NEW BEARINGS IN THE EVALUATION OF POST-CONFLICT RECONCILIATION

A Principle-based Approach

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This report is one of the outcomes of a major programme of research, spanning four years and involving a number of colleagues, partners and collaborators. It started with a 2-year project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under its Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research programme (PaCCS) and Global Challenges Research Fund. That project, *Art and Reconciliation: Conflict, Culture and Community*, ran from 2016-2018 and was an interdisciplinary and multi-institutional collaborative research project involving King’s College London, the London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of the Arts London. It was followed by two separate follow-on awards for impact and engagement.¹

*Art and Reconciliation* investigated the concept and practice of reconciliation in three strands: *History, Discourse* and *Practice*.

- **History** – historical and conceptual investigation of the idea and practice of reconciliation through time, and produced an integrated study of thought and practice on reconciliation.²
- **Discourse** – led by Denisa Kostovicova at LSE, we conducted comparative empirical research across countries, and over time, of *discourses* of reconciliation, applying computer-assisted quantitative and qualitative analysis.
- **Practice** – mapped reconciliation activity, monitoring and evaluation in the Western Balkans region and globally, and commissioned new work to explore the potential role of art and creative practices in reconciliation and modes of evaluation.

The research produced three major findings. First, we developed a new understanding of reconciliation based on a reconceptualisation of reconciliation as a dialogic process, not a fixed outcome. Second, we produced a body of evidence demonstrating the potential of artistic practices and artifacts in inter-communal conflict resolution and remembrance. Third, we developed a new framework for evaluation of reconciliation activity based on Four Principles for successful evaluation of reconciliation and visual arts practice activities outlined in this report.

This report addresses the question that was the initial prompt for our programme of research. In 2015, UNDP (Western Balkans) asked us to develop research to address its need for ‘a codified body of knowledge pertaining to reconciliation’ and to develop ‘appropriate frameworks to evaluate post-conflict reconciliation.’ In spite of a great deal of effort and billions of dollars spent funding reconciliation projects,

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¹ Dr RC Kerr, Prof. AJW Gow, Dr D Kostovicova and Dr P Lowe, ‘Art and Reconciliation: Conflict, Culture and Community’, AHRC AH/P005365/1, 2016-2019; Dr RC Kerr, Prof. AJW Gow, Dr P Lowe ‘Art and Reconciliation — Open Calls and the Living Museum’, AHRC-GCRF AH/S005641/1, 2019-20; Dr RC Kerr, Prof. AJW Gow and Dr P Lowe ‘Art and Reconciliation – the PCRC and ASBO Magazine’, AHRC-GCRF AH/T007966/1, 2020-21.

including arts-based projects, there was little concrete evidence of positive outcomes. This was not unique to the Western Balkans, but that region was an acute example of a context in which the legacy of armed conflict in the region continued to pose a significant challenge to political, economic, and social development and to obstruct inter-ethnic and inter-state reconciliation, in spite of myriad ways of trying to address it. The question was posed in an even more direct way by of the participants at our workshop in Belgrade, an Embassy official, who asked, simply, ‘What works?’

Underpinning the question of what works is of course the question of how do we know? The answer provided in this report was developed on the basis of extensive research investigating the range of monitoring and evaluation methods and approaches, how they were applied, and their pitfalls and potential. Based on our research, which involved mapping reconciliation and evaluation activity and conducting interviews with key stakeholders, we formulated a framework for evaluation based on our assessment of what constituted best practice principles. These principles were designed, developed and tested in a series of workshops with policy makers, donors, practitioners and academics, in Sarajevo in June 2017, in London in June 2018, in Belgrade in October 2018, at our Symposium in November 2018 in London and in New York in May 2019. We are grateful to all of the participants in those workshops, who brought their considerable expertise, insight and creativity to the process, in particular, Sabina Čelajić-Clancy, Elma Hašimbegović, Elma Hodžić, Siniša Milatović, Tatjana Milovanović, Babu Rahman, Velma Šarić, Amit Singhal, Leslie Woodward, Ivan Zveržhanovski, and of course our colleagues and collaborators on Art and Reconciliation, Denisa Kostovicova, Paul Lowe, Milena Michalski, Tom Pashkalis, Henry Redwood and Ivor Sokolić.

We hope we have captured the essence of our discussions and distilled it into a framework that will be useful to stakeholders in reconciliation activity, not least the purported ‘beneficiaries’. Above all, we hope this report provides a useful answer to the critical question of not only ‘what works’ but also ‘how and why’.

TF, RK, JP and AJWG

London, December 2020
1. INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, billions of dollars have been poured into post-conflict settings to try to help war-torn and divided societies come to terms with legacies of violence and atrocity. The term ‘transitional justice’ was coined in the 1980s and early 1990s to describe a ‘toolkit’ of mechanisms for addressing gross human rights abuses, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, aimed broadly at restoring peace, delivering justice, fostering reconciliation and guaranteeing non-recurrence. As such, transitional justice was closely allied with, and seen as a critical element of, post conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. In 2004, the United Nations Secretary General acknowledged as much when he said that the question was not whether to pursue transitional justice in post-conflict societies, but how.\(^3\)

The integration of transitional justice into peacebuilding activity was further reinforced in 2011, when the Secretary-General made recommendations for transitional justice to be integrated with other areas of peacebuilding activity, including rule of law, human rights, and justice and security sector reform, and the Human Rights Council appointed the first Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence.

Different forms of transitional justice have been implemented over the past few decades in a variety of contexts in pursuit of core goals of ensuring accountability, serving justice, deterring future crimes, and achieving reconciliation. Reconciliation is not only associated with attempts to come to terms with the past, but also to build a better future, and is integral to approaches to preventing conflict and building inclusive peace enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

All of the activity has produced, at best, a mixed record. The process of contending with the past is a complex, difficult and long-term project and road to social repair is hard to navigate. Whilst there remains a strong faith in the value of transitional justice, there are also strong critiques – chief among them that it has been internationally imposed, top-down, backwards looking and too distant from the needs and wants of the constituencies it purports to serve. In relation to the contribution of transitional justice to reconciliation in particular, it boils down to a fundamental, and key, question: When it comes to reconciliation, what works?

Answering that question is not an easy task. The concept of reconciliation is itself highly contested and notoriously ill-defined, so it is not always clear what, precisely, are the measures of success when it comes to evaluating reconciliation activities for either learning or accountability purposes. How is it possible to judge whether people are ‘reconciled’, what are they supposed to be reconciled with and according to whom?

The question of what works? was acute in the Western Balkans, where our research was largely focused, and where a great deal of money and attention has been directed at projects that aim to facilitate reconciliation. But there remains little shared understanding of what impact these interventions have had, what reconciliation is, or how it can be achieved. Moreover, in 2016, when we began the research, over

twenty years after the end of the war in Bosnia, reconciliation at the state level appeared more distant than ever.

