of the collective memory in a long run, is a process of constant negotiations between different stakeholders; foremost in politics, culture and media. Considering that the possibility of communicative memory of World War II gets more and more lost due to the passing away of its witnesses, this topic is currently of great interest: which parts of the communicative memory will find their way to the cultural memory, giving a society sense and coherence?

To point out the dynamic character of such a process of negotiating tangible and intangible traces of the past, it is also worthwhile to refer to the various concepts of cultural heritage. According to Laurajane Smith (2006) "heritage is not a thing" but rather an " 'inherently political and discordant' practice that performs the cultural 'work' of the present" (Dicks 2007, 58). Put this way, heritage "is a contemporary activity with far-reaching effects" (UMass Amherst 2015):

> It can be an element of far-sighted urban and regional planning. It can be the platform for political recognition, a medium for intercultural dialogue, a means of ethical reflection, and the potential basis for local economic development. It is simultaneously local and particular, global and shared. /.../ Heritage is an essential part of the present we live in – and of the future we will build (UMass Amherst 2015).

The various heritage concepts, like dissonant heritage, negative heritage and undesirable heritage, further underline the dynamic aspect of heritage – that heritage undergoes constant social and political redefinitions and renegotiations. If the majority of a population, at a certain point, prefers not to have a specific cultural heritage, we can speak about "undesirable heritage" (Macdonald 2006). Lynn Meskell uses the concept of "negative heritage" in order to describe that "a conflictual site becomes the repository of negative memory in the collective imaginary" (Meskell 2011, 558). According to Meskell, negative heritage occupies a dual role: "it can be mobilised for positive didactic purposes (e.g. Ausschwitz, Hiroshima, District Six) or alternatively be erased if such places cannot be culturally rehabilitated and thus resist incorporation into the national imaginary (e.g. Nazi and Soviet statues and architecture)" (Meskell 2011, 558). However, often there is no consensus about the classification of such a cultural heritage, its denial or desirableness. The term dissonant heritage points out the contesting character of heritage by referring to the original meaning of an inheritance, which implies the existence of disinheritance: "all heritage is someone's heritage and therefore logically not someone else's" (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996, 21). For example, all over Austria we can still find war monuments in remembrance of the brave soldiers of both World Wars. The fact that they are not only missing commemoration of the others – the fallen enemies – and not even of the own victims – the oppressed and persecuted compatriots –, refers to the long-lasting character of such contradicting heritage. In this context, it is also worthwhile to mention the *Sacrario militare di Redipuglia*, the largest war memorial in Italy and one of the largest in the world. It was built on behalf of Benito Mussolini in remembrance (if not to say glorification) of Italy's fallen in World War I; and got unveiled in 1938, about one year before the outbreak of World War II, respectively about two years before Italy's entry into that war. This refers not least to the incredible symbolic importance of such heritage.

The consequence of such a manifoldness of different approaches to and dealing with cultural heritage is the presence of multiple, often contesting heritage narratives (cf. e.g. Ricoeur 1998; Cornelissen 2012; Wintersteiner 2015). The main problem about such a manifoldness of narratives is their exclusive character; that they usually claim to be the true one. Therefore, the task will be to find a proper strategy to encounter contesting interpretations, competing for the status of dominant narrative or exclusive truth. We need a methodological tool or conceptual basis which enables the coexistence of contradicting narratives – or in other words: autonomous interpretations of the past. The demand for an autonomous narrative can – at least to some extent – be regarded as the expression for the vital need for cultural identity. If this need is not adequately met within a national framework, what else can be the consequence than the claim for gaining political autonomy or even independence? Put this way, exclusivist thinking in general, like the phantasy of ethnic homogeneity, and exclusivist

narratives in specific, can be grasped as a precondition of claims for autonomy, independence and/or secession. This is not at all to say that exclusivist narratives and exclusivist (collective) attitudes are the only reason for claims for autonomy and/or secessionist tendencies. But, it is obvious that they play a crucial role, which is usually not adequately addressed within mainstream efforts of dealing with endeavours for autonomy or independence. From this point of view, in order to sustainably address these issues, someone will, of course besides other dimensions, have to deal with contradicting interpretations about the past. And this task calls for a suitable methodological approach.

5. The Approach: From Dialogue To Relationality

According to the Oxford International Encyclopedia of Peace, dialogue is to be understood as a "process of direct communication whereby two or more individuals exchange information in order to more deeply understand each other's point of view", whereat the "power of dialogue lies in its emphasis on having participants explore the assumptions, beliefs, and philosophical worldviews at the heart of their assertions" (Dayton 2010, 581).

As Antje Herrberg points out, dialogue is a less directive approach than mediation. While mediation is a method "to discuss issues, reach an agreement and make decisions together", dialogue is "an open-ended communication between conflict parties /.../ in order to foster mutual recognition, understanding, empathy and trust". In this manner, the concept of dialogue (process) "takes into account that international conflict is not an intergovernmental or interstate phenomenon but an inter-societal one" (Herrberg 2009, 14–15; cf. Kelman 2007, 69).

