Infrastructures for Peace at the grassroots: investigating the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations in North Macedonia.

Final Dissertation

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SUMMARY

Building sustainable peace in countries that experienced protracted violence demonstrates to be rather challenging. Since the end of the Cold War, the International Community has struggled to figure out the optimal recipe to lay the foundations for enduring stability in post-war scenarios, while conflict kept on recurring in countries where peace had already been secured, at least on paper. Within the peacebuilding debate involved with solving this troubling issue, the doctrine of Infrastructures for Peace emerged, showing an unprecedented potential to address conflict in a transformative and sustainable manner. Given that little research exists in this domain of peace studies, this dissertation chose to explore in-depth a practical experience of Infrastructures for Peace mandated to enhance peacebuilding at the grassroots level. These are the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations in North Macedonia, established as peacebuilding platforms to enhance inter-ethnic dialogue at the community level. Starting from the hypothesis that the Commissions are not fulfilling their prerogatives as local peace infrastructures, the research sought to dig deeper into their examination, trying to answer the question: are the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations living up to the expectations as effective Infrastructures for Peace?

Through an exploratory single case study design, the research outlines evident gaps in the Commissions' functioning, which are currently not fulfilling their prerogatives as Infrastructures for Peace at the grassroots. By triangulating findings from interviews with secondary sources' data, the investigation concludes that the Commissions never played a decisive role in the improvement of inter-ethnic relations at the Municipal level, as they were majorly bypassed by political authorities. Moreover, the research shows that political influence and lack of technical as well as financial support stand out as major obstacles to their working capacity. Notably, the politicization of these organs detrimentally affects the dimensions of transparency, accessibility, and participation that this dissertation keenly considered. Lastly, the thesis concludes by forwarding recommendations with policy implication to suggest improvements in light of the evidenced shortcomings.

ADDENDUM – CORONAVIRUS HARDSHIP

The research work was partially affected and challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic. As specified within the same dissertation, my initial plan consisted of conducting research directly on the field in North Macedonia, as a way to maximize the research scope and get an in-depth sense of the reference context. To this purpose, I had already contacted officials from international organizations and members from the Center for Inter-Cultural Dialogue, who had made themselves available to materially support the research development as well as my stay in the country. My initial idea was of spending the whole month of April in North Macedonia, to recruit and run a substantial number of interviews and explore first-hand the working conditions of some Commissions for Inter-Community Relations. However, this was made impossible by the outbreak, leading to a forced downsizing of the research outreach. Unfortunately, the online means of communication did not reveal to be equally effective at the time of reaching out to possible participants to the interview process, considerably prolonging the recruitment process. Moreover, the hardship created by the pandemic in North Macedonia affected the response time and readiness of candidates. I sought to minimize the underlined challenges by contacting a high number of possible interviewees *via* email and capitalizing on the already-recruited participants' networks. The support received by some of them was fundamental to finally reach out to a minimum number of respondents to conduct the interviews.

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INFRASTRUCTURES FOR PEACE AT THE GRASSROOTS: INVESTIGATING THE COMMISSIONS FOR INTER-COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN NORTH MACEDONIA

by

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List of Abbreviations

CDI	Community Development Initiative
CICR	Commission for Inter-Community Relations
CID	Center for Intercultural Dialogue
CSO	Civil Society Organization
I4P	Infrastructures for Peace
IGO	International Governmental Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MK	North Macedonia
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NLA	National Liberation Army
LLSG	Law on Local Self-Government
LPC	Local Peace Council
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OFA	Ohrid Framework Agreement
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SG	Secretary General
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

"Let us create the social space that brings Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace together within a conflicted group or setting. Then energies are crystallized that create deeper understanding and unexpected new paths, leading toward restoration and reconciliation"

- John Paul Lederach

1) INTRODUCTION

Since the creation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, the International Community[1] has kept the fostering of peace worldwide as a primary objective. The Charter drafted during the San Francisco Conference stated peremptorily the necessity to join endeavors to achieve peace internationally and to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war".[2] The question of whether this objective has been achieved as of today has been resounding for years in academia and across policymaking environments. By observing the intensity and frequency of armed violence in the last few decades, the answer seems negative. The Peace Research Institute of Oslo's[3] dataset on armed conflicts offer a contrasting scenario to the expectations cherished by the Charter. Despite a stark decline in the frequency of inter-States wars, the overall number of conflicts shows an upward trend.[4] Although different interpretations[5] have been given to the data, some facts appear not debatable. Noticeably, in the last two decades, the number of intra-States wars tripled, followed by war casualties.[6] What stands out even more is the conflict relapse rate. According to the 2011 World Development Report, more than 90% of the civil conflicts occurring between 2000 and 2011 burst in countries that had experienced a civil war in the past 30 years.[7] More studies add that a quarter of all peace agreements signed are likely to collapse within five years, and nearly half of them do not last more than ten years.[8] In 2005, this shortcoming was deplored by the SG Annan as he announced the Peacebuilding Commission's creation.[9] Worryingly, only a few peace processes of the contemporary era led to stable

[1] For the purposes of this dissertation, we will employ a comprehensive definition of 'International Community'. This is both an overlapping and interconnected community of nation-States, that may join efforts and capabilities to give rise to common and shared institutions, as well as a more persons-based notion of "Community of People", together with all its more or less organized extensions (e.g. NGOs). For the people-centered definition see: Bado Arsène Brice, "Understanding the International Community", *Hekima Review*, No. 44 (2011).
[2] UN Charter, Preamble and Article 1.
[3] PRIO has dealt since the postwar period with collecting data on armed conflicts.
[4] Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), "Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946-2016", *PRIO*, February 2017 (available at https://www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.ashx?id=1373&type=publicationfile).
[5] A debate inflames the academia concerning the issue of interpretation of the data on armed violence. See for example: Steven Pinker, "Why the World Is More Peaceful", *Current History*, Vol. 111, No. 741 (2012); John Gray, "Steven Pinker is wrong about violence and war", *The Guardian*, March 2015 (available https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/13/john-gray-steven-pinker-wrong-violence-war-declining).
[6] PRIO, *supra* note 4.
[7] World Bank, "World Development Report 2011", *World Bank*, February 2011 (available at http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/806531468161369474/pdf/622550PUB0WDR0000public00BOX361476B.pdf), 2.
[8] See for example: Paul Collier, V. L. Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol & Nicholas Sambanis, "Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy", *World Bank*, May 2003 (available at http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/908361468779415791/pdf/multi0page.pdf).
[9] Annan confirmed the trend for which "half of the countries emerging from violent conflict revert to conflict within 5 years". See: UN General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General, *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all*, UN Doc. A/59/2005, 21 March 2005, para. 114.

settlements.[10] The recurrence of violence cycles[11] proves the partial inability of the International Community to design effective peace-oriented strategies in the aftermath of conflict to avoid its resurgence.[12] As a whole, one of the main issues in our contemporary era is not much related to the prevention of new wars, but with the permanent termination of those that have already started.[13] This fundamental objective began to be addressed at a systematic level especially since the early 90s, labeling the related efforts under the encompassing term of 'peacebuilding'. This latter had been existing already in the practice of a few NGOs. However, solely from the last decade of the 20th century it started to be part of the UN vocabulary[14] and connected to a broad combination of multi-structured efforts and multi-stakeholder processes aimed to enhance countries' capabilities for achieving long-lasting peace. However, empirics suggest that the current understanding of structures that can sustain peace in the long term appear substantially inadequate.[15] International actors committed to peacebuilding often struggle to ensure sustainable conditions for conflict prevention and *transformation* in post-war scenarios. The precepts delineated in San Francisco cannot be fulfilled as far as peace is not correctly grounded in a sustainable manner.

The literature has widely explored this issue, seeking to sort out the ideal recipe for building peace in war-shattered countries. Some have emphasized the concept of peacebuilding as statebuilding, but neglecting the grassroots dimensions of peace and, in the case of the UN, relying too often on short-term *ad hoc* interventions. The presentation of the debate on peacebuilding will serve as the introductory framework for the investigation. The significance of merging statebuilding objectives with efforts at the grassroots level is recognized, whereas current peacebuilding endeavors have largely favored in an exclusive manner one or the other. To this aim, the ultimate goal of this dissertation is to bring a valid contribution to the field of peace and conflict studies by shedding light

[10] Fernand Varennes, *Peace Accords and Ethnic Conflicts: A Comparative Analysis of Content and Approaches*, in: John Derby & roger Mac Ginty (eds.), Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes, 2003, 151.
[11] World Bank, *supra* note 7, 2.
[12] This is worsened by the fact that when the perspectives of building peace collapse, violence is usually greater and all gains from any development process erased. Collier et al. define 'reverse development' as the obliteration of development gains as a consequence of conflict relapse. See: Charles T. Call & Elizabeth M. Cousens, "Ending Wars and Building Peace: International Responses to War-Torn Societies", *International Studies Perspectives*, No. 9 (2008), 1; Collier, Elliott, Hegre, Hoeffler, Reynal-Querol & Sambanis, *supra* note 8, 13-32.
[13] Barbara F. Walter, "Conflict Relapse and the Sustainability of Post-Conflict Peace", *World Bank*, Background Paper, September 2010 (available at http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/128031468182669586/pdf/620260WP0Confl0BOX0361475B00PUBLIC0.pdf), 2
[14] See for example: UN General Assembly - Security Council, *Report on the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, UN Doc. A/55/305 – S/2000/809, 21 August 2000.
[15] Hans J. Giessman, "Embedded Peace. Infrastructures for Peace: Approaches and Lesson Learned", *Berghof Foundation – UNDP*, 2016 (available at https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Conflict%20Prevention/Berghof-UNDP_EmbeddedPeaceI4P_2016.pdf), 5.

on one area of peacebuilding that has received attention only in recent times, that is the topic of Infrastructures for Peace (I4P). Having been introduced by Lederach during the late 90s, the expression took hold in academia and international *fora* thanks to the successful establishment of I4P in countries such as Kenya and Ghana. However, it is still on the process of finding a concrete grounding within the field, backed by solid empirical evidence. I4P own the potential to compensate for the deficiencies of current gaping approaches to peacebuilding, fostering self-sustaining peace in societies formerly embroiled in violence. While peacebuilding has traditionally sought to join disconnected interventions at various levels to build synergies for sustainable peace, I4P theory focuses on structuring interrelated cooperative mechanisms from top to bottom and *vice versa*.[16] I4P are finally able to provide societies with organizational and structural capacities for *conflict transformation*, rather than merely relying on changing "the hearts and minds" of the parties in conflict.[17]

To give prominence to the ground-breaking concept of I4P, and drawing on the solicitation of several authors towards expanding empirical research on this domain,[18] this dissertation will resort to the analysis of the case study of the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations (CICRs)[19] in North Macedonia (MK). These Local Peace Councils (LPCs) were conceived as part of the Ohrid Framework Agreement that put an end to a period of armed violence between the Albanian-ethnic insurgent group NLA and government armed forces. The primary justification for this case study's choice lies in the fact that MK shows a scenario in which I4P were institutionalized in State bodies as an integral part of the peace process. A more in-depth assessment of Commissions' functioning is deemed valuable for fostering the understanding of top-down I4P acting at the grassroots, producing valuable findings for the advancement of the field of I4P and for guiding practice improvement with feasible policy implications. The author does not have pretensions of generalization, but it is believed that sharing lessons-learned can be useful for the improvement of comparable efforts in designing I4P in similar contexts.

[16] Ulrike Hopp-Nishanka, "Giving Peace an Address? Reflections on the Potential and Challenges of Creating Peace Infrastructures", *Berghof Foundation*, June 2012 (available at https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Dialogue_Chapters/dialogue10_hopp_nishanka_lead.pdf), 1.
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] See for example: Kai Brand-Jacobsen, "Infrastructures for Peace (I4P): A Critical New Frontier in Peacebuilding", *Department of Peace Operations*, Discussion Paper, September 2013 (available at https://kaibrandjacobsen.wordpress.com/2013/09/02/infrastructure-for-peace/); Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 4.
[19] The Commissions appear in the literature also with the appellation of "Committees" and "Councils". The three titles are considered by the author interchangeably.

Overall, this dissertation wants to answer to the following Research Question: are the CICRs living up to the expectations as effective I4P? The investigation moves from the hypothesis that the Councils are barely functional, as drawn by previous research assessments. Finally, it will be argued that although the CICRs represented a breakthrough in the way they institutionalized inter-ethnic dialogue in MK, their capacity to serve as peacebuilding platforms dedicated to join-problem solving and cooperation among ethnic communities remains mostly negligible.

The thesis is split into five parts. Chapter 2 presents an overview of peacebuilding to introduce the current status of the field and provide the theoretical framework of the research. This step is necessary to introduce the topic of I4P, covered in the last section of the Chapter. Next, Chapter 3 describes the research design and elucidates the methods employed to collect and process the data. Within the methodological framework, the CICRs case study is contextualized. Chapter 4 is devoted to displaying the research findings by resorting to a thematic analysis. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the results and reflects on the effectiveness of the CICRs in performing their mandate, by drawing on the I4P literature. Finally, recommendations originated from the discussion are put forward. The last Chapter contains the conclusions and proposes avenues for further research.

2) PEACEBUILDING: A BROAD FIELD

What follows aims to give an extensive overview of the status of the theoretical debate on peacebuilding. Notably, the discussion will elucidate how scholars and actors engaged first-hand with peacebuilding answered the critical question: 'How can peace be effectively built?'. Introducing one of the central theoretical debates in the field of peacebuilding serves the purpose of outlining how peacebuilding objectives of building peace starting from building State institutions or, instead, from local peacebuilding processes have been often contemplated following a 'silo mentality', meaning that one objective was considered as independent or at the expenses of the attainment of the other. From here, the innovation brought by the topic of I4P finds room. The peacebuilding contrasting stances will be finally reconciled through the concept of I4P, nevertheless inserting this specific research work within the 'grassroots peacebuilding' strand as we will explore I4P operating at the grassroots level. The theoretical framework is not inducive of any theory that is directly employed, proven, or disproven through the investigation process. However, it serves the purpose of positioning the research work within the existent literature on peacebuilding, leaning towards the area of I4P. The following *excursus* seeks to shed clarity on the theoretical domain we are operating in, and it will represent the introductory conduit for the exploration of the CICRs case study.

At the time of Annan's report *"In larger freedom"* in 2005, the notion of peacebuilding had already made its way in both the language and praxis of the UN and other international agencies. In 1992, SG Boutros-Ghali introduced it to the UN's vocabulary within his *Agenda for Peace*. Peacebuilding was defined as an "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict".[20] During the 90s, the adoption of the peacebuilding lexicon progressively occurred also for other international actors,[21] that increasingly saw it as being instrumental to broader humanitarian and security objectives of the international agenda.[22] Authors and key practitioners agree that peacebuilding entails more than merely separating enemies and accommodating belligerent parts' interests (peacekeeping and peacemaking respectively); instead, it

[20] UN General Assembly - Security Council, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping: Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 21 January 1992*, UN Doc. A/47/277 – S/24111, 17 June 1992, para. 21.
[21] See for example: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Peacebuilding: a development perspective*, 2004 (available at https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/vedlegg/fredsarbeid/peace_engelsk.pdf); Department for International Development, *Review of the UK government approach to Peacebuilding*, 2003 (available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67945/ev646s.pdf).
[22] Michael Barnett, Hunjoon Kim, Madalene O' Donnell & Laura Sitea, "Peacebuilding: What is in a Name?", *Global Governance*, No. 13 (2007), 43.

aims to address the underlying factors of the conflict and promote social recovery.[23] Nevertheless, its definition features a considerable variation of meanings. The next paragraph will turn to shed light on this point by reviewing the relevant literature and contributions thereon.