This report is based on a multi-year interdisciplinary research programme that sought to investigate the multifaceted concept and practice of reconciliation, and in particular the potential role of the arts in reconciliation, especially in the Western Balkans region: *Art and Reconciliation: Conflict, Culture and Community*. In responding to a UNDP (and others) identified lack of codified knowledge pertaining to reconciliation, our research focused on: mapping reconciliation-related activities, especially arts-based reconciliation projects; and reviewing existing monitoring and evaluation approaches with the aim of identifying best practice, opportunities and challenges.\(^4\)

Our research highlighted a disjuncture between how reconciliation is conceived and practised in arts-based peacebuilding, as an implicit goal of long-term, process-focused community engagement, and how reconciliation projects are required to account for themselves by international donors in short-term, quantifiable results. The challenge of evaluating reconciliation lies in finding ways to bridge the gap between the divergent ways that reconciliation is understood, practised and consequently measured. Our principles for evaluation of reconciliation activity are designed to bridge this gap.

### Evaluation Principles

This report outlines 4 principles to guide the evaluation of reconciliation projects. These principles are offered as a non-prescriptive framework to underpin evaluative thinking and the planning, design and implementation of monitoring and evaluation activities using methods such as Theory of Change.\(^5\) They aim to act as guiding markers for practitioners seeking to understand the key ideas and values that underpin the increasing array of alternative approaches to evaluation and to provide a set of criteria against which practitioners can develop evaluation best practice.

1. **Evaluation is co-created via the active and transparent participation of all stakeholders**

   Evaluation should be co-created, involving the active participation of all stakeholders: from local communities, project participants and beneficiaries to project organisers and donors. Transparency about what each stakeholder’s contribution consists of can ensure tokenistic modes of participation are detected and avoided.

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\(^4\) The research mapped 489 projects labelled and/or described as reconciliation-related, and interviewed fifty-four people, including current and former practitioners in Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and current and former donor employees from private, state and international organisations.

\(^5\) Theory of Change is a method used in planning and evaluation that defines long term goals and works backwards to explain how the desired outcomes will be reached. See page 23 for more detail.
2. **Evaluation is embedded, continuous and longitudinal**
   Evaluative thinking and learning needs to be embedded into organisational culture. It should consist of continuous, collaborative assessment cycles that are integrated into ongoing internal project processes and strategy to build formative, summative and longitudinal learning over time.

3. **Evaluation is context driven**
   Evaluation methods, design and strategy must be shaped by the specific context rather than pre-determined through the application of standardised modes and frameworks. Multimodal methods can capture contextual complexity by generating multiple forms of data from varied perspectives.

4. **Evaluation is independently peer evaluated and shared**
   Evaluation should be independently audited and peer evaluated by an external pool of non-commercial peer practitioners, specialists and funder evaluators drawn from local, regional and international levels (rather than corporate consultancy firms). Evaluation findings must be shared and communicated to ensure accountability and that learning is distributed and applied.

These principles are offered from a starting point that asserts reconciliation is understood as a multidimensional process rather than a specific end point, a process that is dynamic and that varies across context and time. Reconciliation activities are understood as contributing to a longitudinal, locally embedded and multi-generational process. Evaluation itself is seen as an ongoing learning process rather than solely as a definitive assessment on a specific activity. Most importantly, is understood that evaluation must account to affected communities as much as it accounts to donor priorities.

**Report Structure**

This report is presented in three sections. The first section considers in more detail two aspects to the problem of reconciliation evaluation:

- The challenge of developing and building consensus around valid definitions, indicators and methods for measuring reconciliation; and
- Systemic issues and flawed practices prevalent in the peacebuilding and reconciliation industry that disincentivises the fostering of an honest and transparent evaluation culture.

Section 2 presents our research into arts-based reconciliation practices and highlights a disjuncture between practitioners’ definitions of their work and imposed programmatic notions of reconciliation that

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often frame evaluation requirements. There are three commonalities that underline the conception and work of reconciliation found across diverse forms of arts-based peacebuilding:

1. Reconciliation is understood to be an implicit, rather than explicit, goal of their work.
2. Reconciliation is understood to be about long-term, community level engagement.
3. Reconciliation work that is meaningful focuses on the quality of process, rather than on the outputs.

This section of the report explores the opportunities and challenges presented by evaluation of arts-based reconciliation initiatives and considers their implications for how the evaluation of reconciliation might be done differently.

The final section describes how evaluation might be done differently. There is a push to look beyond traditional outcomes and indicator focused evaluation models to assess and learn from reconciliation interventions that deal with complexity, innovation and risk. The emphasis is on ongoing learning, participation, adaptation and accountability. When reconciliation is understood to be unpredictable, non-linear and subjective, evaluation serves as a tool not only to measure impact but as a process that informs strategy and programming and builds capacity and shared knowledge. This section sets out in detail our Four Principles that bring new bearings to the evaluation of post-conflict reconciliation, while also providing an overview of approaches and methods that are being harnessed to pursue inclusive and adaptive forms of evaluation.
2. THE PROBLEM WITH RECONCILIATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF EVALUATION

The diverse array of problems and pressures around evaluating reconciliation, both for accountability and learning purposes, can be grouped into two areas:

1. The challenge of how to develop and build consensus around viable definitions, measures and indicators of reconciliation; and
2. Broader, systemic issues in the peacebuilding and reconciliation field that perpetuate flawed programming and evaluation practices.

Why does reconciliation matter?

Reconciliation is a key development challenge for the countries of the Western Balkans region, where the legacy of the Yugoslav War continues to challenge political, economic, and social development and to obstruct inter-ethnic and inter-state cooperation. In Bosnia and Hercegovina, twenty-five years since signing of the Dayton Agreement, commentators note that it the country remains on a precipice. Whilst optimists argue that work on enhancing equality under the rule of law and in the protection of human rights will decrease tensions, strengthen constructive dialogue and foster reconciliation, pessimists warn of the very real danger that decades of internal ethno-political divisions, rampant corruption and brain drains have inflicted irreparable damage.7

Reconciliation is crucial for the balance to be tipped toward a brighter future for Bosnia and Hercegovina and for the Western Balkans region. It matters instrumentally, as dealing effectively with the legacy of war crimes remains a key condition for integration in the European Union (Montenegro, Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are official candidates, having opened formal accession negotiations, while Bosnia and Kosovo remain potential candidate countries). And it matters substantively, as inter-ethnic tensions and nationalist agendas continue to dominate private and public spaces, evidenced in continuing challenges over refugee return and judicial reform and reflected in polarized media and public discourse.

Why evaluate?

There is no shortage of projects and programmes aimed at building peace and fostering reconciliation, nor is there a shortage of attempts to evaluate them. Indeed, the past 25 years has seen a surge of interest in evaluation of peacebuilding and transitional justice activity.\(^8\) Progress has been made with the production of a wealth of publications and resources addressing the challenges of assessing the impact of difficult to measure peacebuilding and reconciliation activities. These are often methodologically innovative and provide useful guides for practitioners initiating peacebuilding evaluation processes.\(^9\)

However, the field continues fall short of contemporary evaluation cultures and standards and the evidence base remains limited and fragmented. Our research suggests that many organisations lack the capacity and resources to embed evaluative thinking or to conduct evaluation. When they do, it is undertaken primarily for donor reporting rather than learning or community accountability purposes. The take-up of new evaluation modes and approaches is poor, and evaluations are seldom shared. It is not that there has been no evaluation of reconciliation activity; rather it is that the wealth of sophisticated, rich and nuanced knowledge and expertise amongst communities and practitioners has not translated into applied shared evaluation learning and frameworks that make sense to, and match, donor priorities and accountability standards.