Ronald Fisher states that, "numerous interventions described as dialogue can be considered applications of interactive conflict resolution" (Fisher 1997, 121). In turn, the core idea of Interactive Conflict Resolution (ICR) is to bring "together unofficial yet influential representatives of identity groups or states engaged in destructive conflict for informal and flexible discussions in neutral setting designed and facilitated by a team of impartial social scientist-practitioners" (Fisher 2002, 61). In general, one can say ICR involves second track or citizens' diplomacy, a field which was pioneered "from the 1960s by Herbert Kelman, Edward Azar, John Burton, Johan Galtung, Joseph Montville, Harold Saunders and others" (Davies & Kaufmann 2002, 3). Especially Herbert C. Kelman's approach of establishing dialogue groups with influential non-officials was the methodological point of departure of the PRAA's method of comprehensive, open and inclusive dialogue. Comprehensive refers to the content of the dialogue: whatever participants wish to be discussed should be part of the dialogue. Open refers to approaches, procedures, rules and methods that are being utilized: dialogue must not restrict itself to a specific approach but rather

should be open for the integration of different, even contradicting approaches. Inclusive refers to the parties and means that all those who wish to participate should be – somehow – included in the dialogue; by adjusting dialogue settings, be it in the form of enlarged or parallelly ongoing (intra-)dialogical initiatives. It belongs also to the self-understanding of such a dialogue that there must not be any preconditions for joining a dialogue-process, especially such as the readiness for reconciliation; even though it might be its outcome (cf. Brousek 2018; Brousek & Pirker 2016; Graf & Brousek 2014, 2015; Graf et al. 2014).

Traditionally, dialogue is understood as an approach to deepen peace efforts by focusing not least on underlying conflict-dimensions, such as attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, dialogue – as a means of conflict transformation – is usually applied when conflicts are at least partly managed, implying that such conflicts are not (any longer) highly escalated (cf. Glasl 1980). However, the central role of (collective) attitudes in conflict formations refers to the possibility or even necessity to broaden the field of the application of dialogue. This would mean to regard dialogue as a complementary therapy, also in the field of management and settlement of highly escalated conflicts, where traditionally peace through law is the dominant paradigm. Put this way, dialogical engagement in the field of tension between dealing with the past and envisioning the future can be a useful complementary tool to support endeavours for the management and resolution of even ongoing (armed) conflicts. Simply spoken, such a dialogue enables to shift the focus from superficial matters to underlying ones; however, dialogue does not necessarily mean to talk about worldviews and philosophies. It rather means to offer a framework in which different people with different points of view get the possibility to explain their respective standpoints; but without arguing why this or that should be the true perspective. According to my experience, the central task of dialogue is to enable the co-existence of narratives. Therefore, dialogue must not be grasped as a means to gain consensus. In contrast to Plato's concept of dialogue with its impetus of bridging differences, dialogue, like applied within PRAA, is to be understood as an approach situated beyond the search for truth; rather as a strategy to preserve contradiction and plurality (Perko 2003; cf. Thürmer-Rohr 2002). The only basic consensus that is necessarily intended to be achieved within a dialogue, is the consensus about dissent or in other words: agreement about disagreement. This means that the process of transformation at the level of attitudes is often achieved by merely listening to the other in the context of a framework in which there is no need for finding the ultimate true version; be it about present or past issues. To some extent this is also true for the concept of dialogue itself. Within PRAA, we experienced that there have been very different perceptions about the aim of such a dialogue-process; whether it is the creation of a common (meta-)narrative or to find a way to deal with the coexistence of narratives. It goes without saying that this is still an issue about the concept of dialogue.

Realists might criticize that the coexistence of narratives would relativize justified claims for historical truth. However, the methodological basis of such a dialogical endeavour is not at all to be seen as relativist or radical constructivist. Qualifying a position as relative implicitly refers to the possibility of an absolute – quasi extra-mundane – standpoint from which someone could justify about the absolute certainty or absolute relativity of a specific matter. As human beings simply have to live with their imperfection and without the ability for gaining ultimate truth, it is, frankly speaking, always worth to listen to other – even or especially contradicting – points of view. Methodologically spoken, the encounter with other standpoints enables us to experience a process of "strangification", which reveals underlying – usually unconscious – presuppositions of the involved standpoints (Wallner 2002). This is not necessarily to relativize the own point of view, but rather to relate it to other points of view. Such an epistemologically "constructive-realist" (Wallner 2002) method offers a new possibility of commitment beyond the poles of universalism and relativism: relational commitment. Simply spoken, the sense of dialogue is to get to know other perspectives in order to better understand the own one. Throughout such a process we can gain degrees of freedom which helps to broaden our opportunities for action in general and the transformation of conflicts in specific (see Brousek 2017, 2019).

6. The Transformation: Peace Region – an Alternative Model for Autonomy Beyond the Contradiction of Secession and Inclusion

Regarding conflicts about claims for autonomy or independence, we are usually confronted with a contradiction within the poles of inclusion on the one hand and separation or secession on the other. Inclusion in this context refers to the most complete form of integration. Accordingly, autonomy could be described as a compromise between these two poles; since autonomy means somehow both, independence and inclusion up to a certain degree, but at the same time, neither total separation nor complete inclusion.