2.1 A 'CONTESTED UNDERSTANDING' OF PEACEBUILDING

In the definition provided by Collins Dictionary, peacebuilding is "the application of measures to maintain peace in an area that has been previously affected by conflict".[24] Although the concept may resound unequivocal, even its most straightforward formulation is ambiguous. For instance, the assumption that peace is a univocal concept has been largely disputed, and there is today a broad consensus on the differentiation between Positive and Negative peace.[25] It is indisputable that even the most basic definition paves the way for an extension of peacebuilding conceptual span, raising a number of issues to be addressed. One of the most crucial points regards the operational focus of peacebuilding, namely which measures have to be taken and which methodologies to be implemented to build peace. One of the major challenges of peacebuilding is related to "problems caused by confused and contested understandings of what it means to build peace in the aftermath of war".[26] The literature exposes the fact that peacebuilding has attracted a surplus of theoretical contributions,[27] often at odds with each other, at the expense of its operational effectiveness.[28] In other words, peacebuilding has emerged as an "overarching multidimensional concept", which nonetheless often falls shorts of practical effectiveness.[29]

The debate around peacebuilding counts innumerable contributions. David asserts that there are "as many visions of peacebuilding as there are experts on the issue and actors on the field."[30] Barnett et

[23] Charles T. Call & Susan E. Cook, "On Democratization and Peacebuilding," *Global Governance*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2003), 233.
[24] Collins English Dictionary, Definition of Peacebuilding.
[25] In recent times, the academia and key practitioners in the field have increasingly accepted and adopted a dual definition of peace: 'Negative peace' as the absence of violence and 'Positive peace' underling the existence of structures, networks and a cultural framework able to address the root causes of conflicts and enhance peace sustainably. See: Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*, 1996, 31-32. Also: UN General Assembly – Security Council, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations ("Brahimi Report")*, UN Doc. A/55/305-S/2000/809, 21 August 2000, para. 13.
[26] Erin McCandless & Vanessa Wyeth, "Seeking the Forest through the Trees: Institutional Arrangements and Tools for Peacebuilding", *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2008), 1.
[27] See for example: John Heathershaw, "Unpacking the Liberal Peace: The Dividing and Merging of Peacebuilding Discourses", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2008).
[28] See for example: Call & Cook, *supra* note 23, 242.
[29] Michael Lund, "What Kind of Peace is Being Built? Taking Stock of Post-Conflict Peacebuilding and Charting Future Directions, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Discussion Paper, January 2003 (available at http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.494.1386&rep=rep1&type=pdf), 13.
[30] Charles-Philippe David, "Does Peacebuilding Build Peace?", *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1999), 27.

al. claim that while it exists a substantial agreement on peacebuilding as a political symbol, actors disagree on the actual content of peacebuilding, namely which kind of activities need to be prioritized.[31] Extensively, Jenkins recognizes four sources of variation in the definition of peacebuilding.[32] For example, the time frame in which the efforts take place is among them. Peacebuilding can be intended to forestall the initial outbreak of conflict (pre-conflict peacebuilding or conflict prevention) or to prevent its resurgence (post-conflict peacebuilding). Most commonly, the use of the term 'peacebuilding' is equated with post-conflict efforts. The researcher followed this line of definition, since the investigation focused on I4P surged in the aftermath of internal clashes in MK. Nevertheless, this should not mislead to think that peacebuilding can be implemented exclusively when the hostilities formally end. Instead, peace must be envisioned as a process that can start to be built in the immediate outbreak phase of a conflict, and not just. Its fostering can begin even before violence bursts, through the design of conflict prevention, early warning, and *conflict transformation* structures.

Call and Cook recognize two main strands of the peacebuilding literature, divided following the operational focus of the activities in place.[33] The first strand would originate from the definition given by Boutros-Ghali in his *Agenda for Peace*. The erstwhile SG explicitly referred to "rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife"[34], giving to peacebuilding a connotation that much has to do with the broader concept of statebuilding.[35] Conversely, the alternative strand emphasizes nonelite processes, namely the reconstruction of the social fabric and other dimensions of non-violent conflict resolution operating at the community level.[36] Drawing inspiration on this latter categorization, the next sections are dedicated to present the status of the described peacebuilding debate.

2.2 PEACEBUILDING AS BUILDING INSTITUTIONS

Throughout the Cold War, the main responses to war contemplated by the UN relied on brokering peace agreements (peacemaking) or deploying light-armored troops to ensure ceasefires

[31] Barnett, Kim, O' Donnell & Sitea, *supra* note 22, 44.
[32] These are: (1) time dimension, (2) the objective and (3) methods of the peacebuilding action as well as the (4) type of actors involved in the process. See: Robert Jenkins, *Peacebuilding: From Concept to Commission*, 2013, 19.
[33] Call & Cook, *supra* note 23, 235.
[34] UN General Assembly 47/277 – Security Council 24111, *supra* note 20, para. 15.
[35] And defined by the authors as focusing on "elite processes". See: Call & Cook, supra note 23, 235.
[36] *Ibid.*

(peacekeeping). Nevertheless, the end of the Cold War introduced renovated conflict and instability at the intra-State level. As the world began to witness to the burst of violent civil strives such as the wars in the Balkans, the UN increased the span of its peace operations, starting to go beyond the rigid approaches of peacemaking and peacekeeping. It was in this context that the SG proposed a new taxonomy of UN peace operations.[37] By observing the examples provided within the *Agenda for Peace*,[38] it appears clear that the UN conceived peacebuilding as the rebuilding of States' networks and structures, showing a particular inclination towards "strengthening [of] new democratic institutions".[39] In the 1995 *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace*, it was expanded that the essential goal of post-war efforts must be "the creation of structures for the institutionalization of peace",[40] remarking the importance of functioning State structures[41] able to heal the frictions between former warring parties.[42] The term 'peacebuilding' was preferred to the notion of 'statebuilding', as this latter could convey a greater idea of intrusiveness and result more politically charged.[43] The majority of the UN-led peace operations during the 90s followed a pattern based on two pillars: democratization and marketization.[44] Following documents[45] consolidated the UN vision.[46] Such a stance on peacebuilding was, in turn, adopted by other IOs,[47] external stakeholders[48] and donors that came to

[37] Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*, 2004, 18.
[38] The 1992 report provides some examples of peacebuilding activities: "disarming the previously warring parties and the restoration of order, the custody and possible destruction of weapons, repatriating refugees, advisory and training support for security personnel, monitoring elections, advancing efforts to protect human rights, reforming or strengthening governmental institutions and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation". See: UN General Assembly 47/277 – Security Council 24111, *supra* note 20, para. 55.
[39] *Ibid*, para. 59.
[40] UN General Assembly - Security Council, *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace*, UN Doc. A/50/60 – S/1995/1, 25 January 1995, para. 49.
[41] The State was put under the spotlight as there started to emerge a strong consensus that the core cause of conflict was produced by the existence of a weak or failed State. See: Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 2001, 25.
[42] Through, for example, their transformation into political parties. UN General Assembly - Security Council, *supra* note 40, para. 100.
[43] Thorsten Benner, Andrea Binder, and Philipp Rotmann, "Learning to Build Peace? United Nations Peacebuilding and Organizational Learning: Developing a Research Framework, *Global Public Policy Institute*, Research Paper, 2007 (available at https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/31421/Learning_to_Build_Peace.pdf), 13.
[44] Paris, *supra* note 37, 19.
[45] See for example: UN General Assembly, *An Agenda for Development*, UN Doc. A/48/935, 6 May 1994; United Nations Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, *An inventory of post-conflict peace-building activities*, June 1995.
[46] Stephen Ryan, *The Evolution of Peacebuilding*, in: Roger Mac Ginty (ed.), Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding, 2013, 29.
[47] For example, the OECD recognized that "peacebuilding is not statebuilding", nonetheless conceding that "statebuilding remains a central element […] for institutionalizing peace". See: OECD, "Concepts and Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situations: From Fragility to Resilience", *Journal on Development*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2009), 71.
[48] Nation-building became a key objective of US foreign policy after 9/11 as the attacks strengthened the concerns towards weak or failed States (e.g. Afghanistan). See for example: United States of America, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2002 (available at https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf), 1.

consider statebuilding as the primary objective for the consolidation of peace in the whole international domain.[49]

The UN's conception of post-conflict peacebuilding gave birth to a major strand of the literature on peacebuilding, identifying this latter with the re-construction of the State and the accommodation of elites' interests in what can be considered a "structure-centered" approach.[50] We will now turn to review what scholars have contributed thereupon. Many authors[51] have expanded the UN-originated conceptualization of peacebuilding, asserting how this latter coincides fundamentally with statebuilding prerogatives[52] and that local elites must necessarily make part of the reconstruction efforts.[53] Hartzell and Hoddie resorted to statistical evidence to highlight the effectiveness of establishing power-sharing institutions as a determinant factor increasing the likelihood of durable peace.[54] Furthermore, Zartman and Call stress that a critical vector to peace is the rebuilding of authoritative central power,[55] in the shape of a minimally effective State able to regulate "alternative sources of authority".[56] The authors claim that only a centralizing authority can avoid a lack of certainty in the distribution of State's functions, which may invite challenges from below, undermining peace foundations in the long term.[57] Cliffe and Manning table a similar argument.[58]

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[49] Michael Barnett & Christoph Zürcher, *The peacebuilder's contract: How external statebuilding reinforces weak statehood*, in: Roland Paris & Timothy D. Sisk (eds.), The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the contradictions of postwar peace operations, 2009, 26.

[50] Ryan, *supra* note 46, 33.

[51] For instance, Eva Bertram argues that peacebuilding aims at addressing the root causes of conflict by "building the political conditions for a sustainable, democratic peace". Likewise, Call and Cousens maintain that a minimal level of recognized, effective and legitimate institutions is necessary for peace to be maintained once foreign troops withdrawn from their peacekeeping duties. Nevertheless, the two academics are aware of the intrinsic problems which can rise by focusing solely on statebuilding to endure peace. For example, focusing on statebuilding can foster authoritarian and corrupt regimes that are likely to marginalize segments of the population and hence fuel resentment and armed resistance. See: Eva Bertram, "Reinventing Governments: The Promise and Perils of the United Nations Peacebuilding", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (1995), 388; Call & Cousens, s*upra* note 12, 9-10.

[52] See for example: Michael Barnett, "Building a Republican Peace: Stabilizing States After War", *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2006), 89.

[53] *Ibid*, 110.

[54] Caroline Hartzell & Matthew Hoddie, "Institutionalizing Peace: Power Sharing and Post-Civil War Conflict Management", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (2003), 330.

[55] Zartman argues that this source of authority should be legitimated by the establishment of effective participatory processes. See: William Zartman, *Putting Things Back Together*, in*:* William Zartman (ed.), Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority, 1995, 270-272.

[56] Call puts an emphasis on how such forms of authority (e.g. traditional power structures, religious leaders) can effectively benefit the process of peacebuilding. William Reno represents another author voicing that peacebuilders should not overlook the influence of sub-State authorities, rather, these should be included coherently in the process of statebuilding. See: Charles T. Call, *Building States to Build Peace*?, in: Charles T. Call & Vanessa Wyeth (eds.), Building States to Build Peace, 2008, 365; William Reno, *Bottom-Up Statebuilding?*, in: Charles T. Call & Vanessa Wyeth (eds.), Building States to Build Peace, 2008, 156-158.

[57] Call, *supra* note 56, 371.

[58] The two scholars are keen to underline that institutions-building is critical for the maintenance of peace, as both the 'capacity deficit' and 'legitimacy deficit' manage to be addressed only through the presence of an effective and centralized State authority. 'Capacity deficit' is related to the lack of services' provision to the population. 'Legitimacy deficit' is associated with the fact that the citizens do not hold account of the State. Both are usually characteristics of

Further, Paris and Sisk claim that statebuilding represents a "crucial element" of any process aimed at achieving sustainable peace, without which "post-conflict societies are much less likely to escape the dual 'traps' of violence and poverty".[59] The thinkers expand that "more durable peacebuilding outcomes require more focused attention on building up governmental institutions".[60] Other scholars exhibit akin standings.[61]

2.2.1 CRITICISMS TO THE 'LIBERAL PEACEBUILDING' PARADIGM

Some authors[62] concur that the dimensions introduced by the end of the Cold War posed the basis for the UN's conviction that the build-up of market-oriented democracies would constitute an infallible recipe for peace.[63] The same assumption on the 'liberal peacebuilding' paradigm met the support of various theorists.[64] Liberalization and democratization came to be considered as the best recipe against war recurrence. Nevertheless, other scholars contrast this belief, availing of examples to demonstrate how the liberal peacebuilding paradigm hampered in many cases the actual objectives of peacebuilding.[65] For instance, Ottaway finds out, by reviewing several cases of peacebuilding operations, that, despite its desirability, the so-called 'democratic reconstruction model' had proven "very difficult and very costly in practice".[66] Paris shares the same empirical viewpoint,[67] advocating

fragile and weak States. See: Sarah Cliffe & Nick Manning, *Practical Approaches to Building State Institutions*, in: Charles T. Call & Vanessa Wyeth (eds.), Building States to Build Peace, 2008, 164.

[59] Roland Paris & Timothy D. Sisk, "Managing Contradictions: The Inherent Dilemmas of Postwar Statebuilding", *International Peace Academy*, Research Paper, November 2007 (available at https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/iparpps.pdf), 1.

[60] *Ibid*, 3.

[61] See for example: Samuel R. Berger & Brent Scowcroft, "In the Wake of War: Getting Serious about Nation-Building", *National Interest*, No. 81 (2005); Michael Doyle & Nicholas Sambanis, "International Peacebuilding: A Theoretical and Quantitative Analysis," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 94, No. 4 (2000), 779.

[62] According to Roland Paris, in the aftermath of the Cold War among both peacebuilding practitioners and theorists "market democracy took on the qualities of a universal antidote to misery and conflict". Similarly, Ryan confirms that the 'liberal peace' doctrine that propagated in the post-Cold War era inevitably affected also the peacebuilding realm, despite a lack of empirical proofs of its effectivity in intra-States and post-conflict contexts. See: Paris, *supra* note 37, 35; Ryan, *supra* note 46, 27.

[63] For example, such a conviction is displayed by the 1996 *Agenda for Democratization* in which the Secretary General Boutros-Ghali was keen to underline that "democracy within States [thus] fosters the evolution of the social contract upon which lasting peace can be built". See: Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Democratization*, 1996, 6.

[64] Among others, Michael Doyle was a strong supporter of the so-called 'democratic peace' doctrine, relying on the conviction that democracy could bring peace both among States and within them. See: Michael Doyle, "Liberalism in World Politics", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (1986); Michael Doyle & Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations*, 2006.

[65] See for example: Kristoffer Lidén, "Building Peace between Global and Local Politics: The Cosmopolitical Ethics of Liberal Peacebuilding", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 16, No. 5 (2009); Ken Menkhaus, "Somalia: They Created a Desert and Called It Peace(Building)", *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 36, No. 120 (2009); David Chandler, *International Statebuilding*, 2008, 22-24.

[66] Marina Ottaway, "Promoting Democracy After Conflict: The Difficult Choices", *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 4 (2003), 315.

[67] Paris is strongly skeptical of the so-called 'Wilsonian' peace paradigm according to which building liberal market democracies necessarily foster the conditions for a durable peace. See: Paris, *supra* note 37, 155.

instead for a process of "institutionalization before liberalization".[68] Other authors[69] follow on highlighting the gaping conception of peacebuilding as liberal statebuilding. Particular emphasis is put by some on the limits showed by the democratization process as a "short-run event" imposed by outsiders.[70] Some authors are also wary of the monopolization of statebuilding by outsiders, thus hindering "endogenous processes that may allow peaceful institutions to emerge".[71]

This segment has proven that a consensus exists among several scholars and practitioners on the centrality of statebuilding efforts for the success of peacebuilding. Nevertheless, some authors also acknowledge that building peace through statebuilding entails some core issues worthy of consideration.[72] Others argue that statebuilding should not be an exclusive focus,[73] either the most important since it fails in ensuring durable peace under some respects.[74] On this point, Campbell and Peterson maintain that peacebuilding should aim to build peace in a much broader sense than merely focusing on State institutions.[75] A consistent criticism asserts that peacebuilding in this sphere focuses on 'appeasing' the belligerent parties, meeting their needs and interests, while little attention is paid to the distorted relationships existing in societies emerging from disruptive conflicts.[76] The next section presents the strand of the literature originating from this latter consideration.

[68] Paris outlines the importance of prioritizing the establishment of effective institutions of governance and ensuring political stability as an immediate priority for statebuilding and peacebuilding. The author stresses this point in several publications. See: *Ibid*, 187; Roland Paris, "International Peacebuilding and the 'Mission Civilisatrice'", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2002); Roland Paris, "Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism", *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1997).
[69] See for example: Kimberly Zisk Marten, *Enforcing the Peace: Learning from the Imperial Past*, 2004, 11, 131-132, 141-144; Benjamin Reilly, *Elections in Post-Conflict Societies*, in: Edward Newman & Roland Rich (eds.), The UN Role in Promoting Democracy: Between Ideas and Reality, 2006, 132.
[70] Reilly, *supra* note 69, 132.
[71] Susanna Campbell & Jenny H. Peterson, *Statebuilding*, in: Roger Mac Ginty, (ed.), Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding, 2013, 336.
[72] For example, Sarah Cliffe and Nick Manning highlight that several tensions might originate by focusing peacebuilding efforts mainly on statebuilding. Among them, it exists the tendency of considering war-torn societies as not possessing already existing institutions and building these latter from scratch ('the fallacy of Terra Nullius'). Or else, a miscalculation and confusion in the prioritization of statebuilding/peacebuilding objectives accounts as a major flaw of many peacebuilding operations. See: Cliffe & Manning, *supra* note 58, 163-166.
[73] Doyle and Sambanis underline that peacebuilding must grant attention to other elements and dimensions, such as to "build[ing] local capacities for conflict resolution" and "deepening of civil society" in order to "improve the prospects for peaceful governance". See: Doyle & Sambanis, *supra* note 61, 779.
[74] See for example: Paris, *supra* note 37; Call & Cousens, *supra* note 12.
[75] Campbell & Peterson, *supra* note 71, 337.
[76] Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 13.