Outdated and singular perceptions of what constitutes valid evaluation continue to dominate. These are grounded in the belief that only logical models, linear theories of change and expert led, quantitative methods and measures offer robust and systematic evidence. Systemic problems, relating to how the peacebuilding industry is structured and incentivised, perpetuate dysfunctional practices and undermine the adoption of new modes of learning and accountability.\(^10\)

Donors, practitioners and communities are cognizant of the complex, political, economic challenges surrounding the evaluation of reconciliation activities. There is an appetite and an imperative to do things differently: to move from a technical to a transformative approach to peacebuilding.\(^11\) Along with


\(^9\) Many of these resources are available through DM&E for Peace, an online network dedicated to sharing, aggregating and archiving peacebuilding evaluation literature and learning: [https://www.dmeforpeace.org/](https://www.dmeforpeace.org/)


recognition of the failures and limitations of a prescriptive peacebuilding agenda has come a pragmatic shift towards a form of adaptive peacebuilding.¹² This requires a more open-ended and interdisciplinary approach that acknowledges complexity and focuses on the means and process of building peace and reconciliation over the long term.

Adaptive modes of peacebuilding and reconciliation that aim at sustaining peace demand active, multi-dimensional and longitudinal modes of evaluation less wedded to the conventional programming logic of linear, results-based management. Complexity, contextual variance, changing circumstances and the diversity of stakeholders and conceptions of reconciliation make it impossible to advance standardised one size fits all solutions. Moreover, the search for new methods can distract. While there is a need for innovation, methods can become too fragmented, specialised and dependent on particular expertise. What works in one context may be ineffective or even harmful in another setting.

The problem with reconciliation evaluation

There is widespread conceptual inconsistency about what reconciliation consists of among different stakeholders. It means different things to different people. Understandings of reconciliation changes depending on multiple variables such as context, history, culture, language, religion and education.

In addition, the intangibility of many of the elements crucial to reconciliation – trust, relationships, listening, forgiveness – makes it incredibly difficult to grasp and quantify. Reconciliation projects often struggle to demonstrate impacts so instead opt for evaluations that are focused on delivery processes or outputs or less rigorous forms of methods and design.¹³ When establishing casual links is so difficult and it is not a given that an evaluation will generate any definitive findings then evaluation can seem like it gives a poor return on the funds it requires.

In the region in which we conducted our research, the Western Balkans, donors, institutions, governments, politicians, NGOs, local organisations and populations all hold diverse views about what reconciliation means and whether it constitutes a goal or a process. Consequently, there is a lack of a coherent or strategic vision that encompasses a structured, systematic approach to achieving reconciliation. There is no consensus on agreed definitions, measures and indicators of reconciliation. Local language translations of the term ‘reconciliation’ are considered inadequate, even damaging, by

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practitioners and intended beneficiaries. In recent years, this has resulted in a significant drop in its use by practitioners who prefer the purposefully vague formulation of ‘moving forward’, which has fewer negative connotations.

A drop-in support to reconciliation-related activities (both financial and other forms of support) as a result of reconciliation fatigue is viewed as presenting an externally imposed and artificial deadline that undermines reconciliation efforts. As one interviewee lamented, 'most of our donors think they can fix reconciliation within ten years.’ Local actors, due to lack of other sources of financing, often have to abandon or reframe their reconciliation-related work to adopt new language and foci to fit shifting donor priorities and languages. These programmatic changes are survival-driven rather than motivated by relevant expertise in the newly prioritised field. The lack of consistent, long-term programming, and the limited capacity of local organisations to attain the shifting goals of donors, have a negative effect on the impact and effectiveness of reconciliation projects.

**Short-termism**

The funding that is available for reconciliation activities is more often structured around short-term project frameworks and cycles than around long-term programmatic goals. This has multiple, far reaching consequences. Relatively short project cycles limit donor freedom when choosing local partners. It also results in low tolerance for failure, inspiring a misrepresentation of outcomes, and undermining the ability of all stakeholders to test innovative approaches, to take risks and learn from mistakes. Donors under pressure to spend money lack the time to conduct analysis and to integrate learning from previous projects. For local organisations, short-term project funding cycles weaken their capacity to plan for extended, long-term engagements with communities, to manage on-the-ground expectations, to build up knowledge, to invest in and retain skilled and experienced staff and crucially to deepen their impact, networks and trust with local communities. Small civil society and peacebuilding organisations find themselves engaged in the perpetual pursuit of funds to sustain their on-the-ground activities, artificially reframing their reconciliation projects to concur with the latest donor priorities and buzzwords. In the Western Balkans, short-termism has made local populations cynical about the intention and commitment of peacebuilding initiatives and their tendency to undertake fragmented activities with no follow-up and little meaningful relevance or transformation for local people.

To mitigate the effects of short-termism, a key recommendation of our research is that donors should devise long term strategic objectives funded over a 5-10 years horizon, but entrust practitioners to advise on how best to achieve them based on

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15 NGO Employee, INTV 5, 2018.

situational specifics, 'because reconciliation is not something that, if you [only] have money from 2005 to 2010, you can deal with.'

**Vertical accountability**

While some organisations engage in their own evaluation activities for learning purposes, the primary drivers and commissioners of evaluations are government and private donors. Evaluations often form a standard component of grant contracts in the form of grant reporting and are focused on routine matters of accountability and process. Such evaluations tend to be conducted separately, after project completion, rather than being regarded as an essential ongoing project component or they consist of internal or informal organizational monitoring and evaluation. Based on logic, 'linear programme model' evaluations focus on whether intended objectives and outputs have been achieved (largely predetermined by programme staff instead of shaped by intended beneficiaries), rather than measuring impacts in their totality, including unintended positive and negative outcomes. There is often a preference for quantitative evaluation methods which are viewed as having more validity than qualitative or narrative forms of evaluation. Mid-course corrections are very rare in reconciliation-related projects due to this lack of embedded continuous monitoring and evaluation.

Working at the scale of most bilateral donors requires standardisation, but it is incredibly hard to develop standardised processes that can cope with complexity and that can respond to the diverse and challenging contexts in which reconciliation projects are taking place. Despite this there is an emphasis on results and organisations delivering reconciliation activities are under considerable pressure to demonstrate impact which leads to exaggerated claims in project aims and outcomes often built around promises of lofty, or ill-defined change. There is a common perception among implementing agencies that the admission of project challenges or short comings will have serious implications for their reputation and securing future funding. The grant-driven expectation to show value and effectiveness leads to overblown statements of impact at the outset of the projects, which in turn creates increased pressure to overestimate the outcomes of a project and disregard unintended outcomes, especially negative ones. The result is a culture of reticence and a success only bias where the fertile learning gained from the reflection on failure, tensions and challenges or unexpected or unintended outcomes is lost. In this culture of reticence, it is common for organisations to keep evaluation reports and findings internally and not to share or to communicate learning. The outcome is that evaluative learning is only accessed by a small number of people and evaluation reports are filed away and gather dust resulting in lost opportunities to learn and act on evaluation findings.