Against this background, the concept of a dialogically established peace region could act as an alternative model of traditional forms of autonomy, or even as alternative to autonomy. A dialogue would primarily address the cultural and symbolic aspects of claims for autonomy or independence; instead of focusing on the solution of political and legal aspects. As a kind of alternative model of traditional forms of autonomy, dialogically working towards a peace region would prove as a complementary therapy in the context of secessionist tendencies: by focussing on symbolic dimensions, such as the transformation of hostile (collective) attitudes towards the acceptance of alternative – autonomous – narratives. However, if such a dialogue process is successful in

positively transforming attitudes and establishing a culture of peace within a historically specific region, which might of course take several years, the concept of peace region could also prove as an alternative to autonomy in the long run. In case that such an endeavour of enabling the coexistence of even contradicting narratives succeeds, under specific circumstances, autonomy, independence or even secession would not necessarily be aspired. In this sense, the concept of peace region could also be seen as an idea beyond the contradiction of secession and inclusion. It can therefore be taken as a way of transforming the contradiction between secession and inclusion. Such a transformation might be better understood by referring to the dialectical sense of the German term *Aufhebung* (see Hegel 1978, 57–58; cf. Galtung 1998, 165–186). A peace region would abolish, preserve and/or transcend the contradiction of claims for secession and inclusion at the same time. Throughout the establishment of a peace region emerges a kind of subtle difference or separation to other regions not involved (so far), and/or the affected nation states, if they are not entirely involved. However, in the long run, a functioning peace region would strive for the inclusion of those other, so far excluded, regions; f.e. by the establishment of overlapping peace regions. Even sounding kind of fantastic, if such processes are adequately supported by politics and economy as well as the cultural sphere, they are of course feasible.

In the end, in a very long run, such a concept would proof as an alternative strategy to develop a union of peace regions, comprising a manifoldness of autonomous but dialogically related narratives of the past, the present and the future. Such a unity of diversity of peace regions would offer a bottom-up alternative to the currently quite wavering top-down version – the European Union.

Taking the concept of region as a geographical and historical entity for the establishment of peaceful conditions seems to have some distinct advantages, compared to start from a European or even global perspective. Human beings obviously need practicable entities as points of reference, in order to manage thinking and living in gradually larger structures. If living does not even succeed in small (provincial) structures, there is no basis for transnationality or transregionality. However, if human beings get overwhelmed by structures that are too complex to be understood, the problematic consequence is their escape into geographical provincialism and ideological parochialism.

In order to better understand this line of reasoning, we can refer to the topic of language acquisition. Somebody not having a perfect command of his mother tongue will probably never be able to learn foreign languages comprehensively. This means that the mother tongue serves as basis for foreign languages, like a specific province or region serves as geographical and historical basis for gradually enlarging the sphere of action as well as the conceptual space of thinking.

Peace regions are entities that enable us to epistemologically get out of the native world view, without being confronted with too complex and thus

overwhelming structures. Dialogue, in this context, is a process which enables translating, mediating and relating of different constructions of reality, and above all, better understanding our own ones. This proves as basis for the acceptance or even respect of alternative – or autonomous – constructions of reality.

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Notes

[1] This article draws not only on practical experiences from the dialogue project Building the Peace Region Alps-Adriatic (PRAA) but also on accompanying research and academic reflections about that specific and similar projects. In this sense, this paper is to some extent – apart from the mentioned literature – also based on the various project descriptions and proposals, where a lot of people contributed. In this regard, I would like to mention especially Wilfried Graf, Danijel Grafenauer, Johanna Mitterhofer, Jürgen Pirker, Marjan Sturm, Werner Wintersteiner, Daniel Wutti and Mitja Žagar – amongst others – for their important contributions to the project in general and its critical reflection in specific.

[2] In the beginning, it was a dialogical initiative between representatives of the Slovenian and Austrian (mainly Carinthian) civil societies, particularly majority populations and national minorities. From 2016 onwards also representatives of Italy and Croatia have been partly involved. In sum, there have been eight international (one- to two-day) dialogue-workshops in the time span from 2013 to 2017, which took place in Graz/Gradec, Klagenfurt/Celovec, Ljubljana/Laibach/Lubiana, Maribor/Marburg and Piran/Pirano; accompanied by many bi-, tri- and of course multi-lateral meetings of various members in order to prepare for or reflect upon specific issues of the international dialogue workshops. In 2018 the project PRAA entered a phase of reflection and documentation as well as dissemination; firstly, to inform a wider public about the project´s steps forward towards such a peace region and secondly, to critically reflect its shortcomings and development potentials for the future. For the publication of the two common declarations of the dialogue-group see Feldner et al. 2018; for the latest initiative following on PRAA see Wintersteiner (2018). Next year a thorough documentation and reflection will be published in form of a book (see Brousek et al. 2019).