2.3 PEACEBUILDING AS BUILDING PEACE FROM THE ROOTS

The term 'peacebuilding' was firs coined by Galtung in 1976 to refer to an "associative approach" towards the construction of peace.[77] The thinker put the necessity of establishing non-state channels of interaction at the core of his peacebuilding theory.[78] However, let alone a few contributions,[79] the notion of peacebuilding as begotten by Galtung sunk into theoretical oblivion for years. It found renewed vigor only through the endorsement by the UN, nonetheless in the above-explored state-centric fashion. Nevertheless, empirical evidence is far from proclaiming this approach as effective.[80] Some theorists argue that the reason behind war recurrence lies in the incapability of statebuilding to address the root causes of the conflict, which had fueled it in the first place.[81] Other scholars point to the International Community's incapacity to reconstitute the social fabric of post-war societies,[82] joint with a "disinterest in actor-centered approaches", leading to neglect critical elements such as interethnic dialogue and post-trauma rehabilitation of communities, to name a few.[83] Part of the literature has rejected the thesis that peacebuilding should mainly focus on statebuilding endeavors at the more structural level, rather giving prominence to grassroots processes and social dimensions of the conflict.[84]

Lederach has been the most prominent thinker after Galtung to stress the channeling of the peacebuilding efforts towards the civil society level, as the effective path to transform war-torn societies sustainably. He focuses on analyzing the psychological dimensions of civil conflicts that result in deeply divided societies since the violence intensifies animosity, fear, and pre-existent

[77] The "associative approach" described by Galtung would allow a removal of structural violence (oppression) as compared to "dissociative" approaches of peacemaking and peacekeeping exclusively concerned with halting direct violence. See: Johan Galtung, "Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking and Peacebuilding", *Impact of Science on Society*, Vol. 25, No. 9 (1976), 297-298.
[78] *Ibid*, 299-300.
[79] See for example: Michael Harbottle, "The strategy of Third Party interventions in conflict resolution", *International Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (1980).
[80] The conflict relapse rate is employed as evidence of the failure of the State-centric approach to peacebuilding. See for example: C. S. R. Murthy, "New Phase in UN Reforms: Establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and Human Rights Council", *International Studies*, Vol. 44, No.1 (2007), 47.
[81] However, scholars' debate on the degree and extent to which peacebuilding endeavors manage and are effectively capable to address the socioeconomic root causes of conflict. For instance, Jenkins asserts that peacebuilding shall seek to address the economic, social, political and psychological root causes of conflict, whereas Call and Cousens are skeptical of the peacebuilding capacity and operational imperative to address the same, as such action would indefinitely broaden the scope of peacebuilding operations. See for example: Collier, Elliott, Hegre, Hoeffler, Reynal-Querol & Sambanis, *supra* note 8; Paris, *supra* note 37; Jenkins, *supra* note 32, 20-21; Call & Cousens, *supra* note 12, 6-7.
[82] Nat J. Colletta, Michelle Cullen & Johanna Mendelson Formann, "Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Perspectives and Prospects", *World Bank*, 1998 (available at http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/241911468010490992/pdf/multi0page.pdf), 8.
[83] Ryan, *supra* note 46, 25.
[84] See for example: Campbell & Peterson, *supra* note 71, 339.

grievances between communities.[85] If such dimensions of contemporary conflicts are not properly addressed, war is likely to recur shortly. The scholar states that peacebuilding cannot rely on "mechanical processes and solutions", rather it must address "the restoration and rebuilding of relationships".[86] A framework for restoring shattered relationships thus becomes crucial for achieving durable peace. Peacebuilding has to necessarily take into account a "bottom-up approach"[87] to support the level of inter-communal trust-building. Several authors have followed Lederach's thesis,[88] including by resorting to empirical evidence to corroborate these claims.[89] For instance, Saunders and Cockell[90] defend the need for peacebuilding to focus on transforming "conflictual relationships between people into peaceful relationships".[91] They advocate for promoting dialogue between civilians to address "deep-rooted human conflicts".[92] Cockell recognizes that if local relationships are fostered by recognition and trust, peace is likely to be maintained "even in the face of institutional shortcomings".[93] Paris asserts the importance of acting at the grassroots, pursuing the aim to "break down social barriers between formerly warring communities".[94] Additionally, several other scholars have highlighted the criticality of grassroots activities, asserting that official high politics processes alone are only likely to achieve a gaping peace.[95] Additionally, several IGOs, INGOs, and governmental actors demonstrated to be prone to support bottom-up oriented approaches to peacebuilding.[96]

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[85] John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, 1997, 23.
[86] *Ibid*, 24.
[87] Earl Conteh-Morgan, "Peacebuilding and Human Security: A Constructivist Perspective," *International Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2005), 69.
[88] See for example: Michelle I. Gawerc, "Peace-Building: Theoretical and Concrete Perspectives", *Peace and Change*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (2006); Hizkias Assefa, *The Meaning of Reconciliation*, in: European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ed.), People Building Peace: 35 Inspiring Stories from Around the World, 1999.
[89] Marshall and Gurr review several cases of peace processes, finding out that peace settlements are more likely to endure if "broad reconciliation, recovery [..] strategies" accompany the official peace process. See: Monty G. Marshall & Ted R. Gurr, "Peace and Conflict", *CIDCM*, 2003 (available at https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/stm103%20articles/cidcm%20Peace%20and%20Conflict%202003.pdf), 15.
[90] In the view of the author, peacebuilding as a "political exercise" must seek to transform and restructure in an "associative" way the broken sociopolitical relationships within a society. See: John G. Cockell, *Conceptualising Peacebuilding: Human Security and Sustainable Peace*, in: Michael Pugh (ed.), Regeneration of War-Torn Societies, 2000, 21, 31.
[91] Harold H. Saunders, *A Public Peace Process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts*, 1999, xvii.
[92] *Ibid*, 81-88.
[93] Cockell, supra note 90, 20.
[94] Paris, *supra* note 37, 194.
[95] Mari Fitzduff, *The Challenge to History: Justice, Coexistence, and Reconciliation Work In Northern Ireland*, in: Mohammed Abu-Nimer (ed.), Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence, 2001; Wendy Lambourne, *Justice and Reconciliation: Post-conflict Peacebuilding in Cambodia and Rwanda*, 2002; Herbert C. Kelman, *Transforming the Relationship Between Former Enemies: A Social-Psychological Analysis*, in: Robert L. Rothstein (ed.), After the Peace: Resistance and Reconciliation, 1999.
[96] See for example: Utstein Group, "Joint Utstein Study on Peacebuilding: National Report on Germany", *German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development*, 2003 (available at http://www.ceipaz.org/images/contenido/Joint%20Utstein%20study%20of%20peacebuilding%20-%20national%20report%20on%20Germany_ENG.pdf), 4; United Nations Development Program, *Role of the UNDP in*

Local communities and relational dimensions of the conflict have received increasingly considerable attention as the International Community had to deal with the shortcomings of several failed peacebuilding operations. Latterly, the conflict resolution field has started to draw from both approaches to tackle more comprehensively the various dimensions of contemporary wars.[97] Drawing on the practical experiences and theoretical developments, it became evident that the faced failures in avoiding war recurrence stemmed by the negligence of either structural or relational elements, with these latters having been majorly disregarded. Peacebuilding actors are currently more sensitive to the necessity of both a systemic (or political) change and a relational (or psychological) transformation than they were 30 years ago.[98] As Gawerc puts it, peacebuilding is increasingly aware "that it is critical to develop and institutionalize mechanisms that can respond to the full range of psycho-political and socioeconomic communal needs", to endure peace.[99] Nevertheless, during the '90s, one strand of peacebuilding scholars had already begun to envision the construction of 'infrastructures' to precisely address this double objective, through an 'institutionalization' of *conflict transformation* processes. We will now turn to present it.

2.4 I4P: INFRASTRUCTURES TO SUSTAIN PEACE

The word 'infrastructure' in association with the term 'peace' may sound unusual, since peace has been generally linked to an inter-personal process. However, the core of the theory of 'Infrastructures for Peace' (I4P) lies in the idea that sustainable peace must be embedded in a network of physical structures[100] able to address distorted relationships through a dynamic process of cooperative problem-solving interconnecting the various sectors of society. Starting as a product of academia as introduced by Lederach in 1997,[101] the concept gained increasing attention as some practical experiences resulted successful (e.g. Kenya, Ghana).[102] From here, the wording was endorsed by the

crisis and post-conflict situation, UN Doc. DP/2001/4, 27 November 2000; UN General Assembly, *Note by The Secretary-General*, Annex, UN Doc. A/51/395, 23 September 1996.

[97] Gawerc, *supra* note 88, 438.

[98] See for example: John Paul Lederach, *Preparing For Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Culture*, 1996; Erin McCandless, *The Case of Land in Zimbabwe: Cause of Conflict, Foundation for Sustained Peace*, in: Mohammed Abu-Nimer (ed.), Reconciliation, Justice and Co- existence, 2001; Oliver Ramsbotham, Hugh Miall & Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, 3rd Edition, 2011.

[99] Gawerc, *supra* note 88, 438.

[100] Giessman, *supra* note 15, 5.

[101] Lederach, *supra* note 85, x.

[102] For an overview of these and other successful experiences in establishing effective I4P: See: Paul van Tongeren, Creating Infrastructures for Peace – Experiences at Three Continents", *Pensamiento Propio*, Vol. 36, No. 37 (2011).

UN, becoming a key focus of its assistance operations.[103] For instance, the Peace Architecture established in Ghana in 2011 was set thanks to UNDP's practical support.[104]

Galtung was the first scholar to speak about the need for "peace structures […] that remove the causes of war and offer alternatives to war".[105] Such structures were described as comparable to the immune system of the human body in the sense of contrasting the emergence of violence in a self-sustaining manner.[106] To a certain extent, the work of Cousens and Kumar also served as an introductory framework for the development of the theory, as they argued that peacebuilding shall prioritize helping "a given society build[ing] its political capacity to manage conflict without violence".[107] As said, Lederach often stressed the need for "context-based, permanent, and dynamic platforms" capable of addressing recurrent episodes of violence and the socio-political (relational) root causes of the conflict constructively.[108] Certainly, a significant contribution to the development of the discourse of I4P is to ascribe to the surge of the notion of '*conflict transformation'*, on which *inter alia* Lederach worked extensively.[109] Shortly, if conflict had always been considered an ended phenomena, thus characterized by a specific triggering event and by the possibility of being solved once for all, the failure of traditional approaches of conflict resolution[110] drove the literature towards reconsidering the nature of peace and conflict.[111] Increasing emphasis emerged on the conviction that the best way to ensure sustainable peace should proactively engage the warring communities to deal constructively with conflict, even after a formal agreement may have been reached.[112] In this light,

[103] UNDP, *Issue Brief: Infrastructures for Peace*, 2013 (available at https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/crisis-prevention-and-recovery/issue-brief--infrastructure-for-peace.html).
[104] See: Ozonnia Ojielo, "Designing an Architecture for Peace: A Framework of Conflict Transformation in Ghana", Discussion Paper, 2007 (Unpublished Paper).
[105] Galtung, *supra* note 77, 297-298.
[106] *Ibid.*
[107] Similarly to Galtung, the authors envision the creation of a kind of peace which owns the appropriate antibodies to conflict recurrence Elizabeth M. Cousens, *Introduction*, in: Elizabeth M. Cousens & Chetan Kumar (eds.), Peacebuilding as Politics: Cultivating Peace in Fragile Societies, 2001, 13.
[108] John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and the Soul of Building Peace*, 2005, 47.
[109] See for example: John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, 2014.
[110] For example, the case of the Genocide in Rwanda happening immediately after a peace agreement had been formally achieved. In the literature, see for example: Jaine Leatherman, William E. DeMars, Patrick Gaffney & Raimo Vayrynen, *Breaking Cycles of Violence*, 1999, 73.
[111]Such focus drew from the tradition of peace studies which considered conflict to be something not negative *per se*, and rather an unavoidable occurrence. Lederach considers it positively as the 'motor of change', without which human condition would remain static and unsatisfied. However, it hinges on the way conflict is dealt with which may make it violent and disruptive of peace, or constructive and stimulant of stronger bonds. See: Lederach, *supra* note 109, 29; Ramsbothal, Miall & Woodhouse, *supra* note 98, 279; Raimo Vayrynen, *From conflict resolution to conflict transformation: a critical review*, in: Ho-Won Jeong (ed.), The New Agenda for Peace Research, 1999; Kumar Rupesinghe, *Civil Wars, Civil Peace*, 1998.
[112] Gawerc, *supra* note 88, 439.

peace is remarked as a process[113] that needs to be nurtured consistently. With the appropriate tools, networks, and institutions, conflict can be structurally transformed, finally leading to "increasing injustice, reducing violence, and restoring broken relationships".[114] Conversely, if left unaddressed, it can lay the foundations for recurrent cycles of violence.[115] The notion of I4P arose from the *conflict transformation* theory, seeking to give practical operationalization to it.

2.4.1 CONCEPTUALIZING INFRASTRUCTURES FOR PEACE

Galtung and Lederach have been the two major pioneers of the concept of I4P, whose origin is therefore to attribute to academic elaboration. The theory has subsequently met the contribution of many authors and agencies. For instance, in the understanding of the UNDP, anything contributing to dialogue, conflict prevention, and mediation can be considered making part of the broad I4P conjunction.[116] Conversely, Giessmann grasps the necessity to interlink various peacebuilding efforts and actors, and seeks to deliver more uniqueness to the definition, arguing for the "dynamic networking of skills, capacities, resources, tools and institutions" aiming to "enhance sustainable resilience of societies[117] against a relapse into violence".[118] On the same page, some scholars frame I4P with an attentive look at the systemic dimension and the necessary interrelatedness of the various components. Brand-Jacobsen is keen to draw parallelisms between how I4P should be envisioned and existing infrastructures in public sectors such as healthcare and the military. He stresses the need for "institutional expertise and organizational architecture"[119] capable of enhancing integration, interaction, and interplay among its constitutive parts. As Lederach suggests, I4P shall address "cooperative and engaged relationships beyond immediate office",[120] which do not result from prefabricated structures or rules of behavior, but can only stem from an interrelated system of mutually-reinforcing elements.[121] From a different perspective, van Tongeren defines I4P as "institutional mechanisms" that foster "cooperative, problem-solving approaches to conflict, based

[113] Chetan Kumar, *Conclusion*, in: Elizabeth M. Cousens & Chetan Kumar (eds.), Peacebuilding as Politics: Cultivating Peace in Fragile Societies, 2001, 185.
[114] Lederach, *supra* note 109, 23.
[115] Brand-Jacobsen, *supra* note 18.
[116] In the eyes of the UNDP, the whole of I4P consists in a broad range of tools and resources, defining it as a "network of interdependent systems, resources, values and skills held by government, civil society and community institutions that promote dialogue and consultation; prevent conflict and enable peaceful mediation when violence occurs in a society". See: UNDP *supra* note 103, 6.
[117] Social resilience is a fundamental element in the lexicon of the I4P doctrine. Shortly, it translates in the broader capacity of a society to peacefully transform any conflict that may arise internally. Instead of a climate of animosity, social resilience wants to build a culture of dialogue and collaboration.
[118] Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 10.
[119] Brand-Jacobsen, *supra* note 18.
[120] John Paul Lederach, "The Origins and Evolution of Infrastructures for Peace: A Personal Reflection", *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2012), 13.
[121] Giessmann, supra note 15, 10.

on dialogue".[122] In this light, *conflict transformation* capacities result nestled in institutionalized mechanisms.

To sum up, notwithstanding variance in its definition, the concept of I4P keeps some key elements at its core, shared by most of the authors: a set of working institutions that can be more or less structured, an emphasis on enhancing *conflict transformation* capacities, the importance of systemic-thinking and interrelatedness of structures across all layers of society, and lastly, an indefinite time horizon. I4P are built to provide societies with enduring *conflict transformation* structures, rather than relying on *ad hoc* interventions handled by third parties. Nevertheless, these components of I4P are present with a degree of variation from case to case, hinging on contextual variables and material constraints on the ground. For instance, the interconnection among components[123] of the I4P network is an element missing in the case study under analysis.

The I4P theory presents significant comparative advantages with regard to the traditional approaches to peacebuilding. Noticeably, it brings an added value to the field of peace studies inasmuch it has the potential to overcome deficiencies of the way peacebuilding has been approached in the last few decades. Firstly, the central idea underlying the concept of I4P concerns the possibility to provide a multi-sectoral approach to peace, allowing peacebuilding to be addressed comprehensively, structurally, and in a sustainable manner. The peacebuilding spectrum presents both agencies specialized in top-down approaches and actors engaging more in bottom-up responses to conflict.[124] However, problems arise, when one line prevails on the other, as peace risks to be only partially accomplished. A second significant risk entails the 'coherence and coordination dilemma', involving scarce coordination among actors, leading to efforts duplications and inefficiency of the overall system.[125] In these cases, synergies able to root peace sustainably are only presumed but rarely achieved.[126] Conversely, the development of I4P allows for creating intrinsic synergies throughout

[122] Paul van Tongeren, "Increasing Interest in Infrastructures for Peace", *Journal of Conflictology*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2011), 45.
[123] For example, we make reference to the connection and cooperation channels that could be established between national, regional and local Peace Councils.
[124] International organizations such as the United Nations, for instance, have majorly focused on statebuilding and on acting at the top-leadership levels for building peace. On the other side, local and international NGOs have mostly channeled their efforts at the middle-range and grassroots dimensions of conflict, putting major emphasis on the importance of reconciliation and conflict resolution at the community level.
[125] See for example: Cedric de Coning, "The Coherence Dilemma in Peacebuilding and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Systems", *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2008).
[126] Smith provides a resume of the Join Utstein Study of Peacebuilding, which analyzed the outcomes of 336 peacebuilding projects during the 90s. the Study individuated the lack of coordination and overall strategic planning at the country level as one of the main factors contributing to the failure of the peacebuilding efforts in the long-run. See: Dan Smith, "Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together Overview: Report of the

the peacebuilding system, interconnecting the institutional level with the grassroots dimension (see Figure 1 below). I4P doctrine allows to partially narrow the gap between the two strands of peacebuilding conceptually divided over the operational focus of the action. I4P create conjunction between the two, by bridging community-level needs with elite-focused processes. I4P can contribute to enhancing what Lederach defines "vertical capacity", fundamentally rooting sustainable peace.[127] This capacity lies in structuring interdependencies that are not exclusively horizontal, but especially "up and down the levels of leadership", meaning they range vertically across all society layers,[128] allowing spaces for participation across society hierarchies. Furthermore, many scholars[129] point out how peacebuilding efforts are mostly short-lived and crisis-driven, and thus insufficient to build a sustainable framework for peace.[130] On this issue, another advancement of the I4P doctrine involves the principles of sustainability and *domestic foundation*[131] to give peace an address.[132] In fact, the underlying factors leading to conflict recurrence seldom can be addressed by third parties in a short timeframe.[133] Unsustainability may represent a challenge also for I4P. However, if well designed, these guarantee capabilities for *conflict transformation* that self-sustain even after foreign aid exhaust its support, ensuring a long-term commitment to peacebuilding. Here, although the establishment of these structures can be third-party assisted (e.g. UNDP), ensuring full indigenous ownership is imperative to allow a sustained process enshrined with societies' own capacities, granting a sense of local ownership fundamental for the success of the overall peace process.[134]

Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding", *PRIO*, January 2004 (available at https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kilde/ud/rap/2004/0044/ddd/pdfv/210673-rapp104.pdf).