17 NGO Employee, INTV 2, 2018.


19 Ibid.
Accountability mechanisms in the peacebuilding field are almost exclusively vertical,\(^{20}\) with implementing agencies and local organisations having to report upwards to donors and governments. There is little emphasis on accountability to the beneficiaries who the projects serve. There is limited consultation with communities on project design and planning and participatory evaluation methods, where beneficiaries play active and substantive roles in monitoring and assessing projects, are not widely used. This situation speaks, in part, to systemic issues of power, politics and ownership within the peacebuilding field where the concept of accountability is ambiguous. When different parties and stakeholders have different versions or visions of what reconciliation is, whose vision should evaluation account to?

What has been called the ‘accountability chain problem’,\(^{21}\) the vertical chain of oversight which often involves multiple steps from the community activity to the level at which funds are approved, is also problematic in so far as it creates significant disincentives for transparency and open sharing of learning and evaluation. Each level of the chain is incentivized to keep the next level up, that they directly report to, happy. Local community organisations are motivated to communicate the success of their on-the-ground activities and omit the challenges and failures when they report to the national level NGO. NGOs are, in turn, incentivized only to report success when they account to their donor, and so on up the ladder. Further up the chain where financial decisions about the allocation of funding are made, actors removed from the community lack sufficient knowledge about the nuances and complexities of what is actually happening and to make informed decisions.

**Lack of evaluative and co-ordinated learning culture**

The disincentives to foster a transparent and honest evaluative learning culture in peacebuilding are perpetuated through the dominant strategies by which funders distribute funds to grantees, as well as through monitoring and reporting shortcomings. Often, donors issue a request for proposals in line with their strategic plan, which organisations bid for through a competitive assessment process. This system obstructs collaboration between both funders and implementing organisations. At both levels, actors fail to synchronise their efforts. Funds are primarily awarded to single project-based grantees. Sustained co-ordination is hard and the development of inter-locking networks of initiatives with multiple funders and initiators that can complement and amplify each other is limited. It becomes a challenge to undertake evaluation that seeks to decipher learning about broader goals, such as reconciliation, across multiple projects. In the competitive process organisations are incentivized to over-promise and subsequently disincentivized to effectively evaluate as it is unlikely that their projects will live up to the ambitious goals outlined in the proposal.

These systemic issues shape the roles played by individuals who are motivated by a complex set of personal incentives and disincentives to conduct and use evaluation effectively. People want to be associated with successful projects, and communities have little recourse if they want to call organisations to account. In the Western Balkans some young people actively chose not to engage in any agency-linked

\(^{20}\) Church, ‘Evaluating Peace-Building’.

\(^{21}\) Blum, ‘Improving Peace-Building Evaluation’.
reconciliation activities; their refusal to participate was the only means by which they could communicate and assert their disdain about the way peacebuilding programmes are implemented.

Much evaluation is conducted internally, and yet when it is not solely done for donor accountability or communications purposes, the lack of organisational learning culture undermines the potential of insights garnered from the evaluation to be taken up and acted upon. Without an enabling context to ensure evaluation can contribute to institutional learning, this might consist of supported learning structures or staff allocated time, then the knowledge generated is not integrated back into programming practice.

Weak methods, uncertain results and the failure to share

Within organisations implementing reconciliation activities in the region there are weak understandings of different evaluative methods and approaches which limits their capacity to make informed decisions about evaluation strategies and to institutionalize evaluative thinking. There is an absence of consistent day to day monitoring which should exist as an ongoing project management function. Most evaluation happens without baseline assessments, so it is hard to make comparisons, or before and after analysis, which undermines its ability to draw firm conclusions about the degree of change that has occurred and raises accuracy and causality challenges. Organisations struggle to understand how to use qualitative methods effectively to produce rich learning, while convincing external audiences of their rigour and credibility.22

Evaluations often produce weak and uncertain results making it hard to make confident claims. Here the concern is not negative evaluations, but evaluations in which it is hard to reach any definitive findings and conclusions. Different audiences have different expectations as to what constitutes solid methods and evidence; some wish to see rich qualitative material, whereas others want to see hard numbers.

The final significant shortcoming surrounds the failure of organisations to share their evaluation data. There are few opportunities for projects to learn from each other’s successes and failures and evaluation synthesis and meta evaluation becomes impossible when evaluations stay hidden in computers and institutional archives.

High costs

The lack of capacity to produce and share high quality evaluations that provide actionable learning is not unique to the peacebuilding and reconciliation field. However, it is noticeable that despite the significant advances that have been made in the last decade – the creation of resources, guidelines and knowledge around peacebuilding evaluation – these are still not being consistently applied.

External evaluation experts bring with them considerable expertise for evaluating reconciliation and peacebuilding that builds the capacity and complements institutional knowledge. However, independent evaluation is costly and may simply not be viable for a large number of projects. When there are funds for

external evaluations, the experience in the Western Balkans is that there is a relatively small pool of external evaluators to draw on. This, combined with the relatively small number of reconciliation practitioners and donors seeking external evaluation, creates an ongoing interdependence between evaluators and evaluated. Such interdependence limits the scope of critical feedback provided by evaluators, leading to charitable assessments and unrealistic expectations. The fact that external examiners tend to be paid significantly more than project staff creates resentment amongst practitioners, decreasing the willingness to pursue external evaluations.

Conclusion

Evaluation of reconciliation programming tends to rely on linear, managerial approaches that do not capture the complexity of post conflict conflicts. There is a tension between evaluation methodologies that satisfy the requirements of donors and those that are most useful for organizational learning and decision-making. Can singular approaches to evaluation meet the needs of all stakeholders? Can individual organisations or projects working on improving and testing new and innovative evaluation strategies and methods, advance the field if some of the systemic issues around the vertical accountability structures are not addressed? There is a common sense that current restrictive modes of evaluation not only fail to capture the complex and creative work of reconciliation but also undermine its critical potential and a common unease over who is defining the agenda for this work.23

Increasingly more sophisticated methods, designed to deal with complexity and context, are being developed and implemented.24 However, their adoption is slow, and the methods require resources, expertise and understanding. It is not always easy to effectively communicate the results of these studies when others are unfamiliar with the methodology. Many of these problems have become mutually reinforcing and self-perpetuating and there is a call for a ‘whole-of-field’ solution,25 which re-writes the how the evaluation of reconciliation is being done.