[127] John Paul Lederach, *Just Peace – The Challenge of the 21st Century*, in: European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ed.), People Building Peace: 35 Inspiring Stories from Around the World, 1999, 29.

[128] *Ibid*, 30.

[129] See for example: Ryan, *supra* note 46, 25; Brand-Jacobsen, *supra* note 18.

[130] International actors tend to move out funding and political oversight once a ceasefire appears to hold, although peace is often far from being self-sustaining. See: Call & Cousens, *supra* note 12, 11-12.

[131] Lederach maintains that "the greatest resource of sustaining peace in the long term is always rooted in the local people and their culture". See: Lederach, *supra* note 85, 94.

[132] Hopp-Nishanka, *supra* note 16, 3.

[133] Call & Cousens, *supra* note 12, 7.

[134] Andries Odendaal, "The Political Legitimacy of National Peace Committees", *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2013), 41.

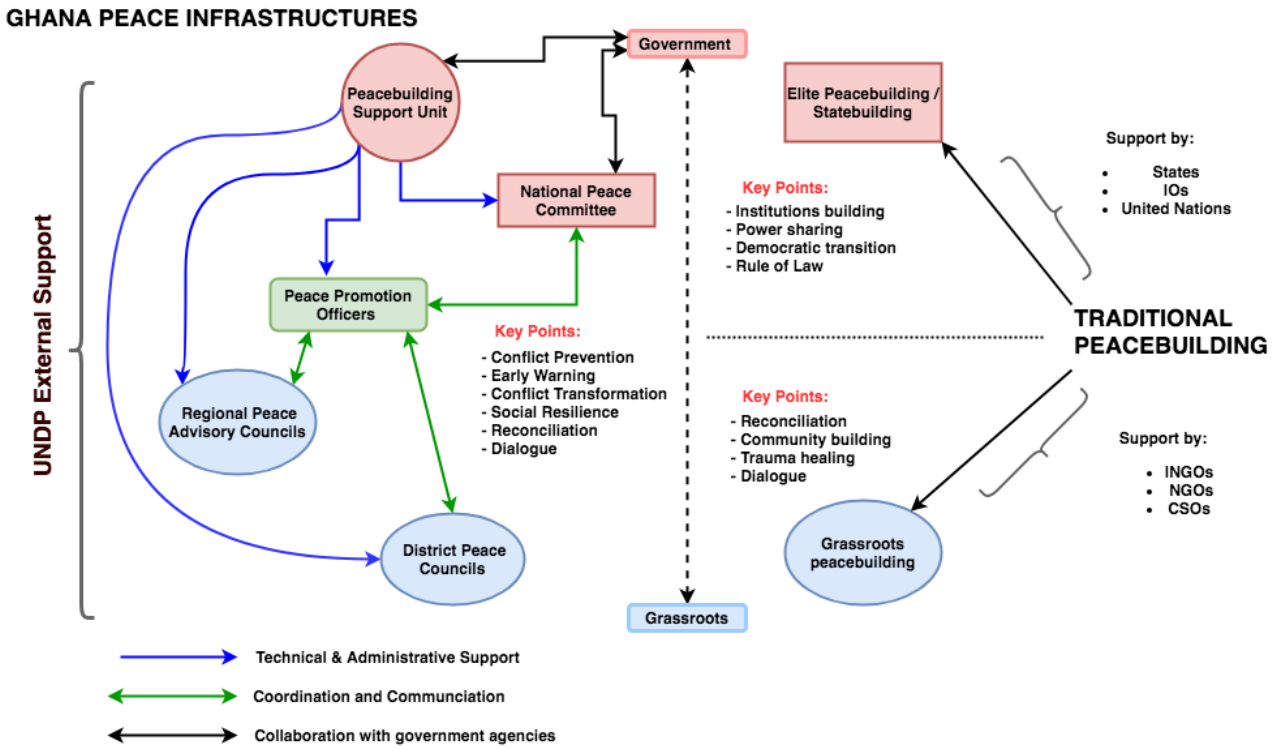

Figure 1: *I4P multi-sectoral approach VS disconnected peacebuilding efforts.*[135]

2.4.2 TYPES OF INFRASTRUCTURES

I4P theory is all-encompassing of a wide range of structures with the potential to intervene at all stages of the conflict cycle,[136] from enabling peace processes to support reconciliation and healing, up to prevent conflict from breaking out in the first place.[137] Yet, it is possible to distinguish two broad groups of I4P. Those connected with the governance level of the State or I4P with a national

[135] The diagram visually exemplifies the key characters of a well-structured I4P network, such as the one that was established in Ghana in 2011, as compared to the disconnection of traditional approaches to peacebuilding, characterized by a 'silo mentality' and differentiated efforts, as it is easily deducible in the second part of the illustration. In the case of Ghana, a National Peace Committee was established at the national level as a platform of consultation and cooperation among the main stakeholders at the political and governmental level. Regional and District Peace Councils were also created at the regional and local level, engaging with *conflict transformation* and community peacebuilding. Peace Promotion Officers were established to facilitate communication and coordination among the many decentralized Peace Councils, and between these latters and the central National Committee. In order to support the Peace Architecture, a Peacebuilding Support Unit was established to coordinate the work of government agencies with each component of the I4P network, as well as to provide technical and administrative support to the whole system. The graph clearly shows the multi-sectoral approach that I4P are capable of pursuing simultaneously, by seeking to address peacebuilding at different levels of society in an interconnected way. For Ghana Peace Architecture, see: Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 27-29.

[136] By perceiving conflict as a linear process, peacebuilding has been generally bounded solely to the final phase of international assistance in conflict resolution. I4P can act throughout the conflict cycle, buttressing States' institutional and societal unreadiness to handle conflict constructively since its early phases. In the words of Giessmann, I4P can establish temporary platforms and *fora* for "inclusion, participation and collaboration, based on the mutual interest of conflicting parties", with the aim of exploring alternatives to the use of armed violence. See: Cousens, *supra* note 107, 6; Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 12.

[137] Brand-Jacobsen, *supra* note 18.

mandate, and those instead emerging from the civil society, often thanks to the engagement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and NGOs.[138] I4P of both kinds have been often established with the support of foreign donors and international organizations such as the UN through UNDP's supportive missions.[139]

As far as the first group (top-down I4P) is concerned, this can include National Peace Platforms, Offices, Departments and Ministries of Peace as well as National, District, and Local Peace Councils if created by the central government, among others.[140] Besides, other I4P fall under this definition, such as peace programs within the schools' curricula. An example of I4P with a national mandate can be traced Ghana's recent past, where the National Peace Architecture stood out in ensuring both a peaceful transition during electoral turmoil and people's engagement with peacebuilding and dialogue across conflict divides.[141] Other successful cases can be found in the recent past of South Africa, Kenya, Costa Rica, and the Philippines.[142] About nationally mandated I4P, Giessmann asserts that "transparency, accessibility and participation"[143] are three vital elements for the success of top-down I4P. We will consider these factors more in-depth in Chapter 3.

Moving to the alternative type (bottom-up I4P) of I4P, these results usually enshrined in society-based initiatives promoted by civil society actors, such as NGOs, associations of citizens, insider mediation networks, or faith-based organizations.[144] These I4P can take different forms depending

[138] For a good overview of the various types and practices of I4P, see for example: Laura Aldrighetti, *Infrastructures for Peace – Nesting Opportunities*, 2013 (available at http://pacedifesa.hopto.org/public/documents/Infrastructures%20for%20Peace%20Nesting%20opportunities%20%28di%20Laura%20Aldrighetti%20-%20CSDC-%29.pdf).
[139] This is the case of *inter alia* Costa Rica, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Kirghizstan, Tunisia, Nepal. See, for example: UNDP, *supra* note 103; Vincent Verzat, "Infrastructures for Peace: A Grass-roots Way To Do State-building", *Berghof Foundation*, April 2014 (available at https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Dialogue_Chapters/dialogue10_comment_verzat.pdf).
[140] Nationally mandated I4P brings the substantial advantage of counting on the support of the central government, therefore benefitting from wide-ranging budgetary and implementation capacities, besides a major and extensive legitimacy. On the other hand, a drawback lies in the same dependency on the State's authority Secondly, in some cases of civil wars, the central government itself is involved in perpetuating the violence In these eventualities, the government may lack the necessary legitimacy and authority to establish effective and widely supported I4P. Some argue that for this reason, I4P should be preferably as much independent as possible from the central government. See: van Togeren, *supra* note 122, 46; Global Alliance for Ministries and Infrastructures for Peace, "Nesting Peace: Creating Infrastructures to Sustain Diversity", *GAMIP*, September 2013 (available at http://www.gamip.org/images/Switzerland%206th%20Summit.pdf), 93.
[141] Particularly, the role of the National Peace Council in connection with Regional and District Peace Councils was fundamental to halt the internal. See: Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 27-29.
[142] See for example: van Tongeren, *supra* note 122, 47-48.
[143] Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 15.
[144] The "Tunisian Quartet" is regarded as one of the most successful examples of bottom-up I4P of the last decades, confirmed by the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015. This infrastructure took shape by the coalition of influential non-state actors in Tunisia during the early phases of the revolution in 2011. Its engagement with multi-party mediation and conflict resolution was fundamental to ensure a peaceful transition towards the democratic elections of 2014. See: Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 18.

on the context and needs to be addressed, ranging from national bodies for the promotion of inter-factional dialogue (e.g. Inter-Religious Council in Uganda) to restorative circles supporting communities in post-trauma healing and reconciliation.[145] Certainly, this category of I4P has a strong potential to build bridges across conflicts' divides[146] as it can rely on the perceived neutrality of its members or on the authority of influential members from within the ethnic, religious or cultural groups.[147]

To sum up, this Chapter was dedicated to introducing the theoretical framework within which this research moves. The literature reviewed on the topic of peacebuilding serves the purpose of clarifying the theoretical foundations from which the research necessities of this dissertation stem. Reviewing the literature on peacebuilding has been useful to demonstrate that, rather than focusing exclusively on the institutional level, peacebuilding must also address the social divides and grievances that result exacerbated by the conflict. As Bercovitch recognizes, while official tracks of high politics are undoubtedly important, a condition of sustainable peace can be rooted solely in the enhancement of reconciliation and mediation at the community level.[148] Without careful consideration of the grassroots dimension of post-war societies, building enduring peace may become hard to accomplish. As a conclusive point, the concept of I4P has been exalted for its potential of simultaneously addressing various dimensions of peacebuilding as well as overcoming related shortcomings of the discipline in the way it has been approached in the last 40 years. What emerges from the debate on peacebuilding is that the different approaches must complement each other, and the I4P theory innovates in this respect. It becomes possible to build a network of *conflict transformation* capacities and infrastructures across multiple levels and sectors of society capable of both appeasing elites' interests and acting at the grassroots level of peacebuilding.

To conclude, this dissertation is based on a double research necessity stemming from the literature reviewed. First and foremost, but to a limited extent, the research aims to expand the study of grassroots peacebuilding. While the sphere of peacebuilding envisioned as statebuilding overflows of contributions and this latter approach has been extensively engaged by the UN peace operations, inputs regarding a more bottom-up dimension of peacebuilding have been relatively fewer and less

[145] Aldrighetti, *supra* note 138, 4.
[146] Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 18.
[147] Bottom-up I4P entail several advantages. They can be more context-sensitive, having enhanced independence and legitimacy in the eyes of the public as they work in close contact with the affected communities. The other side of the coin regards their reduced scope and impact, a lower availability of resources and funding available, and the risk of enhancing pre-existing power structures within communities by relying on influential personalities. See: Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 19.
[148] Jacob Bercovitch, *Resolving International Conflicts: The Theory and Practice of Mediation*, 1996, 7.

investigated. However, the grassroots dimension of peace is deemed crucial to ensure sustainable outcomes in peace processes.[149] Indeed, the concept of I4P allows for a partial reconciliation between the two contrasting stances of the debate on peacebuilding. Indeed, within an ideal model of I4P, the establishment of working institutions at the national, regional, and local levels is joint and intrinsic to reconciliation, *conflict transformation,* and collaborative problem-solving capacities operating at the grassroots. However, since the CICRs case study lacks the interconnection between national and Municipal I4P, what follows in the next Chapters fundamentally focuses on investigating peacebuilding at the community level, as intended by the mandate of the CICRs. The institutional element of peacebuilding is left on the background. As it has been argued, the I4P theory presents ground-breaking features which respect to traditional peacebuilding approaches, providing the rationale for focusing on its specific exploration. All in all, the present work is justified by the scarcity of research on the topic of I4P. Despite the potential demonstrated, the sphere of I4P is still poorly considered, and researches able to grasp nuances of different experiences are scarce.[150] Drawing on this gap, the present dissertation is hence inspired by the opportunity to contribute to enrich the broader understanding of I4P' functioning, as well as the nurturing and dissemination of relevant findings thereon. Particularly, exploring more in-depth existing I4P, such as the CICRs, can contribute to a pool of expertise for improving further research and I4P practice.

The next Chapter will deal with presenting the research design, outlining the methodology chosen as well as the methods employed for collecting and processing the data. Besides, the key features of the case study of the CICRs will be put forward. Here, I4P were established nation-wide after a period of internal violence in 2001. As a result of the peace negotiations, the CICRs were set as national-mandated (top-down) I4P responsible for handling inter-ethnic relations at the local level. Clearly, their mandate was directed towards grassroots peacebuilding. Their functioning as I4P constituted the core element of the present investigation.

[149] See for example: Saunders, *supra* note 91; Cockell, *supra* note 90; Lederach, *supra* note 85; Lambourne, *supra* note 95; Marshall & Gurr, *supra* note 89.
[150] Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 4.

3) RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this Chapter is to explain the research methodology used to explore whether the CICRs are living up to their expectations as effective I4P. The author resorted to the exploratory case study methodology to address the research necessities, examining the case of the CICRs in MK. Employing the case study methodology points to provide a 360-degree view on the current condition of the CICRs, leading to an in-depth exploration of thus established I4P.

The Chapter follows a logical structure. Firstly, the research aims are stated, accompanied by the presentation of the issues and assumptions at stake. The third segment lays out the research methodology, justifying the choice of resorting to a case study approach. Afterward, the background of the CICRs case study is outlined. The last segment of the Chapter turns to give a more detailed description of the research methods employed and to clarify the main steps of the investigation process.

3.1 NATURE AND AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

When it comes to the type of research design, three main paradigms are usually contemplated: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive.[151] Generally speaking, the amount of pre-existing information determines the nature and aims of the research. When little information about a particular research topic exists, the explanatory type is deemed the most appropriate research framework.[152] Briefly, this pattern is followed to investigate a phenomenon that is not clearly defined yet, and little knowledge is known about, which nonetheless is believed to contain elements worth discovering.[153] Vogt provides a comprehensive definition of the concept as "a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life".[154] The goal of exploratory research is to document a certain phenomenon or object as completely as possible or to dig deeper into earlier explanations.[155] As Hancock and Algozzine sum up, the exploratory research is "often a prelude to additional research efforts".[156] Taking such characteristics into account, this research follows the

[151] Dawson R. Hancock & Bob Algozzine, *Doing Case Study Research: a Practical Guide for Beginning Researches*, 2nd Edition, 2011, 37.
[152] Pentii Routio, *Models in Research Process*, 2007 (available at http://www2.uiah.fi/projects/metodi/177.htm).
[153] Robert A. Stebbins, *Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences*, 2001, 5.
[154] Paul W. Vogt, *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology: A Non-Technical Guide for the Social Sciences*, 2nd Edition, 2011, 105.
[155] Routio, *supra* note 152.
[156] *Ibid.*

exploratory research framework for two main reasons. The first hinges on the observation that the ambit of I4P is insufficiently investigated. This gap motivated the author to proceed with further empirical assessments in this field in the light of the potential possessed by the I4P. Given that exploratory researches "seek to define research questions of a subsequent study",[157] a key aim of the investigation is to contribute to I4P theory's development, generating useful food for thought to stimulate additional research.

Secondly, the CICRs have been subject to previous assessments. However, the author considered necessary to explore their current condition, some years after the last academic investigations on the status of these bodies, and undertake their study resorting to the I4P lenses for analysis. In fact, the researcher innovatively focused on exploring these organs concerning the principles of transparency, accessibility, and participation. Given that these criteria are considered crucial for the establishment of effective I4P, the investigation aims to foster ulterior research on approaches through which these key aspects could be better methodologically framed and materially strengthened in I4P practice. On this latter point, however, the research seeks to depart from the mere proposition of further research opportunities, as generally foreseen by the exploratory research framework. Noticeably, the findings of these research work, taking the shape of recommendations, are designed to have policy implications for providing useful guidance for improvement regarding the operativity of the CICRs. Additionally, policy recommendations in the form of lessons learned from the North Macedonian experience aim to address broader necessities for improvement in the praxis of I4P.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTION & HYPOTHESIS

Originating from the described aims, this dissertation strives to answer to the following Research Question:

RQ1: Are the CICRs living up to the expectations about their operativity as effective I4P?

Stemming from the interest for exploring the working capacity of the CICRs, the Research Question was deconstructed in three sub-questions. These are:

1. To what extent the CICRs contributed to improving the status of inter-ethnic relations in the Municipalities where they were established?
2. What are the main obstacles to the proper functioning[158] of the CICRs?

[157] Hancock & Algozzine, *supra* note 151, 37.

[158] Properly functioning CICRs are expected to regularly meet and perform office's duties, to advise the Municipal authorities on sensitive issue about inter-ethnic relations and to actively promote their improvement at the Municipal level.

3. How are the principles of transparency, accessibility, and participation observed in the structure and functioning of the CICRs?

The sub-questions are envisioned to shed light on the broader issue of whether the CICRs are serving their mandate properly as local I4P. According to mandate's expectations, the CICRs should stand as institutionalized *fora* for promoting dialogue among ethnic communities, actively contributing to improving inter-ethnic relations at the Municipal level. To fulfill these prerogatives, the CICRs are expected to be as transparent, accessible and participated as possible.

The Research Question was not built from scratch. In fact, it originates from the hypothesis that the CICRs are majorly dysfunctional and failing to undertake their core functions. Such an assumption was based upon a preliminary review of the research material about the CICRs, providing a slightly negative overview. For instance, Petkovski concluded that the CICRs were insignificant for what concerned their mandate of advancing inter-ethnic relations among communities.[159] Similarly, Lyon and Treneska-Deskoska had come to similar conclusions in two separate papers.[160] The objective of the present research is to verify the presented hypothesis under current conditions, some years after the mentioned evaluations were conducted. This comes intrinsically linked with exploring the sub-issues indicated above.

3.3 CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

The research resorts to the single case study approach regarding the country and type of I4P into question. However, it must be specified that it consists of an embedded case study, thus multiple units corresponding to virtually all the CICRs were considered to pursue an analysis as much holistic as possible over the broad condition of these LPCs.

The case study methodology[161] is rather useful when the subject of the investigation represents a less known phenomenon in a real-life context. According to Yin, this methodological approach is used

[159] Aleksandar Petkovski, "The Effects of the Work of Committee and Commissions on Interethnic Relations in Republic of Macedonia", *Acta Universitatis Danubius. Relationes Internationales*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2014).
[160] Aisling Lyon, "Municipal Decentralisation in the Republic of Macedonia: preserving a multi-ethnic state?", *Federal Governance*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2011), 36; Renata Treneska-Deskoska, *Committee and Commissions for Inter-Community Relations as Instruments for Inter-ethnic Dialogue in the Republic of Macedonia*, in: Vladimir Čolović (ed.), Law of the Countries in the Region, 2010, 83.
[161] For more extensive literature on the case study methodology, see for example: John Gerring, *Case study research: principles and practice*, 2007; Christine B. Meyer, "A Case in Case Study Methodology", *Field Methods*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (2001).

"to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena".[162] Besides, exploratory case studies are employed to answer questions typically introduced by *what* and *how*.[163] Although case studies present a significant limitation of contextualization of the findings that makes it impossible to generalize research outputs in diverse contexts automatically,[164] George and Bennett maintain that one of their key advantages is the high degree of conceptual validity,[165] permitting to come up with indicators that best fit the research purposes. The flexibility granted by the case study approach, especially for what concerns the methods handled, is described as "both the strength and weakness of this approach"[166] as compared to other methodologies. As a whole, an embedded case study results valuable for fostering a holistic analysis of a specific phenomenon, providing the researcher with an encompassing overview able to grasp nuances of complex processes. Moreover, such a methodology allows more flexibility in integrating qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and knowledge integration.[167] However, it should be specified that the researcher did not put much emphasis on comparing elements from different units of analysis. Instead, these were taken in an aggregated way to outline more general trends and features of the CICRs single case study. Finally, the case study methodology allows some degree of generalization, although limited (the "*petit generalizations*" defined by Stake).[168] As it is followed in this dissertation, findings extrapolated by a specific case study can be generalized by way of recommendations for policy implementation. To sum up, the single embedded case study methodology is considered valuable because: (1) it allows exploring a specific question at great length, (2) it comprehensively takes into account the context, and (3) it examines various dimensions of the units under analysis, ultimately providing a holistic perspective on the single case.

The CICRs have been selected as a convenient case for deepening I4P's understanding, resulting optimal for the empirical research on both grassroots peacebuilding and on the partially unexplored field of I4P. The choice of investigating the CICRs is motivated upon two grounds. The first reason hinges on the fact that the CICRs were established as national-mandated I4P equipped with a grassroots peacebuilding mandate. MK shows the attempt of a peacebuilding process that gave relevance to the grassroots dimensions, engaging Municipal ethnic communities within platforms for

[162] Robert Yin, *Case study research: Design and methods*, 5th Edition, 2014, 4.
[163] *Ibid.*
[164] Yin defines it as the "problem of knowing whether a study's findings are generalizable beyond the immediate study." See: Yin, *supra* note 162, 48; also: Alexander George & Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 2005, 30-32.
[165] George & Bennet, *supra* note 164, 19.
[166] Meyer, *supra* note 161, 329.
[167] Roland W. Scholz & Olaf Tietje, *Embedded Case Study Methods: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Knowledge*, 2002, 14.
[168] Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, 1995, 7.

joint problem-solving and dialogue. Hence, *conflict transformation* capacities in the inter-ethnic domain were formalized into enduring institutions. Of particular interest for the author was that the CICRs have not been subject to any comprehensive assessment of recent date, beyond some surveys conducted by non-governmental organizations in the last few years. The observations on the dysfunctionality of the CICRs provided by past research paves the way for a detailed exploration that can bring out updated deficiencies and challenges of the CICRs. Consequently, the research findings can potentially enrich the pool of expertise devoted to the improvement of I4P doctrine and practice.

The second reason is contingent. This is the geographical closeness to the location where the dissertation was written, which could have enabled the author to conduct research directly on the field. The material condition of geographical proximity of the country was determinant in the selection of the CICRs as a suitable case study for this research. However, such an opportunity became eventually impossible by material conditions dictated by the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in Europe.

The next segment aims to provide a brief overview of the background context in which the CICRs surged. The author is convinced that providing the reader with a richer picture of the situation of MK can better serve the understanding of the overall dissertation.

3.3.1 THE NORTH MACEDONIAN CONFLICT & PEACE PROCESS

During the 1990s, MK[169] was cherished at the international level as the only successful case[170] of peaceful secession[171] from the former Yugoslavia[172] as well as of internal appeasement of ethnic interests.[173] In the region, Macedonian Slavs and non-Macedonian minorities[174] had been

[169] For an exhaustive compilation of the ancient and contemporary history of North Macedonia, and the political questions around it, see: Hugh Poulton, *Who are the Macedonians?*, 1995; Elisabeth Barker, *The origin of the Macedonian dispute*, in: James Pettifer (ed.), The New Macedonian Question, 1999, 4; Doko Slijepcevic, *The Macedonian Question: The Struggle for Southern Serbia*, 1958; James Pettifer, "The New Macedonian Question", *International Affairs*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (1992).
[170] Radoslava Stefanova argues that part of this success was due to the deployment of UN peacekeepers with a preventive mandate, which surely facilitated the transition and stabilization process in the region. See: Radoslava Stefanova, "Preventing Violent Conflict in Europe: The Case of Macedonia", *The International Spectator*, Vol. 32, No. 3-4 (1997), 113.
[171] For a good overview of the Yugoslav Wars: Richard C. Hall, *War in the Balkans: An Encyclopedic History from the Fall of the Ottoman Empire to the breakup of Yugoslavia*, 2014
[172] Alex J. Bellamy, "The new wolves at the door: Conflict in Macedonia", *Civil Wars*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2002), 127.
[173] In 1991, the Badinter Commission praised Slovenia and North Macedonia for the constitutional guarantees ensured to minority groups. See: Steve Terrett, *The Dissolution of Yugoslavia and the Badinter Arbitration Commission: A Contextual Study of Peace-Making Efforts in the Post-Cold War World*, 2000.
[174] In 1994, around 23% of the population belonged to the Albanian minority while the Macedonian majority accounted to nearly 64%. See: State Statistical Office, *Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Macedonia*, 2016 (available at http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/PDFSG2016/03-Naselenie-Population.pdf), 67.

cohabitating relatively in peace for centuries.[175] Nevertheless, conflict broke out right at the beginning of the new millennium, lasting for several months.

Although authors have given diverse interpretations[176] of the conflict in MK, it can be asserted that a mixture of social, economic,[177] and political grievances, as well as unmet demands for recognition[178] lied behind the outburst of violence in 2001.[179] Bellamy argues that the violence should be seen as a struggle for social transformation, seeking "to renegotiate the relative positions of Albanians and Macedonians *vis-à-vis* the state" and to ensure a greater portion of State ownership to the Albanian

[175] For example, according to a census of Yugoslavia in 1981, over 1.9 million inhabitants of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia: 1.2 million were Slav Macedonian, 370 thousand Albanians, 44 thousand Serbs, 86 thousand Turks and 50 thousand Gypsies. See: Youssef Courbage, "Census, Elections and Population: The Case of Macedonia", *Population-E*, Vol. 58, No. 4-5 (2003).

[176] For instance, the so-called theory of the "Four Wolves" pointing to the interference of regional powers. See for example: Dean Katsiyiannis, "Hyper-nationalism and irredentism in the Macedonian region: Implications for US policy, part I", *European Security*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1996), 325; John J. Mearsheimer & Stephen Van Evera, "Redraw the Map, Stop the Killing", *The New York Times*, April 1999 (available at https://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/19/opinion/redraw-the-map-stop-the-killing.html?auth=login-google). Alternatively, Robert Kaplan and Samuel Huntington are strong advocates of the 'ancient ethnic hatred' theory, according to which clashes and violence in the Balkan region are rooted in centuries-old cultural and religious cleavages. See: Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, 1993; Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilization?", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.72, No. 3 (1993).

[177] During its first decade of life, MK had suffered a brutal economic downturn, mainly due to a double trade embargo put into place by Yugoslavia before, and Greece afterwards. This situation of economic shortage had rebounded especially on the conditions of ethnic Albanians who, by being more concentrated in rural areas, were already suffering from economic underdevelopment and marginalization from public sector positions. As a demonstration of this, by 2001 only less than 20% of Albanians were lawfully employed. See: Karl Cordell & Stefan Wolf, *Ethnic Conflict: Causes-Consequences-Responses*, 2009, 56; Bellamy, *supra* note 172, 126; Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*, 1995, 365.

[178] Despite the Constitution of the newly established republic had recognized the "full equality" in terms of citizenship to other minorities living within the new country's borders, the constitutional framework resulted in *de facto* discriminatory of the non-Macedonian minority groups. While Macedonian Slavs represented the dominant group, almost one-third of the whole population was affected by various discriminatory provisions, inevitably laying the foundations for grievances and internal unrest. As a whole, the State of MK had emerged in a multi-ethnic setting seeking to provide assurances to minority groups regarding the fact that anybody could theoretically compete for the 'control' of the State, whereas non-Macedonian minorities were *de facto* marginalized by constitutional entry barriers. Discontent and demands for improved political, social and economic recognition from the Albanian minority mounted throughout the 1990s. See: *Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia*, 1991 (available at https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/mk/mk014en.pdf), Preamble; Julie Kim, "Macedonia: Country Background and Recent Conflict", *Congressional Research Service*, March 2002 (available at http://www.lb7.uscourts.gov/documents/10-33271.pdf), 4-5; John Philips, *Macedonia. Warlords and Rebels in the Balkans*, 2004, 65; Peter H. Liotta, "The 'future' Republic of Macedonia: the last best hope", *European Security*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2000), 71;

[179] See for example: Nicholas Wood, "Trust me, says NLA leader, this is peace", *The Guardian*, August 2001 (available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/aug/18/balkans2); Bellamy, *supra* note 172, 119, 122, 140.

minority.[180] The escalation can also be framed in light of the conjunction of a series of driving factors,[181] such as the war in Kosovo.[182]

Clashes exploded in February 2001 in the Northern part of the country between the ethnic Albanian rebel group NLA and government armed forces. A series of violent confrontations continued for seven months, affecting the civilian population[183] but without reaching the level of escalation of other Balkan wars. Overall, the clashes caused more than 200 victims, and around 180 000 internally displaced people.[184] Intensive international mediation[185] drove the belligerents to sign the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) on the 13th of August 2001. The peace accord promoted a dual-track strategy,[186] attempting to concretely address Albanian minority's grievances while at the same time maintaining the territorial integrity of the State.[187] The OFA provided substantial amendments to the 1991 Constitution, introducing guarantees of minority rights,[188] and *de facto* transforming MK in a multi-ethnic nation-State. A cornerstone of the OFA regarded the process of decentralization[189] of

[180] Similarly, Adamson and Jovic put at the origin of the North Macedonian ethnic dispute the re-negotiation of ethnic identities in the wake of North Macedonia independence in 1991, following which the concept of nationhood was approached to the Macedonian ethnicity, while Albanians were relegated to the political status of 'minority' group. See: Kevin Adamson & Dejan Jovic, "The Macedonian–Albanian political frontier: the re-articulation of post-Yugoslav political identities", *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2004); Bellamy, *supra* note 172, 123.
[181] Authors seem to agree that all these cultural, political and economic factors can be considered necessary but not sufficient elements to justify the surge of armed conflict, since such conditions had persisted throughout the 90s without intensification. See for example: Pavlos I. Koktsidis, "How Conflict Spreads: Opportunity Structures and the Diffusion of Conflict in the Republic of Macedonia", *Civil Wars*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2014).
[182] Stefan Wolff, *Ethnic Conflict: A Global Perspective*, 2006, 114.
[183] Lars Jerker Lock, "Macedonia", *Sida Division for South-East Europe*, October 2003 (available at https://www.sida.se/contentassets/a4319f99cc124339800aecd53db36bfa/macedonia-a-conflict-analysis_936.pdf), 8.
[184] Brita Helleland, "Feature: Light returns to Black Mountain village as returnees rebuild homes", *UNHCR*, November 2002 (available at https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2002/11/3dc29aca4/feature-light-returns-black-mountain-village-returnees-rebuild-homes.html).
[185] For a detailed overview of the negotiation process leading to the Ohrid Framework Agreement and main political actors involved, see: Eva Gross, *The Europeanization of National Foreign Policy: Continuity and Change in European Crisis Management*, 2009, 32-38; Alice Ackermann, "Macedonia in a post-peace agreement environment: a role for conflict prevention and reconciliation", *The International Spectator*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2002), 73.
[186] For a shortcut on the peace negotiations outcome, see for example: International Crisis Group, "Macedonia: War On Hold", *ICG-Balkans Briefing*, August 2001 (available at https://www1.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/world/europe/south_east_europe/macedonia/MacedoniaWaronHold.pdf).
[187] Ragaru argues that the OFA undevoured to "confirm the existence of a unitary state while promoting institutional recognition of ethnic diversity". See: Nadège Ragaru, "Macedonia: between Ohrid and Brussels", *Chaillot Papers*, No. 107 (2008), 21; also: Florian Bieber, *Partial Implementation, Partial Success: The Case of Macedonia*, in: David Russell & Ian O'Flynn (eds.), New Challenges for Power-Sharing: Institutional and Social Reform in Divided Societies, 108.
[188] Substantial improvements occurred for what concern the issues of official languages of the State, the political representation of ethnic minorities and their inclusion in the public sector. See: *Framework Agreement*, 2001 (available at https://www.osce.org/skopje/100622?download=true), Annex A, Article 7, 8, 69 - paras 6.2, 5.2.
[189] Bruunbauer assesses the status of pre-2001 North Macedonia as "possibly the most centralized State in Europe". However, the excessive centralization had made local authorities often inefficient in addressing the economic and social needs of their communities See: Ulf Brunnbauer, "The implementation of the Ohrid agreement: ethnic Macedonian resentments", *JEMIE - Journal on ethnopolitics and minority issues in Europe*, No. 1 (2002), 6; Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS) & Institute for Democracy, Solidarity and Civil Society (IDSCS), "The Process of Decentralization in Macedonia: Prospects for Ethnic Conflict Mitigation, Enhanced Representation, Institutional

power,[190] concretized through the implementation of the Law on Local Self-Government (LLSG).[191] Decentralization was theoretically directed at making local governance more effective as well as strengthening local democracy and representation of minority groups,[192] thereby preventing feelings of marginalization that had fostered grievances in the first place.[193]

The peace process laid the foundations for what many considered a significant step towards achieving sustainable peace in MK. However, several authors agree that the outcomes were mixed, and the OFA failed to address the inter-ethnic relations comprehensively and sustainably.[194] Ackermann is careful to outline that a high level of mistrust continued to permeate ethnic communities after 2001, as the OFA seemed to leave heated sentiments of existential threat[195] and social insecurity without directly addressing the reconciliation problem.[196] Violence "reinforced exclusionary ethnic attitudes and politics",[197] widening social ethnic distance. Overall, the transformation of MK into a multi-ethnic State constituted a fragile equilibrium in which ethnicity is still given precedence over citizenship. In such a context, the risk of ethnic polarization is not entirely eradicated.[198] Therefore, it is possible to assert that the conflict is still not fully healed, rather, we could speak about a 'frozen' conflict, as

Efficiency and Accountability", *idscd.org*, 2006 (available at https://idscs.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/MACEDONIA_DECENTRALIZATION.FULLREPORT_APPENDIX.pdf), 9.