24 Scharbatke-Church, ‘Peacebuilding Evaluation’.

3. INSIGHTS FROM ARTS-BASED RECONCILIATION AND PEACEBUILDING PRACTICE

The previous section outlined the problem of reconciliation evaluation. Here, we ask what insights can be learned from arts-based reconciliation and evaluation practice. Art is increasingly seen as a ‘go-to’ peacebuilding tool, which has the potential to overcome many of the problems that more traditional responses to legacies of violence and atrocity face.\(^26\) Leading peace scholar, John Paul Lederach, emphasises the art of the creative, as well as the technical, process that drives peacebuilding.\(^27\) Strategic arts-based peacebuilding and reconciliation interventions have proliferated over recent decades as the soft power of arts and culture has been acknowledged.\(^28\) Artists, practitioners and institutions are harnessing the transformative potential of the arts and creative interventions to engage communities in post conflict settings: to create safe spaces, to support healing, to make meaning, to build relationships, to catalyse dialogue and to help people forge new stories and ways of understanding their experiences and each other.\(^29\) In the Western Balkans, community arts-based processes have become an essential component of peacebuilding work.\(^30\)

However, despite calls for the arts to be ‘mainstreamed’ into peacebuilding activities the value of arts-based reconciliation and peacebuilding is yet to be fully realised.\(^31\) A significant challenge is one of evaluation. There is a lack of systematic evidence of the impact of the arts on reconciliation processes. Traditional evaluation approaches, with their focus on pre-defined objectives, quantitative measures, causal links, linear models of change and short-term outcomes, fail to capture the emergent, adaptive and


expansive qualities and impact of the arts. There is an absence of shared languages and frameworks to which both practitioners and donor can subscribe. Creative processes that deal in subjective experience and non-tangible outcomes challenge standard forms of measurement. There is a tension between the more ‘elicitive’ approach of arts-based peacebuilding, often delivered by small arts organisations and individual creative practitioners, and the prescriptive tendencies of the linear and logic based programmatic and evaluative thinking deemed necessary for institutions and donors. This creates a disjunct between how arts practitioners define their work and how programmatic and funding imperatives require them to frame their activities, imposing a notion of reconciliation that is often at odds with the values that drive arts-based peacebuilding practice.

Art and Reconciliation

Our research mapped arts-based reconciliation activities in the Western Balkans and beyond with two objectives:

1. To understand how reconciliation was conceived and practised by arts-based peacebuilding practitioners.
2. To identify challenges, opportunities and strategies for evaluation best practice that could be drawn on from arts-based peacebuilding.

The field of arts and creative peacebuilding is of course incredibly diverse with a range of different stakeholders from professional artists, community participants and arts institutions to creative and NGO practitioners undertaking a myriad of projects utilizing varying creative and artistic media from digital media and opera to theatre and street art.33 There are plural parameters, ways of working, motivations and criteria for success. Despite this divergence, there were some commonalities that marked the way creative practitioners in the Western Balkans approached the ‘work’ of reconciliation. These are discussed below.

You can start this process (of reconciliation) and you can run it successfully without talking about it.

Arts practitioner A, 2018, interview

First, reconciliation was understood to be an implicit, rather than explicit goal of their work. While funding agendas require arts practitioners to define their projects in terms of how they enable and achieve reconciliation, at a community and practice level practitioners do not use the language of reconciliation. In

32 John Paul Lederach, Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures (Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1995).

33 Fairey, ‘The Arts in Peace-Building and Reconciliation’.
the Western Balkans, where reconciliation discourse is deeply politicised and problematic, reconciliation interventions are often resisted and even rejected by communities.\textsuperscript{34} The term has become redundant, damaging even, for projects that want to engage meaningfully rather than alienate local communities. Arts interventions seeking to carve new spaces for dialogue, to build relationships and to drive inclusive local narratives describe how, while their work is clearly concerned with reconciliation, they consider it to be a by-product of inclusive arts work rather than its driving purpose.\textsuperscript{35} Participatory artists, especially, understand reconciliation to be embedded in a wider set of values and a process that needs to be embodied by the community and allowed to emerge over time and on its own terms. In fact, trying to impose a reconciliation agenda onto arts projects perversely undermines their reconciliatory potential.

\begin{quote}
If they (funders) ask me, “How do you know that you’ll make any kind of difference?” I say, “I don’t know. I will know in 10- or 15-years’ time.” Most funders are not patient enough to wait for 10 or 15 years.
\end{quote}

Arts practitioner B, 2018, interview

As the above quote demonstrates, arts practitioners understood reconciliation to be about long-term engagement. Although required to define and account for their reconciliation work in terms of singular projects that produced short-term demonstrable outputs, practitioners emphasise the importance of working slowly to build trust, processes and relationships over time. This is crucial in community engaged arts work where people are mistrustful of change and interventions.

\begin{quote}
The arts are about a process, not the final production – the final act is important, it builds confidence, it elates and celebrates but that wasn’t the work, that was just the finale. It is the process that needs to be commissioned – not the product.
\end{quote}

Arts practitioner C, 2017, interview

Finally, arts work that meaningfully drives reconciliation is about fostering an emergent process as much as it is about creating artistic products. This is especially clear in participatory arts projects where a primary concern is with the quality of the creative process and its inclusive, dialogical and relational qualities. In terms of their effects on reconciliation, practitioners are clear that it is the learning,

\textsuperscript{34} Stef Jansen, ‘If Reconciliation is the Answer, Are We Asking the Right Question?’, \textit{Studies in Social Justice} 7: 2 (2013), pp. 249-243.

conversations and networks that happen between the project participants, the wider community and audiences and facilitators as part of the creative process that are crucial. This work is emergent and cannot guarantee outcomes. Reconciliation can be the implied intention, but it cannot be assumed. Doing so denies the agency of a community to define their own creative process and any version of reconciliation that it may, or may not, entail.

**Arts evaluation: challenges and opportunities**

The challenges of evaluating the social impact of the arts, similar to the challenges of evaluating reconciliation, are manifold. Existing evaluations have been criticised for an over-reliance on participant testimonies that claim significant impact, but not in ways that are verifiable beyond these participant accounts. There is a lack of longitudinal evaluation resulting in a tendency to focus on short-term outputs over long term outcomes. Critical considerations of negative impacts or artistic failure are routinely omitted. Evaluations have also failed to establish convincing causal links or sufficiently connect impacts to the wider socio-political circumstances or account for contextual complexity. While there is a pressure to use quantitative methods and metrics, these reveal little about the creative experience and its emotional, subjective and unconscious aspects.

The issue, in part, comes down to divergent criteria for success. Our research established the impact of iterative arts-based projects often equates to a ripple effect or multiplier impact. Arts-based projects prioritise the quality of the creative and dialogical process and the emergence of expansive impact over time, while donors are keen to see demonstrable outputs and project models that can be replicated or delivered at scale. Focusing on context and building relationships and dialogue, arts-based methods and strategies resist standardisation, replication and scalability.

The lack of a systematic evidence base for the contribution of the arts to post conflict reconciliation is not indicative of the fact that there is not a wealth of existing practice-based knowledge and expertise around arts-based reconciliation. While practitioners, working with limited resources and a lack of external investment or support, may struggle to produce evaluation deemed as sufficiently rigorous by evaluation experts, the reflexive basis of arts-based approaches produces valuable insights and iterative learning that is applied to improve and hone practice. Often, arts practitioners run concurrent forms of monitoring and evaluation, producing project accounts to satisfy donor reporting while at the same time engaging in reflective, practice-based learning to self-evaluate their own activities. Methods range from in-depth participant interviews, building case-studies, collaborative learning exchanges and peer evaluation with other organisations or practitioners in their network and working with academics. A number of NGOs working with arts-based and creative arts employ theories of change and forms of participatory

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evaluation. The focus is often on artistic intent and possibility, and on what emerged and was learned, rather than on whether projects adhere to set of pre-determined objectives and outcomes.

Conclusion

How to bridge the gaps between different approaches to reconciliation and their seemingly divergent criteria for success? The challenge is to develop a shared learning and evaluation culture that everyone can subscribe to and to create evaluation tools that capture the exploratory, complex and emergent qualities of arts-based and reconciliation work without limiting it. Qualitative, narrative and participatory forms of evaluation data need to be taken as seriously as metric based, quantitative forms of data. Developing adaptive and creative modes of evaluation that can be strategically integrated with traditional forms of evaluation will allow for the generation of data that can provide new insights and learning. Multi-modal evaluation that harnesses both qualitative and quantitative methods can expand and amplify what evaluation speaks of and to whom.