[190] For a comprehensive analysis of the process of decentralization in North Macedonia, see: Aisling Lyon, *Decentralisation and the Management of Ethnic Conflict: Lessons from the Republic of Macedonia*, 2016.

[191] For a review of the entire document, see: *Law on Local Self-Government*, January 2002 (available at http://mls.gov.mk/images/laws/EN/Law_LSG.pdf).

[192] According to Kamelia Dimitrova, the decentralization of power in multi-ethnic contexts has the potential to foster inter-ethnic coexistence as it provides local communities with an enhanced sense of ownership and empowerment, as well as an increased identification of the population in the State. See: Kamelia R. Dimitrova, "Municipal Decisions on the Border of Collapse: Macedonian Decentralisation and the Challenges of Post- Democracy", *Southeast European Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2004), 176.

[193] Lyon, *supra* note 190, 57.

[194] Many authors point to a gaping an incomplete peace process. For instance, Lyon is keen to underline how the decentralization process in North Macedonia was rather partial in failing to offer adequate protection and equal recognition to all ethnic communities. See for example: Lyon, *supra* note 160; Ragaru, *supra* note 187; Jenny Engström, "Multi-ethnicity or Bi-nationalism? The Framework Agreement and the Future of the Macedonian State", *JEMIE - Journal on ethnopolitics and minority issues in Europe*, No. 1 (2002); Zhidas Daskalovski, "Language and Identity: The Ohrid Framework Agreement and Liberal Notions of Citizenship and Nationality in Macedonia", *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2002), 15.

[195] Most Macedonians perceived the OFA reforms as undermining their security and identity, which for many had sedimented on the affirmation of a mono-ethnic Macedonian nation-State. See: International Crisis Group, "Macedonia's Name: Why the Dispute Matters and How to Resolve It", *ICG-Balkans Report*, December 2001 (available at https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/122-macedonia-s-name-why-the-dispute-matters-and-how-to-resolve-it.pdf), 9.

[196] Among other things, the issue of war crimes that had been committed by armed actors from both sides kept on fueling inter-ethnic hostilities and distrust, despite the formalization of the legislative revisions. See: Ackermann, *supra* note 185, 75.

[197] Elena Spasovska, *The Role of Women's Non-Government Organisations in Building Peace in the Republic of Macedonia*, 2017 (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation), 3.

[198] Ragaru, *supra* note 187, 21.

some episodes of violence occurred in the last few years demonstrate.[199] In 2008, Reka wrote that OFA's biggest challenge would have been to withstand the proof of time as a practical framework for conflict prevention. Twelve years after, this research wants to contribute to assessing the performance of such a process.[200]

3.3.2 THE PEACE ARCHITECTURE AND CICRs

Chapter 2 has stressed how the development of constructive relationships, reconciliation, and joint problem-solving capacities is fundamental to root sustainable peace. The capacity to promore national dialogue and "recreate some form of peaceful coexistence" among communities is essential for long-term peace and stability.[201] Hislope argued that one of the main problems of the status of inter-ethnic relations in the pre-2001 MK had been the lack of mechanisms that could cut across ethnic divisions and build "a web of interlocking relations".[202] To foster inter-ethnic dialogue, the OFA envisioned the creation of a peace architecture to deal with inter-ethnic coexistence.

Firstly, the already existing central Council dedicated to deal with inter-ethnic issues was reformed and strengthened by constitutional amendments. Composed of 19 members representing the different minority groups,[203] this national organ undertook the duty of considering questions of inter-ethnic nature and forwarding proposals to the legislative body.[204] The Committee also assumed the function of oversight on the double majority system (or Batender majority)[205] for what concerned the laws affecting minority rights. As a whole, tts effectiveness has drawn several criticisms, demonstrating

[199] See for example: Reuters in Kumanovo, "Violence between Macedonia police and 'terrorists' increases scrutiny of PM", *The Guardian*, May 2015 (available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/11/macedonia-violence-nikola-gruevski-government).
[200] Armend Reka, "The Ohrid Agreement: The Travails of Inter-ethnic Relations in Macedonia", *Human Rights Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2008), 56.
[201] Ackermann, *supra* note 185, 82.
[202] Robert Hislope, "Between a Bad Peace and a Good War: Insights and Lessons from the Almost-War in Macedonia", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 26, No.1 (2003), 136.
[203] As far as the Committee's composition is concerned, 7 members are Macedonian MPs, 7 are Albanian MPs and the rest of the members consist in 1 MP for each the Turkish, Vlach, Romas, Bosniak and Serbian minorities. See: Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, *supra* note 178, Amendment XII.
[204] *Ibid.*
[205] Drawing its name by the French judge Robert Batender, it defines a voting procedure according to which a piece of legislation is adopted if it obtains the simple majority of votes over the overall number of MPs in the Parliament, plus a simple majority of votes of those MPs belonging to minority groups). In case of disputes arising on the voting of laws affecting the status of minority groups, the Committee is in charge of discussing and resolving the dispute internally, finally reaching a consensus by a majority vote. The functions and prerogatives of the Committee are specified by the Law on Inter-Community Relations Committee. See: *Law on Inter-Community Relations Committee*, December 2007 (available at https://www.sobranie.mk/inter-community-relations-committee.nspx).

intrinsic weaknesses that made of the Committee more a replica of the Parliament at a smaller scale than a useful *forum* of cooperation among ethnic representatives.[206]

Secondly, Municipalities presenting a high degree of ethnic heterogeneity were endowed of standing LPCs responsible for the improvement of inter-ethnic relations. As national-mandated I4P, the CICRs were created to "institutionalize inter-ethnic dialogue", functioning in a preventive manner *vis-à-vis* the surge of inter-ethnic tensions.[207] As part of the decentralization process, they were enabled to act as instruments for strengthening minorities' participation, and thus their sense of ownership, in the Municipalities' decision-making.[208] Following Article 55 of the LLSG, any Municipality where at least 20% of the population belonged to a minority group, had to create a CICR compulsorily.[209] Eventually, 20 Municipalities out of 85 were obliged to establish them.[210] As far as the CICRs composition is concerned, ethnic groups existing in the Municipality should count an equal number of representatives. This specific requirement aims to involve all minority groups in the debate, regardless of whether they benefit from political representation in the Municipal Council, thus promoting inter-ethnic dialogue beyond politics. Paragraph 4 of Article 55 deals with outlining the mandate of the CICRs. These have to handle inter-ethnic issues and questions, by discussing solutions and forwarding appraisals to the Municipal Council. Here, this latter is obliged to review the proposals and make a decision.[211] Although not explicitly specified in Article 55, Treneska-Deskoska and other authors[212] observe that the CICRs have undertaken functions other than those prescribed by the law. These ended up including not exclusively all the matters subject to the Batender rule and specified by Article 41 of the LLSG,[213] but also any other question involving inter-ethnic relations, issues and disputes occurring within the Municipal territory.[214] According to Odendaal, one of the the essential roles is "to defuse potentially harmful rumors and facilitate negotiations between

[206] Authors agree on the view that the political tensions existing inside the political institutions majorly reflected in the Committee, making it incapable of tabling a constructive debate on inter-ethnic issues: See for example: Treneska-Deskoska, *supra* note 160, 76-78. For an assessment of the Committee's effectiveness, see: Petkovski, *supra* note 159; Odendaal, *supra* note 134, 46.
[207] Treneska-Deskoska, *supra* note 160, 85.
[208] Sreten Koceski, "Committees for Inter Community Relations – CICR: Establishment, mandate and existing experiences", *CDI*, 2008 (available at https://www.osce.org/skopje/30744?download=true), 5.
[209] Law on Local-Self Government, *supra* note 191, Article 55.
[210] Andries Odendaal, "An Architecture for Building Peace at the Local Level: A Comparative Study of Local Peace Committees", *UNDP*, Discussion Paper, 2010 (available at https://www.un.org/en/land-natural-resources-conflict/pdfs/UNDP_Local%20Peace%20Committees_2011.pdf), 15.
[211] Law on Local-Self Government, *supra* note 191, Article 55.
[212] See for example: Treneska-Deskoska, *supra* note 160; Odendaal, *supra* note 210.
[213] "The regulations referring to culture, use of the languages and alphabets spoken by less than 20% of the citizens in the Municipality, determining and use of the coat of arms and flag of the Municipality, shall be adopted by the majority of votes of the present council members, within which there must be a majority of votes of the present council members belonging to the communities which are not the majority of the population in the Municipality". See: Law on Local-Self Government, *supra* note 191, Article 41.
[214] Treneska-Deskoska, *supra* note 160, 79

relevant stakeholders".[215] In other words, CICRs should perform as *conflict transformation* platforms where community stakeholders engage in constructive discussions and problem-solving. Koceski highlights that the CICRs can also play a fundamental role in improving inter-community trust and cooperation, through cultural and social activities.[216] On paper, the creation of the CICRs has the potential to improve inter-ethnic cooperation and facilitate trust-building, thanks to the fact that all the ethnic groups are ensured with an advocacy platform where they can make sure that their views are taken into account by other communities as well as by the Municipality. *Conflict transformation* capacities are thus enshrined within institutional capacities,[217] increasing the outreach of the whole process as it exists the potential for transforming ethnic demands, together with actions to improve inter-ethnic relations more broadly, in political responses.

The existing material on the CICRs provides mixed signals. On one side, the CICRs seem to have proven to be effective in defusing violent escalations between ethnic groups, and facilitating inter-ethnic dialogue and cooperative relations among communities.[218] On the other hand, this evidence appears somewhat anecdotal.[219] A UNDP report from 2010 concluded that, in most Municipalities, the CICRs had been constituted by the authorities "for the sake of demonstrating that they have done so", but these bodies were mostly dysfunctional and often bypassed by local administrations.[220] Beyond these assumptions, their actual working capacity 19 years after the conflict in MK, constitutes the focus of the present study.

3.4 THE POINT ON THE RESEARCH METHOD

The methods usually employed by the exploratory case study methodology are qualitative. Nevertheless, it has to be conceded that a quantitative analysis could have also been undertaken to explore the research problem, given the capacity of quantitative assessments to produce cause-effect descriptions.[221] However, both the limited number of existing data on the work of the CICRs and the outburst of the Covid-19 pandemic, rendered it very complicated to set up an exclusively quantitative framework for the investigation. On the other hand, a qualitative approach has the potential to

[215] Odendaal, *supra* note 210, 53.
[216] One example, organized by the Municipality of Sopishte under the advice of the CICR, is the organization of an ethnically mixed football league in the city. Koceski, *supra* note 208, 15.
[217] *Ibid*, 15.
[218] Odendaal, *supra* note 210, 53.
[219] *Ibid.*
[220] United Nations Programme to Enhance Inter-Ethnic Dialogue and Collaboration, "Results of a Participatory Assessment National and Local Capacities for Strengthening Inter-Ethnic Dialogue and Collaboration", *UNDP*, September 2010 (available at http://mdgfund.org/sites/default/files/UNDP_Participatory_Report_Full_English.pdf), 5.
[221] Stake, *supra* note 168, 37.

showcase the nuances of the studied phenomenon. Within the exploratory process, the opinions of key experts on the work of the CICRs were considered intrinsically necessary for providing the Research Question with a multi-faceted answer, primarily due to their capacity to provide in-depth narratives about the present conditions. Nevertheless, information (mostly of quantitative nature) collected from reliable secondary sources was equally employed to supplement the interview data. This technique denominated 'triangulation', relies on the use of multiple sources of evidence to add breadth to the research and understanding of the phenomenon under question, minimizing misperception and invalidity of the findings.[222] This research method demonstrated to be appropriate *vis-à-vis* an embedded case study methodology.[223]

3.4.1 DATA COLLECTION

The author hence resorted to mixed data collection methods, drawing from both primary and secondary sources. In this way, the author sought to construct observations as objective and holistic as possible, avoiding "mere intuition and the good intention to 'get it right".[224] Triangulating data delivers more construct validity to the findings, therefore "multiple sources of evidence"[225] should be turned to. The analysis relied first and foremost on one-on-one interviews with informed stakeholders from within MK. Primary sources were considered valuable to extract meaningful insights and first-hand experiences, especially considering the hardship in finding information about the key indicators (described below) of transparency, accessibility, and participation. Additionally, secondary data was considered to complement and triangulate the knowledge evidenced by the interviews. The author believed that such data could add value to the evaluation of the findings by providing a marked quantitative perspective and granting more factuality to the observations. Secondary data were taken from the academic research of Petkovski, who conducted a quantitative investigation of the CICRs in 2014,[226] and from surveys and reports released by non-governmental entities (CDI, ZELS),[227] and international organizations engaged in MK. These are the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the UNDP. These sources span between 2007, year of establishment of most of the CICRs, and 2018, date of the last survey conducted across Municipalities by the NGO CDI.

[222] Scholz & Tietje, *supra* note 167, 20.
[223] *Ibid*, 14.
[224] Stake, *supra* note 168, 107.
[225] The author speaks about evidence from two or more sources but converging on the same set of facts or findings for triangulation. See: Yin, *supra* note 162, 83.
[226] For reference, see: Petkovski, *supra* note 159.
[227] Mainly produced the Community Development Initiative (CDI), a North Macedonian NGOs that particularly focused in the las few years on assessing and improving the work of the CICRs. The other source is ZELS, the association of the units of self-government of North Macedonia. that worked extensively on improving the operativity of the CIRS.

3.4.2 INTERVIEWS

For the selection of the participants, the researcher used a purposeful sampling strategy. As Creswell defines it, "this means that the inquirer selects individuals [..] because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study".[228] Since the research problem at the center of this dissertation aims to shed light on the operativity of the CICRs, the author considered experts and informed personalities on the functioning of the Councils as 'purposeful' participants for the interview process. Such criterion was explicitly outlined within the solicitation e-mail that was forwarded to any potential candidate, stating that the candidates could deny their involvement in case of lack of expertise. In the initial idea of the researcher, such a sampling category could include members of non-governmental bodies working in contact with the CICRs, officials from governmental organizations engaged in MK, and members of both Municipal Councils and CICRs themselves. Given the material constraints of the recruitment procedure due to the pandemic, no other selection criteria were set. This latter assumed that the interviewed people answered the questions honestly.

The recruiting strategy occurred by online solicitation between February and May 2020. The process began with sending an informative e-mail describing the study purposes and the contribution that participants could make. Afterward, fundamental for the advancement in the recruitment procedure was the utilization of first contacts' networks for reaching further potential candidates. Eventually, the number of recruited participants was not highly satisfactory due to the hardship generated by the Covid-19 outbreak. The author managed to conduct seven *semi-structured interviews* with purposeful stakeholders. The researcher carried out three semi-structured interviews with officials from international organizations and four semi-structured interviews with exponents of civil society organizations. The choice of resorting to multiple interviews with stakeholders territorially diffused in MK rather than focusing on a single Municipality served the exploratory purposes of the embedded case study methodology, seeking to construct a comprehensive state of play capable of gathering altogether elements that may differ from one Municipal context to the other. In this way, the risk of undermining the exhaustiveness of the analysis, by focusing solely on one Municipality, was partially, although not totally, reduced. On the other side, the risk of disregarding specificities of the various units of analysis is evident and makes part of the limitations to the present research.

[228] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Enquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2007, 125.

The interviews took place via Skype during the first half of May 2020. The participants were provided with the Questionnaire and the Informed Consent Form describing the envisioned protection of confidentiality at least one week in advance. All data was maintained under protected conditions. Only the researcher had direct access to them. Confidentiality was ensured at all times. Upon completion of the dissertation, all maintained information will be destroyed. For confidentiality purposes, the author agreed separately with each participant on the suitable naming for the presentation of the findings. Officials of international organizations explicitly demanded of being referred to anonymously. Thus, these were named Official 1, 2, and 3. The two representatives of the Center for Inter-Cultural Dialogue (CID), a Kumanovo-based NGO, also asked for the omission of their names. Hence, they were referred to as CID Member 1 and 2. The other participants, Sreten Koceski and Ardita Mehmeti[229] agreed on the explicit use of their full names and titles. The documents used for the interviews can be found in Annex A and B: Informed Interviews Questionnaire, Informed Consent Form.

3.4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

All the interviews were recorded by using the dedicated tool provided by Skype. Consequently, the interviews were transcribed in different Word documents and examined to detect thematic commonalities following the framework or thematic analysis approach.[230] The author employed such a method to process and catalog the corpus of information into thematic sections, to support the operations of classification and summarization. The thematic analysis was also employed because it permits achieving better clarity and cohesion in data exposition to the readers. Through the analysis, the author highlighted common and contrasting trends derived by the experiences of the different participants. In the first place, the author reviewed the interviews' transcripts to detect "recurring regularities",[231] by highlighting quotes that could be significant. Following the structure of the interviews' questions, thematic categories emerged. Such aggregated information was brought together with data originating from the review of secondary sources to highlight relationships across the data sources, testing the emerging thematic categories against the data.[232] In this way, the author sought to construct an analysis as objective as possible, triangulating participants' opinions with evidence from secondary sources. Lastly, so-created 'themes' were refined and solidified.

[229] Sreten Koceski is the Director of the NGO Community Development Initiative; Ardita Mehmeti is the Deputy Director of the CSO ZELS. See: *supra* note 227.
[230] Beverley Hancock, *Trent Focus for Research and Development in Primary Health Care: An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 1998, 17.
[231] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*, 1998, 180.
[232] *Ibid.*

3.4.4 KEY INDICATORS

Given the scarcity of information in this respect, the interviews sought to investigate three key aspects capable of providing an incisive perspective on the CICRs as effective I4P. Giessmann underlines that I4P, considered fully-fledged institutions, are likely to be successful and offer "a space for sustainable collaborative relations" if they are based on three key "indicators":[233] transparency, accessibility, participation. Such components are fundamental to ensure legitimacy and sustainability to the work of I4P, by fostering confidence-building across society sectors towards the established bodies. It is a specific interest of this dissertation to analyze these elements as a way to stimulate further discussions and research opportunities in their respect. Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify the use that the author made of these indicators. The researcher did not employ them with a determinist perspective, namely to determine the success or not of the CICRs. Instead, these were handled as analytical tools to grasp nuances of the CICRs in light of the I4P theory as foreseen by the exploratory methodology. The researcher considered that they could finally provide useful guidance about which areas of improvement deserve particular attention. Usually, these components are regarded as indicators of good governance quality, and our elaboration drew exactly from this sphere since Giessmann lacks in providing guidelines in defining them.

First and foremost, to consider *transparency*, the author resorted to the formulation made by Bauhr and Grimes. They frame this indicator as "the availability of, and feasibility for actors both internal and external to State operations to access and disseminate information relevant to evaluating institutions, both in terms of rules, operations as well as outcomes".[234] Put it shortly, transparency lies in the capacity of institutions to openly provide information to the public. The possibility that external stakeholders can easily gain access to such information guarantees accountability and prevents distrust.[235] Bauhr and Grimes provide three key dimensions to measure transparency: government (or institutional) openness, whistleblower protection, and publicity. Leaving alone the third component[236] on the basis of the scarce interest in the relation between the CICRs and the media, the researcher focused on the first two. 'Institutional openness' refers to the facility of access to information,[237] while 'whistleblower protection' exposes the degree of vulnerability of

[233] Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 15.
[234] Monika Bauhr & Marcia Grimes, "New Measures and Relevance for Quality of Government", *The Quality of Government Institute*, Working Paper, 2012 (available at https://qog.pol.gu.se/digitalAssets/1418/1418047_2012_16_bauhr_grimes.pdf), 5.
[235] *Ibid*, 2.
[236] Publicity is defined by Bauhr and Grimes as "the extent to which detected improprieties actually stand a reasonable chance to reach the public and relevant stakeholders", and it is connected to press freedom and newspaper circulation. *Ibid*, 9-10.
[237] *Ibid*, 7-8.

whistleblowers.[238] This latter dimension is fundamental to verify the likelihood of disclosing power abuses and wrongdoings externally.[239] In the present investigation, the author hence examined both the degree of openness of information for what regards the election procedures, mandate and work outputs of the CICRs, as well as the degree of vulnerability of possible whistleblowers.

Accessibility as a dimension of governance is usually connected to a physical determination (e.g. accessibility of disabled people to buildings), or a rather diverse type of accessibility of economic nature to public services such as healthcare or education. The OECD asserts that "the impact of basic public goods and services [..] depends significantly on the extent to which intended recipients are able to access", and that "services can be considered a performance criterion for governments, reflecting their capacities to accurately recognize the diversity and nature of different needs, create and tailor delivery and communication channels accordingly, and ensure equity and fairness in delivery and distribution".[240] Accessible services should be reactive *vis-a-vis* differentiated needs as well as be available to anyone. Therefore, the CICRs were considered in the same way as services, hence exploring their degree of accessibility for residents. The accessibility component can determine the reactivity of the CICRs in responding to direct needs of the community as well as enhance the principles of representation and community empowerment. One of the primary purposes of the decentralization process in MK was to narrow the gap between governance institutions and marginalized segments of the population, guaranteeing enhanced accessibility to local governance. Two angles were considered for the investigation. The first had to do with the possibility for citizens to indiscriminately access to a seat inside the CICRs, while the second looked upon the existence of mechanisms for residents to bring issues directly under the attention of the CICRs.

As far as the *participation* component is concerned, the author employed an exhaustive definition provided by Ricciardelli. Participation "refers to the citizens' capacity of engaging in public management affairs […] by taking part in decision-making that would ultimately respond more proactively to citizen concerns".[241] By granting citizens the opportunity to participate in shaping their own destinies, participation is a powerful tool to strengthen representativeness, ownership, and

[238] Whistleblowers are inside members responsible for reporting wrongdoings and power abuses to the public or the press. The more the whistleblowers are likely to suffer repercussions for reporting such misdoings externally, the less the institution in question can be defined as transparent. See: *Ibid*, 9.
[239] *Ibid.*
[240] OECD, "Government at a Glance", *OECD Publishing*, 2013 (available at https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/gov_glance-2013-en.pdf?expires=1588611088&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=95F5EB45D2611CD9934C182A8C5A1BDB), 150.
[241] Alessandra Ricciardelli, *Governance, Local Communities, and Citizens Participation*, in: Ali Farazmand (ed.), Global Encyclopedia for Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance, 2017, 1.

accountability. Therefore, the research attempt to investigate the involvement of citizens in the decision-making and electoral processes of the CICRs.

The exploration of these aspects of the CICRs resulted in useful insights for reflecting on their state as effective I4P. Also, it opened up opportunities for fostering research on these indicators.

3.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The main limitation of the present study originates from the very nature of the methodological approach. A case study is, by definition, particularistic and contextual, therefore rendering the findings hard to meet a wider generalization to the broader population. Nevertheless, generalization is not an objective of the research. The author is convinced that by outlining challenges, and proposing solutions, to the unique case of the CICRs, a contribution to expanding the literature research on I4P can be made and ulterior research opportunities can be paved. This dissertation wants to offer a limited level of generalization that is based on treating the CICRs as an example of LPCs with a peacebuilding mandate at the grassroots. The exploration of the challenges affecting the working capacity of the CICRs can lead to further research, as well as policy improvement, on how to best design I4P at the local level to effectively pursue peacebuilding objectives.

Another important limitation weighs on the methodology and methods employed for collecting data. Such constraint was conferred by employing the embedded case study methodology together with the material impossibility of conducting a large number of interviews with key stakeholders from a broader spectrum of Municipalities. This reduced the scope of the research outcomes further, omitting salient differences and variables among CICRs of different Municipalities. The units of analysis were considered holistically without emphasizing comparative assessments. However, this methodological limitation to the exhaustiveness of the collected data is defendable on the ground of the impossibility to conduct field research in MK, as initially planned. The author made every effort to expand the network of stakeholders that could take part in the interview process, by contacting via e-mail nearly 20 interlocutors. However, the sole counting on electronic communications, as well as the chaotic situation generated by the pandemic in MK, obstructed the recruitment process, and weakened the exhaustiveness of the research findings.

This Chapter aimed to outline the research design chosen to answer the Research Question. The goal of Chapter 4 is to provide a framework analysis to present the investigation results.

4) RESEARCH RESULTS

This Chapter presents the investigation results. By analyzing the information provided by interviewees and triangulating it with data extracted from secondary sources, valuable information was gathered regarding CICRs' current condition, challenges to mandate implementation and specific aspects of their working operationality with respect to transparency, accessibility, and participation.

The analysis is organized into three main thematic sections, corresponding to the three strands of the Research Question, and reflected within the backbone of the interviews. Starting from the hypothesis that the CICRs are mostly inoperative and unable to fulfill their premises, Theme 1 answered the first sub-question; *To what extent the CICRs contributed to improving the status of inter-ethnic relations in the Municipalities where they were established?* Theme 2 addressed the second sub-question; *What are the main obstacles to the proper functioning of the CICRs?* However, the leading interest of the investigation aimed at assessing the status of the CICRs as effective I4P. Following Giessmann,[242] the CICRs should contemplate critical features to operate as effective peacebuilding *fora*. Theme 3 addressed the last research sub-question; *How the principles of transparency, accessibility, and participation are observed in the structure and functioning of the CICRs?*

4.1 THEME 1: CICRs AND LOCAL INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

Six out of seven respondents highlighted how the CICRs had a very low or no impact on inter-ethnic relations improvement. Official 1 described it as "very negligible", asserting that the CICRs have never been perceived as incisive organs. Likewise, Official 2 stated: "CICRs have not demonstrated to fulfill the purpose of their existence", having "no substantial impact on inter-ethnic relations". Three NGO members agreed that, while during the first years after their establishment, the CICRs had played some role "at least institutionally", in solving inter-ethnic tensions, their current impact is minimal. However, their justifications slightly differ. Sreten Koceski[243] asserted that since "they do not get together, do not have meetings and do not function", there is "no argument to say that they are contributing somehow" to improve inter-ethnic relations at the Municipal level. CID Member 1 justified their opinion about "little or no effect" on the basis that the CICRs "represent an improvement in the legislation in terms of integration of the different communities", but "they do not have put in practice what they envisioned". CID Member 2 held: "to some extent, they [CICRs] have

[242] Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 15.
[243] Director of the Community Development Initiative, see: *supra* note 227 & 229.

improved the status of inter-ethnic relations" as they "gave their contribution within the Municipal Council when topics about the two communities [Albanian and Macedonian] went hot", thus "we cannot neglect their work". They then referred that the diminished intensity of their work can nowadays be partially attributed to the reduced number of inter-ethnic disputes between communities. However, they continued saying that their current focus should be on "how to improve and give inputs in the relations between the communities", whereas they are failing in doing so. Ardita Mehmeti[244] was the only participant to respond affirmatively to the question. She outlined that the CICRs "played and still play an important role in building, maintaining and improving the inter-ethnic relations not only between Albanian and Macedonian ethnic communities but also all other communities", thanks to "their tremendous impact on local policies". The results of a 2018 *Survey* reflect the scarce engagement of the CICRs to the broader improvement of inter-ethnic relations. The 11 CICRs meetings held in 2018 across 19 Municipalities hardly focused on incisive topics for inter-ethnic coexistence at large, dealing instead with limited-impact issues (e.g. renaming the schools in Municipality of Debar,).[245] Furthermore, although some participants pointed to the fact that the CICRs had been more active in the past (immediately post-2007), the 2010 UNDP *Report* signals that most topics of CICRs competence were already directed to political leaders by then, bypassing the Commissions.[246] Likewise, Petkovski's research evidence had underlined the irresponsiveness of CICRs to events that risked to deteriorate inter-ethnic relations.[247]

When describing the upstream causes of such poor performance, five participants noted that the CICRs lack visibility. In other words, citizens are not aware of their existence, and thus the CICRs fail to be recognized as reliable bodies. For instance, Official 1 pointed out: "there is little knowledge among the population about what a CICR is and its functions". Evidence also emerged from both the OSCE *Analytical Report on the Decentralization Process*[248] and the *Report on the Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in the Republic of Macedonia*.[249] Based upon several interviews with citizens, this latter reported that "many citizens are neither aware that their municipality is obliged to establish a CICR".[250]

[244] Deputy Director of ZELS, see: *Ibid.*
[245] OSCE & CDI*, Комисии за односи меѓу заедниците - Резултати од прашалник***,** November 2018 (unpublished Questionnaire Results).
[246] United Nations Programme to Enhance Inter-Ethnic Dialogue and Collaboration, *supra* note 220, 5,7.
[247] Petkovski, *supra* note 159, 148-149.
[248] OSCE Mission to Skopje, "Analytical Report on the Decentralization Process**",** *osce.org*, September 2014 (available at https://www.osce.org/skopje/231581?download=true), 89.
[249] Survey among the population and study conducted in 2012 by the Community Development Initiative, see below.
[250] Community Development Initiative, "Report on the Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in the Republic of Macedonia- Perceptions of the citizens at the local level*", CDI,* 2012 (Unpublished Report), 8, 14.

Some participants reported a general improvement of inter-ethnic relations at the Municipal level in MK. This positive trend seems to find confirmation in the OSCE data from 2009, showing that the majority of citizens (78%) evaluated the status on inter-ethnic relations in their Municipalities positively, against a minority (13%) of negative marks.[251] In the words of Official 1: "since the end of the conflict, inter-ethnic relations experienced ups and downs", however, "if there is something that has improved inter-ethnic relations in a substantial way, I would not say these have been the CICRs".

To sum up, although inter-ethnic relations in MK relatively improved over time, the role played by CICRs in this process appears fairly limited. Even the participants that provided a partial or total positive view on the role of the CICRs did not provide specific examples to support their opinions, externalizing a tangible difficulty in framing their role in detail. A partial explanation of this low impact is linked with the poor visibility of the CICRs to the public, signaling a lack of inclusion of grassroots communities within CICRs scope. Even if the CICRs had more significance at an early stage, their recent activity hugely diminished in terms of intensity. The 2018 *Survey* reports that only 6 of the 17 Municipalities responding held CICRs meetings during the same year. Among these, only 2 CICRs submitted opinions to the Municipal Council, but in 0 cases this latter answered to the proposals.[252]

4.2 THEME 2: CHALLENGES OF THE CICRs

Six respondents reported the lack of independence from political parties' influence among the most burdening challenges to the CICRs' proper functioning. Official 1 referred that the CICRs were "very much subjected to political dynamics at the local level", for which "it becomes very difficult for a representative to be totally independent by its party affiliation". Likewise, CID Member 1 talked about "a high level of intervention of the political parties within the local administration". Another evidence of the existence of political impediments to the work of the CICRs was traced by some participants in the discontinuity of the CICRs work. Once the 4-years mandate of the respective Municipal Council ends, a new CICR is formed. The high politicization of the CICRs was a recurrent topic both throughout the interviews and within all the secondary sources analyzed.[253] The *Survey*

[251] OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje, "Decentralization Survey", *osce.org*, December 2009 (available at https://www.osce.org/skopje/41048), 54.
[252] In 2015 it also had been 0, while in 2014 solely two proposals from the CICRs had been finally accepted by their respective Municipal Councils. See: OSCE & CDI, *supra* note 245.
[253] OSCE Spillover Monitoring Mission to Skopje, *supra* note 251, 89; Community Development Initiative, *supra* note 250, 10.

reported that 8 out of the 19 Municipalities answering had CICRs solely composed by political parties' representatives.[254] Political influence was majorly detected in the election of CICRs members, but this specific subject is further developed below.

The lack of budget was appointed by most of the interviewees as another great weakness. According to CID Member 2: "one thing which is an obstacle is that the members are working on a voluntary basis so they are not receiving any financial support, so everything that they will do, like any meeting or anything, will be just voluntarily and will not be paid for them, and having in mind that these are the people who are at the same time working 8 hours somewhere else, it is natural that they will focus more time on their job rather than be very much devoted on many issues and to go deeper in any things that the Commission can do". Ardita Mehmeti concurred that CICRs "do not have financial support from Municipal budget and therefore no financial compensation is provided for their engagement". At the same time, Official 1 mentioned: "generic legislation exists foreseeing the financing of the CICRs activities, that however poses no obligations. Therefore, the CICRs also possess reduced resources to act independently". The lack of financial support appears to be a permanent issue over the years. In 2014, Petkovski accounted that only 3 out of the 33 existing CICRs were receiving economic support from the Municipality.[255] In the *Survey*, only 2 out of 19 Municipalities were allocating funds to the CICRs.[256]

Sreten Koceski and Official 3 gave primary significance to the existence of insurmountable "gaps in the law", for which "the Municipal authorities can easily bypass the legislation and put aside the CICRs". Koceski linked it to the lack of "political will" to improve the legislation and CICRs' working capacity. He appeared rather pessimist when outlining the reasons behind the lack of will from political authorities, saying that this would "mean that the decisions cannot be made between two or three people, but the wider community will be consulted". The absence of support by "Mayor and Municipal Council", was also considered a significant impediment by Official 2. The OSCE *Decentralization Report* confirmed the scarce consideration that Municipal authorities have for the CICRs, reporting that 60% of the Municipalities surveyed had responded with 'sometimes' to the question about how often the CICRs opinions were considered when deciding upon inter-ethnic issues.[257]

[254] The result accounted for 45% of the total responses. See: OSCE & CDI, *supra* note 245.
[255] Petkovski, *supra* note 159, 146.
[256] OSCE & CDI, *supra* note 245.
[257] OSCE Mission to Skopje, *supra* note 248, 84.

It stands out that the CICRs took existence in a highly politicized context. The participants put great emphasis on this point, in many instances returning to this subject throughout the interview and connecting other issues to the lack of independence from political authorities. This latter gap seemed to reflect on other problems raised by the participants. Another substantial challenge is the absence of funds for financing CICRs functioning, together with the lack of technical and administrative support received by the Municipal authorities. Some participants put paramount emphasis on the fact that the current legislation suffers from considerable gaps, allowing Municipal authorities to bypass the existence and proper functioning of the CICRs. A non-recurrent issue mentioned by some participants is the lack of technical capacities owned by CICRs members to perform their functions effectively.