38 Hunter and Page, ‘What Is ‘the Good’ of Arts-Based Peacebuilding?’. 
4. DOING EVALUATION DIFFERENTLY

Increasingly, nuanced, tried and tested evaluation approaches exist. These build on established good evaluation practice, have been specifically developed for evaluating initiatives dealing with complexity, innovation and risk, and emphasize ongoing learning, participation and adaptation. Informed by complexity and systems theory, they include developmental evaluation, principles-based evaluation, action evaluation and adaptive evaluation approaches (see Table 4.1 for an overview of the main approaches and methods). These approaches do not advocate a single method, design, tool or inquiry framework; rather, they utilize both established and newer methods and different forms of qualitative and quantitative participatory methods, adapting them to the particular evaluation challenge or focus.

Sharing characteristics with the reflexive, practice-based learning employed by some of the arts practitioners interviewed for this research, these evaluative approaches look beyond traditional outcomes and indicator focused evaluation models. They consider how evaluative thinking can contribute to strategic thinking, to accountability and to capturing and applying emergent learning. These approaches are mindful of the political role of evaluation. They aim to measure the totality of a project’s impact, not simply its progress towards achieving project objectives, and to ensure that learning can be applied and integrated to improve project effectiveness.

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40 Michael Quinn Patton distinguishes between evaluative thinking, a systematic results-oriented way of thinking that becomes meaningful when embedded into an organisational culture, and the activity of evaluation itself. Michael Quinn Patton, Evaluation Flash Cards: Embedding Evaluative Thinking in Organisational Culture (Otto Bremer Foundation, 2014).
**Table 4.1: Evaluation approaches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation approaches</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action Evaluation</td>
<td>Action research seeks to enable transformative change through the critical reflective learning generated during the simultaneous process of taking action and doing research. Action research often employs participatory methods and mixed teams of practitioners and researchers. As an evaluation method it enables project stakeholders to articulate and reach their goals, to satisfy evaluative requirements and to enhance programme effectiveness. The process facilitates and merges effective programme design, implementation and monitoring with evaluation through an interactive goal definition process that seeks to define shared goals in order to better achieve them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental evaluation</td>
<td>Developmental Evaluation is an approach that seeks to support innovation and development, especially in complex and unstable settings, by guiding adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities. It integrates evaluative thinking throughout the project cycle through the presence of an embedded evaluator and the use of collaborative, action-oriented tools. It particularly suited to new initiatives to get ongoing, real-time feedback about what is emerging and their implications and impacts. Pioneered by Michael Quinn Patton, it has used by various INGOS in post conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory evaluation</td>
<td>In participatory evaluation all the project stakeholders – those directly affected by or benefiting from a project and those implementing it – actively contribute to the evaluation process and to the understanding of a project and in applying that understanding to improve the work being undertaken. Stakeholder involvement can happen at any or various stages of the evaluation process from design to data collection, analysis and reporting and is facilitated using different kinds of participatory methods (both qualitative and quantitative). The type and level of stakeholder involvement can vary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles-focused evaluation</td>
<td>Principles-focused evaluation is used to assess interventions that are principle driven. Building on developmental evaluation, it is relevant to projects working in complex, dynamic environments where programmes are adapted to changing circumstances using principles to guide and navigate decisions and actions. Principles-focused evaluation examines 1) whether principles are clear, meaningful and actionable, 2) whether they are being followed and if so, 3) whether they are leading to the desired results.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41 [https://www.dmeforpeace.org/developmental-evaluation/](https://www.dmeforpeace.org/developmental-evaluation/)

42 Patton, *Principles-Focused Evaluation*. 
### Table 4.2: Specific evaluation methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI)</strong></td>
<td>The Everyday Peace Indicators approach (EPI) is a participatory, quantitative impact process that produces and investigates community generated indicators of peace with the aim of meaningfully integrating bottom-up knowledge into policy processes. Instead of external experts determining indicators of success, EPI supports local communities to establish their own indicators of peace and reconciliation in order to determine the impact of interventions and feed into their design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most Significant Change (MSC)</strong></td>
<td>Most Significant Change (MSC) is a narrative based evaluation method which involves participants, communities or stakeholders in a step-by-step process to generate and analyse accounts of change and to decide which of these accounts is the most significant and why. MSC provides information about impact (both intended and unintended) but is also about learning about and clarifying values. Participatory Video Most Significant Change (PVMSC) utilises participatory video within the process as short films are made of selected stories and video screenings engage wider audiences in discussions around the stories and the learning they contain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome harvesting</strong></td>
<td>In outcome harvesting, evidence of what has been achieved is collected and then working backwards it is determined whether and how the project contributed to the observed and documented changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photovoice</strong></td>
<td>Photovoice is a participatory visual research method that can be adapted to evaluation. It involves project stakeholders or community members taking photographs in response to specific evaluative questions or themes and through a participatory analysis process selecting the most important images that identify and communicate community concerns and priorities. Subsequently the photographs are used in exhibitions or other outputs to communicate evaluation findings and generate dialogue. Photovoice is also used as an action research and community advocacy method.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theory of change</strong></td>
<td>A Theory of Change is an explanatory model of change that seeks to make clear how a project produces its desired outcomes. It outlines the problem a project is seeking to tackle, what it aims to do and the activities, outputs and assumptions it involves, elucidating why a set of activities will produce the outcomes. Theories of Change are constructed by determining the desired outcomes and then identifying what is required to achieve the outcomes. They are used as a planning as well as an evaluative tool.</td>
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What does evaluating reconciliation differently look like?

Examples of how these approaches are being applied in post-conflict contexts demonstrates their compatibility with reconciliation programme evaluation at the project level. They illustrate how evaluation can produce real-time findings that support the strategic development of initiatives as they grow and cope with the uncertain and dynamic environment of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Elements of these approaches are increasingly being adopted and customized by actors across the peacebuilding sector from community-based organisations to international private foundations. Operating within the contexts and confines of their specific organisations, these players are developing modes of evaluative thinking that foster organizational change and generate learning that is relevant and applicable. There is a shift away from causal models of change and a push to understand reconciliation as an unpredictable, non-linear and subjective process that evades definitive measurement. From this starting point, evaluation is harnessed as a tool, not only to assess impact, but as a responsive process that pursues understanding rooted in the stakeholder’s values and perspectives about the kind of change they seek to achieve. It informs adaptive peacebuilding programming, shares learning and builds institutional and staff capacity and knowledge. Evaluation plays an active role in influencing and shaping change.

Private foundations that we spoke to for this research, with a greater freedom to innovate than many public or inter-governmental institutions, are actively pursuing alternative funding and monitoring and evaluation strategies that harness these approaches and succeed in disrupting some of the systemic challenges. These strategies include: allowing potential projects to apply through a rolling open invitation rather than thorough competitive, time bound, themed calls; investing in the building of institutional knowledge; co-developing grant reporting schedules with their grantees; regular and direct communications and contact between donor staff and grantees; site visits to projects; and extensive due diligence and ongoing project monitoring; investing in internal staff capacity rather than working with external experts.

Every organisation, NGO and donor needs to invest in tailoring their own evaluative tools, processes and strategies to fit their programming and the contexts in which they are working. There has been an

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explosion of evaluation activity in the peacebuilding field in the last two decades which has been accompanied by a proliferation of guidance. There is a diverse array of evaluation tools and new ways of using technology and data, but it is hard to navigate the field and to select between all these different tools and approaches when there is no coherent framework in place. The notion of evaluation principles helps, in an atmosphere in which standardized approaches are resisted, to guide practitioners looking to build evaluative thinking and strategies.

However, with no set formulas or coherent guidelines the field can become impossible to navigate. A key challenge for organisations wanting to identify different ways of doing evaluation is the sheer number of approaches and the degree to which they borrow from and develop practices from each other. Given this confusing confluence of diverse new evaluative theories and practices, and because of their shared commitment to context, and collective refusal to adhere to a pre-determined set of methods and activities, we suggest that it is helpful to embed evaluation in a principle-based approach. These principles, which draw on complexity theory, and systems thinking, are offered as a guiding framework to support peacebuilding professionals to identify and understand the key ideas and values that underpin these approaches to doing the evaluation of reconciliation differently. Used alongside evaluation and planning methods such as Theory of Change (see Table 4.2, above), they inform evaluative thinking, creating a set of criteria which practitioners can use to guide and inform monitoring and evaluation processes and activities.

**Evaluation Principles**

We propose a set of Four Principles that serve as the foundations to guide evaluation approaches that are seeking to forge alternative ways of understanding, assessing and accounting for the impact of reconciliation initiatives. These principles are offered as a framework to support practitioners grappling with the array of emerging terms, tools and techniques and who seek to understand the key ideas and values that underpin these approaches.

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48 Scharbatke-Church, ‘Peacebuilding Evaluation’.


50 A principles approach to evaluation draws on the pioneering work of Michael Patton. See, Patton, Michael Quinn, *Principles-Focused Evaluation*.


**Principle 1: Evaluation is co-created via the active and transparent participation of all stakeholders**

Evaluation is understood to be an active and collaborative activity, rather than a paper based, reporting requirement, that is co-created through the input of multiple stakeholders, from beneficiaries and community members to project staff, donors and evaluation practitioners. Understanding evaluation to be co-created distributes ownership and disrupts modes of evaluation that prioritise vertical accountability and external experts. Co-creation requires more direct and multi-lateral communication and contact between stakeholders and evaluators in order for shared learning to emerge. It requires that evaluation become not just the preserve of evaluation experts but a collective undertaking, led and coordinated by external evaluators or internal evaluation leads. When multiple stakeholders are recognized as having input into the learning and also play a role in sharing and applying that knowledge evaluation improves practice by amplifying networks, supporting peer-learning, and building capacity.

Evaluation is co-created not just when multiple stakeholders’ input into the monitoring and generation of data, but also when they participate in analysing and making sense of emergent findings and in the dissemination of learning and in the implementation of recommendations. This is especially useful in complex situations where the meaning and significance of information can be difficult to predetermine and interpret.

To date, the beneficiaries or participants in peacebuilding programmes have been largely excluded from evaluation. Evaluation relies heavily on indicators and measures set by external actors and experts, which purport to measure progress according to standards defined by outsiders to the affected community even though it has been established that beneficiaries define peacebuilding effectiveness differently to external interveners. The failure to include local perspectives and priorities has resulted in misguided, top down interventions that end up alienating communities and at worse exacerbating conflict and divisions. Participatory evaluation approaches and methods, that actively seek to include the stakeholders of a project in the evaluation process, are now increasingly mainstream. Stakeholders can include donors and project organisers as well as the intended beneficiaries, but the emphasis has been on recognizing the important contribution that local communities and project beneficiaries have to make to evaluation.

However, in many instances the modes of participation used are tokenistic. Beneficiaries are still predominantly called on as sources of information or evaluation data rather than viewed as active participants in the evaluation process. Examples of evaluations that utilize participatory methods exist, such as Most Significant Change, PVMSC, Every-Day Peace Indicators and Photovoice, where participants play a role in the generation and analysis of evaluation criteria and data, and in the discussion and dissemination of findings, but they are sporadically supported by donors. Participatory methods require specialist expertise, resources and organizational commitment. It might not always be possible to facilitate meaningful participation in evaluations, but it is vital that beneficiaries are actively consulted and

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that their voices are incorporated. Evaluations should avoid using misleading language that suggests that there has been more participation than has actually occurred. The should ask how different stakeholder groups are contributing to the process, and what active roles they are playing in the generation, analysis and dissemination of findings. Evaluation needs clearly to demonstrate how all stakeholders, including beneficiaries, are being consulted and to be transparent about how substantive their level of participation is.

**Principle 2: Evaluation is embedded, continuous and longitudinal**

Evaluative thinking and learning needs to be embedded into organizational culture. With the cost of external evaluation often being prohibitive, the emphasis is on building internal evaluative knowledge. When evaluation is internally embedded it becomes more than a one-off enterprise. Evaluation is not something external that is carried out after the project completes but rather actively owned and enacted by the key project stakeholders and any commissioned evaluators over time.

This can be achieved if greater emphasis is given to monitoring and evaluation at every stage of the project process. Evaluation is integrated from the outset into the project planning, design and implementation as a long-term, strategic and reflective element of the overall project approach. Ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning activities run alongside project activities and time is dedicated to analysing and reflecting on data so that learning can inform the strategic development of a project and adaptations to the programme. There is discussion and clarity from the start among the stakeholders about the role and purpose of the evaluation, when and how it will be done and by whom and how findings will be shared, integrated and acted on.

The emphasis moves away from excessive planning or pre-determining of activities and indicators to ongoing tracking and learning from outcomes through regular interaction and dialogue between the key stakeholders. This activity becomes part of the intensive day to day work of the project team. Real-time, iterative cycles of learning inform adaptive peacebuilding strategies. The focus is on what emerges and on continuous collective appraisals about progress rather than on what was planned. Iterative cycles enable cumulative assessment reporting so that a picture emerges of the cumulative impact of projects over time. Continuous monitoring is vital to working with risk and in environments which are unstable and constantly changing and evolving. It recognizes that a project, that could be deemed as successful one year, the following year might be no longer effective or even detrimental because the context has changed. With continuous monitoring changing circumstances and emerging issues are detected and project adaptations can be made in a timely fashion.

The focus is not only on short-term, quantifiable results but on long-term impact and applied learning that is integrated and used to adapt activities over time. Such a longitudinal approach requires ongoing investment in terms of dedicated time, resources and staff training and capacity building. It requires a whole project commitment to prioritizing monitoring and evaluation activities and to act on the learning that emerges by working in iterative cycles to adapt project thinking and activities. It is key to mitigate the negative effects of short-termism by taking a longitudinal approach to evaluation, that seeks to account for what happens not only in the short-term, to funders of specific projects, but also seeks to build a deeper understanding of an intervention’s dynamics and effects over time, pursuing the building of learning around long-term strategic objectives that span 5-10 years.

**Principle 3: Evaluation is context driven**
Evaluation methods and strategies must be shaped by the parameters of the intervention and context in which it is taking place rather than pre-determined by the application of standardised evaluation models and frameworks. When people with experience and specialist knowledge of the country, conflict and community play an active role in evaluation, informed decisions can be made about what methods and approaches are most appropriate and an extra dimension is brought to the analysis of findings. With a shift away from an over-reliance on pre-determined indicators, there is an emphasis on ongoing evaluative observation, assessment and judgements and the cumulative know-how of people who can interpret and understand the context is key. Impact is defined in broader terms, not only according to the discrete and direct effects of an intervention, but in relation to how an intervention impacts within the context of the wider political and community context. Customising evaluation to context puts more control and ownership into the hands of project stakeholders, who rather than having to implement standardized tools can adapt methods according to what makes most sense within their initiatives.

Customising evaluation requires a multi-modal, pluralist and interdisciplinary approach to evaluation methods and strategies. Multiple methods that incorporate both qualitative and quantitative approaches may at times seem incompatible but are key to capturing different forms of data and perspectives. These in turn generate different forms of insight and learning. Any single data source has strengths and weaknesses. The commodification or standardisation of specific methods undermines their efficacy. Using multiple methods allows for the triangulation of findings across different sources and for evaluators to explore for conflicts, consistencies or overlapping patterns and insights that emerge between them. No one method provides privileged insight. Different methods can complement and enhance each other, providing depth and multi-layered viewpoints. An incomplete range of perspectives, on the other hand, raises questions about the validity of the evaluation.

Methods are flexible and adaptive and evaluation comprises multiple forms of data, designs and foci, depending on the questions being asked and what is appropriate for the particular stakeholder, intervention and context. Systems thinking foregrounds the understanding of interrelationships, engages with multiple perspectives and reflexively reflects on the practical and ethical implications of methods choices. This involves recognising that every viewpoint is partial. The collation of multiple viewpoints is necessary to track the linear and non-linear relationships, intended and unintended interactions and outcomes and hypothesized and unpredicted results. While the use of multiple methods to evaluate a singular, short term intervention might not always be possible or appropriate, multimodal evaluation can be applied over time with the application of different evaluation methods at different points in programme stages or iterations. A bricolage and pragmatic approach to the use and application of methods is key.

**Principle 4: Evaluation as independently peer evaluated and shared**

Validation is essential to ensure accountability and it is vital that evaluations are validated by actors independent from, or external to, the initiative being evaluated. Previously, an emphasis on methodological competence and rigour and external, independent expertise was a primary determinant of evaluation validity. However, validation can take a number of forms. With the high cost of external evaluation experts being prohibitive for many and an emerging shift towards internally embedding evaluative culture within organisations, there is a need for the development of new modes of independent peer review and validation. Now there is an increasing emphasis on how evaluation is facilitated and implemented to ensure the meaningful involvement of key stakeholders and how this engagement shapes their judgment about the credibility of an evaluation’s findings and their openness to implement and share the learning it contains.
Evaluations can of course be conducted by independent external evaluators or would ideally involve external evaluation expertise and support; however, when there is less resource available, validation can also come in the form of the peer review of activities, data and findings. The creation of a pool of non-commercial peer evaluators drawn from practitioners, specialists, academics and funders from local, regional and international levels (rather than corporate consultancy firms) would enable evaluations to be independently reviewed and validated. Harnessing practitioner networks and exchanges, project visits and interviews, a peer review process simultaneously validates evaluation and cross fertilises knowledge and learning. Independent advisors, field, technical or community experts, can provide targeted assessments and reviews of evaluations or activities directly. Collaborations with academics and research institutions allow for another form of independent validation.

Central to this is the sharing of evaluation and the communication of findings, not only to ensure accountability, but to the implementation of learning and building improved and adapted reconciliation interventions. Co-creating evaluation and working collaboratively to understanding findings and their implications mean that evaluative learning is shared as part of an active process through separate stakeholder networks rather than sitting unread in reports on hard drives. When it is further communicated to groups outside an intervention’s immediate stakeholder circles, learning is amplified as it can be cross referenced and compared with the experience of other initiatives. Evaluations can be acted upon, and the wider field can benefit from the knowledge generated as learning is disseminated thorough diverse networks and channels.

The public sharing of evaluation findings and learning can fall off the agenda when projects and organisations are working with limited time, capacity, or resources or actively keep their findings internal. However, it is vital that the communication of evaluation findings is given sufficient importance and viewed as an essential component of evaluative process. Increasing headway is being made in the accessible sharing of learning and knowledge via virtual presentations, podcasts, resource libraries, media galleries and blogs on platforms such as DM&E for Peace.55 Ensuring that learning is successfully distilled and communicated in accessible formats allows it to reach wider audiences and enables the wider field to build up collective and cumulative knowledge.

55 https://www.dmeforpeace.org/
5. CONCLUSION

With no set formulas or standardised strategies, the evaluation field can become impossible to navigate. There are major challenges to the effective evaluation of reconciliation, but there are also opportunities with the development of new evaluative approaches that are specifically geared for complexity, risk and innovation and hard to measure concepts.

The Four Principles set out in this report offer a framework to help to support peacebuilding professionals to identify and understand the key ideas and values that underlie approaches to doing the evaluation of reconciliation differently. These principles are offered as a non-prescriptive framework to underpin evaluative thinking and the planning, design and implementation of monitoring and evaluation activities using methods such as Theory of Change. New bearings in the evaluation of post-conflict interventions can be developed, centred around these Four Principles:

1. **Evaluation is co-created via the active and transparent participation of all stakeholders**

2. **Evaluation is embedded, continuous and longitudinal**

3. **Evaluation is context driven**

4. **Evaluation is independently peer evaluated and shared**

These principles have been created to serve practitioners, communities, donors and organisations seeking to find new ways to tackle the complex challenge of evaluating reconciliation. The mode of evaluation captured in these guiding principles advocates participation and the co-creation and application of learning in iterative cycles that become embedded in reconciliation programming. They embody a form of strategic and adaptive peacebuilding that pushes beyond traditional outputs and indicators focused on linear, results focused models of evaluation, and looks to longitudinal impact and emergent, process-based learning.

The 2015 UN decennial review of its peacebuilding architecture acknowledged peacebuilding to be a political activity that must avoid one-size-fits-all solutions and rather work towards sustainable peace and reconciliation by building resilience and local ownership. These guiding principles seek to distribute and apply the benefits of evaluative thinking and learning to ensure accountability, not only to donors but to conflict affected communities and beneficiaries, and to enhance the quality and impact of reconciliation.

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56 Theory of Change is a method used in planning and evaluation that defines long term goals and works backwards to explain how the desired outcomes will be reached. See Table 4.2 for more detail.

programmes. The principles are based on our assessment of ‘what works’ in arts-based reconciliation activity. We advocate a collaborative approach to evaluation in which evaluative thinking is strategically embedded into the whole project cycle, over time, in which learning agendas and the indicators and criteria for success are defined by all the project stakeholders (including, most crucially, conflict affected beneficiaries and communities) and learning is independently validated, shared, communicated and acted on.
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Art and Reconciliation – the PCRC and ASBO Magazine, AHRC-GCRF AH/T007966/1, 2020-21.