4.3 THEME 3: KEY INDICATORS

The respondents were finally asked to express their opinions on three key characteristics of the CICRs structure and functioning: transparency, accessibility, and participation. Consequently, the section is structured into three parts.

4.3.1 TRANSPARENCY

The participants' answers regarding the transparency of the CICRs gave mixed signals, while secondary sources[258] pointed to it as a major issue. Most of the respondents addressed the questions focusing more on the fact that the citizens are neither informed nor interested in the work of the CICRs. Hence, although information is or could be made public by the CICRs, citizens are not interested in gaining access to it. For instance, Official 1 commented: "I believe that it is not difficult to obtain information on the work, but there is actually little knowledge of the CICRs existence". CDI *Citizens Survey* indicated the transparency gap as a main concern for many citizens, especially about the decision-making, allocation of funds, and database activities of the CICRs.[259]

Regarding the transparency in the election of CICRs constituents, participants outlined a significant gap. The interviewees showed little awareness themselves of the selection criteria in their respective Municipalities. For instance, CID Member 1 stated: "I do not know how they are selected in my city because usually that goes to the City Council". On the same line, most respondents indicated that the nominations of CICRs members lie entirely in the hands of the Municipal authorities. Among these,

[258] See: OSCE Mission to Skopje, *supra* note 248, 89; OSCE & CDI, *supra* note 245.
[259] Community Development Initiative, *supra* note 250, 9.

Official 2 asserted: "transparency of the election is to a big extent left to the discretion of the Mayor, just like the procedure for election/publishing of the call". Sreten Koceski declared: "in 90% of Municipalities they do not actually set criteria [..] between 10 and 20% they 'we have criteria', but they do not respect them". OSCE findings also confirm the issue of members election in a non-transparent way. Only 20% of the Municipalities surveyed declared to follow the proposals from village councils, leaving 80% of the CICRs with unclear election procedures.[260] Similar results were obtained by Petkovski.[261]

About the CICRs mandate, interviewees seemed to interpret it in different ways. Ardita Mehmeti declared: "the work of the CICRs is regulated by the municipal statutes. This is a public document; it can be easily found on the Municipality official web page". However, this was contrasted by CID Member 2: "most of the time, Municipalities' statutes are not very clear or precise. For example, in Kumanovo, it only states how many people would be within the CICR, and that is it". Koceski affirmatively stated: "it is written in the law; there are policy papers, policy briefs. It is clear what they should do". Similarly, CID Member 2 declared that "legally you can find most of the things related to their mandate, like the duration of it or how they are chosen". However, on the specific role of the CICRs at the Municipal level, "It is very hard to find a specific document, and for the citizens to find out more about their mandate". The lack of clarity of mandate was appointed by Petkovski as one of CICRs' major issues.[262]

The perceptions of the respondents on the transparency of CICRs decision-making process and outputs majorly aligned. Participants' views are better resumed in the words of CID Member 1: "The decisions are most of the time visible, but the process is not visible". The transcripts of CICRs meetings and voting sessions are not directly made public. However, interviewees agreed that potentially any citizen could request and obtain them from the Municipal archive. Participants' perception is confirmed by the *Survey*, in which 12 of 16 Municipalities declared to keep a detailed archival work of CICRs activities.[263] However, Official 2 reported that "almost no municipality publishes minutes from the CICRs meetings on the web and in this way, citizens cannot get timely and relevant information".

[260] OSCE Mission to Skopje, *supra* note 248, 83.
[261] Out of 33 Commissions, Petkovski had found out that in the majority of cases the political authorities of the Municipality had exclusive saying on the appointment of CICRs members. Petkovski, *supra* note 159, 146.
[262] *Ibid*, 144.
[263] OSCE & CDI, *supra* note 245.

CID Members stated that the decisions of the CICRs are made public through the Municipal Council's meetings and the Official Gazette. In the case of Kumanovo, they spoke about the possibility of updates about CICRs activities through their dedicated page on the Municipality website and the official Facebook page of the Commission. However, in CID Member 2's opinion: "transparency should be improved since we are living in the 21st century, most of the things could be published online", adding that "the CICR has its section on the Municipality website but you cannot find much information about it in that".

The feedback participants shared on the transparency aspects of the CICRs is mixed. The issue of visibility of the CICRs was again given paramount importance, raised in multiple instances by four participants. Transparency gaps were detected at the level of CICRs members' nomination. The mandate of the CICRs is another grey area, although few participants pointed to the body of laws regulating the CICRs. Respondents reported discrete transparency in matter of decision-making. Overall, according to the research sample we have, the CICRs seem to suffer to some extent from a transparency problem, as confirmed by multiple secondary sources. As a confirmation of this, none of the participants could recall any case of whistleblowing. Both CID Member 2 and Koceski confirmed that issues are usually solved internally while keeping a clean public face.

4.3.2 ACCESSIBILITY

Participants were mostly negative regarding accessibility, and only one of them reported a positive view about it. Four interviewees referred to political influence as the main obstacle to the free accessibility to CICRs membership. Koceski was one of these, stating: "it is always political representatives, even when you find some reports that say yes 'we made it in public, NGOs proposed…', in practice, behind the curtains, it is only a political decision". Official 1 concurred: "to be a representative of these bodies, you need some kind of political connection at the local level so that the limit to the accessibility of citizens is given by political affiliation or relationships with the political representatives in power in the Municipality". Likewise, CID Member 1 noted that political influence made of the CICRs "an environment that is not open to those people the CICRs were envisioned for". Official 3 also agreed, stating: "potential candidates do not run for office, they are usually appointed by the Mayor or municipal council". CID Member 1 added: "credibility in front of the political parties" (through the confirmation of the Municipal authorities) is a fundamental factor for selecting CICRs members. Divergently, Ardita Mehmeti noted: "the call for the selection of the members of the CICRs is open for all interested citizens. Here, I see the problem in the lack of interest

and motivation to be part of this body, and this is one of the reasons why the members of CICRs are coming mainly from municipal councils".

Almost none of the respondents considered ethnicity as a discriminatory factor, reporting the general respect of the principle of equitable representation of ethnic groups. Nevertheless, secondary sources report a different situation. In fact, the principle of equitable representation envisioned by the LLSG is not respected in several CICRs, and some minority groups are underrepresented.[264] Sreten Koceski explained: "in some municipalities dominant ethnicities can put more representatives from their own ethnicities, and less from the others".

About reporting issues directly to CICRs assemblies, five respondents asserted the lack of formal mechanisms through which citizens can report to the CICRs. Instead, they signaled the possibility to resort to informal channels, by personally contacting CICRs members. However, three participants expressed a somewhat negative view of the possibility that citizens can effectively bring any instance in front of the Commissions. For example, Official 2 noted: "starting from the fact that the contacts of the CICRs members are rarely published on the Municipal websites, I consider that accessibility of 'normal' citizens is rather limited". Conversely, two respondents judged accessibility positively. CID Member 2 noted the possibility of attending CICRs meetings as a working accessibility channel at citizens' disposal. Ardita Mehmeti offered a different perspective: "there are a legal provision and mechanism for submitting any complaint, proposal and other initiatives. Therefore, the accessibility is not really an issue here". She instead denoted the lack of proactivity by the citizens.

Accessibility to the CICRs represents an issue in participants' views. Despite some positive experiences, most interviewees noted the lack of accessible processes for both running for a seat and reporting an issue to CICRs' attention. Political affiliation plays a significant role in nominating CICRs members, while ethnicity does not constitute a problem for most interviewees. However, secondary sources outline issues of underrepresentation of minorities in some CICRs. Finally, directly reporting to the CICRs is a major issue. Even the informal channels considered by some respondents are difunctional according to the majority of the interviewees. Secondary sources lack data in this respect.

[264] See: CDI & ZELS, "Implementation of the Principle of Adequate and Equitable Representation", *ZELS*, November 2013 (available at http://www.zels.org.mk/Upload/Content/Documents/Dokumenti/EN/2014/Adequate%20and%20equitable%20representation.pdf), 80; OSCE Mission to Skopje, *supra* note 248, 88; OSCE & CDI, *supra* note 245.

4.3.3 PARTICIPATION

All the 7 respondents interviewed in this research had negative considerations of the possibility that citizens can participate in any way in the work of the CICRs.

All participants agreed that participation in the selection of CICRs members is very minimal or non-existent, with the process relying mostly on political authorities. On this point, Official 2 declared: "the procedure electing CICR members is not standardized in the country and includes a big portion of discretion by the Municipal management". CID Members concurred that "a limited or small group of people" can participate in proposing possible members to the Municipality. However, CID Member 1 stated: "proposing does not mean decision making, so it is really not participation because if you propose does not mean that those people will be elected". Ardita Mehmeti added: "there are some examples when the candidates are proposed by local communities on citizens gatherings, but these are rare examples". The *Survey* reports that only 5 of the 20 responding Municipalities envisioned some consultative mechanism, such as public call or consultation with CSOs.[265] In other cases, the selection of CICRs lay utterly in the hands of the Municipal authorities.

Participants displayed akin views regarding citizens' possibility to take part in the CICRs decision-making process. Nearly all the interviewees provided a negative answer or refrained from answering. For instance, Official 3 asserted: "there are no clear provisions concerning citizens' participation in formulating opinions by CIRCs". The sole divergent answer was provided by Ardita Mehmeti, saying: "the members of the CICRs are obliged to consult the communities that they represent, this is often conducted by citizens gatherings, individual contacts, media". On this issue, Sreten Koceski contrasted: "Usually, it is advised to CICRs members to go and talk to the members of their community [..] But they do not do it." The CDI *Survey* reports that no cases have been noted in which the CICRs consulted citizens.[266] Overall, participation shows to be a sore subject for the CICRs. Answers from participants provided an overall negative overview of both the aspects of participation explored, corroborated by secondary evidence.

This Chapter presented the results of the 7 interviews conducted with expert stakeholders, and their triangulation with secondary data. This is followed by a discussion of the results, seeking to highlight key points revealed by the CICRs case study.

[265] OSCE & CDI, *supra* note 245.
[266] Community Development Initiative, *supra* note 250, 9.

5) DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Chapter 4 displayed the results of the research. What follows includes their discussion, facilitated by resorting to the I4P literature to reflects on the shortcomings of the CICRs. Ultimately, recommendations to overcome the challenges faced by the CICRs will be advanced.

5.1 INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

Odendaal asserts that the added value of LPCs is the creation of institutionalized channels for dialogue among community sections.[267] In turn, dialogue fosters social cohesion, joint problem-solving, and trust-building at the local level.[268] LPCs own then the potential to improve socio-political relations in locally divided communities. In MK, no institutionalized mechanism enabling constructive dialogue among communities existed before 2001. Thus, the CICRs represent a groundbreaking development in this respect.[269] Municipalities established these Councils in the hope that they could enhance inter-ethnic relations in their local settings.[270] The CICRs were to act as peacebuilding *fora* to handle issues arising between communities,[271] supporting inter-ethnic coexistence,[272] hence contributing to the peaceful development of the North Macedonian society.[273]

Feedback received by participants showed that the CICRs poorly managed to enhance inter-ethnic relations in the Municipalities where they were created. Various reasons were appointed to explain their scarce performance, such as the lack of visibility in the community, and their relegation from Municipal authorities. CID Member 2, speaking about Kumanovo, referred to the issue that the local CICR was mainly directing its action at organizing cultural activities with a minimal impact on the wider inter-ethnic relations in the city. Respondents concurred that the CICRs are only established "on paper" in many Municipalities, providing no actual platform to foster peaceful relations. Secondary data confirmed participants' negative opinions, showing the clear bypassing of the CICRs at the hands of Municipal authorities. Although the CICRs have been effective in few instances in defusing inter-ethnic tensions, as some participants and secondary sources reported,[274] they got

[267] Odendaal, *supra* note 210, 7, 11.
[268] *Ibid*, 12.
[269] *Ibid*, 11.
[270] Petkovski, *supra* note 159, 142.
[271] Lyon, *supra* note 160, 36.
[272] Odendaal, *supra* note 210, 51.
[273] Koceski, *supra* note 208, 5.
[274] For example, see: Odendaal, *supra* note 210, 53; Koceski, *supra* note 208.

overall sidelined by Municipal authorities, failing to deal with the improvement of inter-ethnic relations more broadly.

Even if the broader level of inter-ethnic relations in MK demonstrated signs of progress since the 2001 violence, the research findings bring little evidence allowing to ascribe such advancement to the existence of the CICRs. The gathered evidence confirms that the CICRs played only sporadically a decisive role as institutionalized channels of dialogue to handle inter-ethnic issues nonviolently. Their limited outreach towards engaging and being known by the population stands out as a major flaw at the core of their inconsistency. However, respondents demonstrated to be deeply convinced that the CICRs could still play a crucial role both at the local and at the national level if the challenges affecting their functioning were overcome once and for all.

5.2 GAPS OF THE CICRs

In the domain of top-down I4P,[275] Giessmann mentions that the "political influence of the government or ruling actors on the design and implementation of I4P"[276] represents a critical problematic risking to tamper their effectivity. Similarly, Odendaal highlights that "the more the process is imposed externally, the weaker the LPC's capacity to serve peace".[277] In other words, securing "local buy-in" and ownership over national-mandated I4P is fundamental to ensure their effectiveness at the local level. In this respect, six out of seven participants listed the control exerted by political authorities as the major challenge faced by the CICRs. Interviewees mentioned politicization as a distinctive element of the whole North Macedonian context. The CICRs have not managed to escape the same logic. For instance, Official 1 reported: "the level of politicization in MK is very high, and it defines everything in the country [..] political affiliation is what counts the most". Findings from different sources concurred that the CICRs suffer from political interference at many levels. This reflects in the way CICRs members are elected, who can win a seat within the assembly and how much the CICRs can be independent in their work. Such a feature comes in stark contrast with the fact that I4P should "be guided by bipartisanship and independence".[278]

Following Odendaal, excluding local communities from decisions concerning top-down LPCs could make of these a total failure.[279] The CICRs were established as a consequence of the peace process

[275] I4P equipped with a national mandate, also called "formal" or top-down I4P.
[276] Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 17.
[277] Odendaal, *supra* note 210, 14.
[278] van Tongeren, *supra* note 102, 98.
[279] Odendaal, *supra* note 210, 14.

without attention to consult and engage local communities on their nature and structure, thus excluding space for local ownership.[280] The LLSG left room for maneuver to Municipalities on the specific statutes of each CICR. However, findings show that this margin was exploited by local politicians to establish CICRs devoid of a clear framework of rules and procedures. Subsequently, their composition and work became increasingly subdued to Municipal political authorities, further ruling out local communities' direct ownership, if not by indirect participation through the election of local political representatives. The lack of both political independence and community-shared ownership generated distrust and disregard of the population at large, as the CICRs failed to be seen as incisive *fora* devoted to promoting dialogue among ethnic communities. Inevitably, instead of a "non-threatening social space where dialogue, consensus-building and problem-solving can take place",[281] the CICRs became a further arena for political confrontation. The CICRs prove to have fallen victim to one common problem of top-down I4P,[282] namely the imposition of a mandate that, due to political manipulation, is incapable of giving an effective address to local ownership. For most of the respondents, achieving independence from political authorities is seen as the top priority to improve CICRs operativity.

Odendaal asserts that funds should be secured to LPCs to cover a whole range of expenses.[283] Additionally, he highlights the necessity of "technical backup", namely the " access to people who know the basic principles of peace processes, and who have the skills to help all participants implement them".[284] Research findings indicate the lack of financial resources as a chief obstacle to the functioning of the CICRs. As a matter of fact, only a limited number of CICRs show to dispose of a budget. Without compensation, CICRs members have to work voluntarily, thus undertaking CICRs' responsibilities concomitantly with other work priorities. Besides, CICRs lack finances for both necessary tasks (e.g. field visits) and the implementation of specific activities (e.g. cultural events). Furthermore, participants pointed to the lack of technical expertise of the CICRs members, undermining their capacity to implement effective strategies and actions. CID Member 1 noted: "the building of their [CICRs members] capacity in terms of how to write a strategy, how to communicate with people, how to aggregate the relevant information needed for the strategy should be improved". Overall, the CICRs seems to be lacking with respect to the points made by Odendaal. The absence of

[280] *Ibid*.
[281] Andries Odendaal & Retief Olivier, "Local Peace Committees: Some Reflections and Lessons Learned", *NTTP*, 2008 (available at https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/51c2/273a7977c7dbbb7a5985db6d3a19016383dc.pdf), 5.
[282] *Ibid*, 14.
[283] Such as for activities undertaken, material needs (e.g. offices) and training of the LPCs members: Odendaal, *supra* note 210, 17.
[284] In other words, LPCs members should be familiar with peacebuilding concepts and skills. See: *Ibid*, 16.

technical, financial, and administrative support is a significant obstacle to their effective action since CICRs members are both technically unprepared and materially incapacitated to develop thoughtful efforts to improve relations among ethnic communities.

Upstream of the described problems, some respondents stressed the existence of significant "gaps in the law", reason why lack of clarity persisted within the legislative framework (LLSG) regulating the CICRs, hence allowing Municipal authorities to bypass and sideline them. For instance, Koceski insisted: "everything starts with the law, and this is the point that has to be addressed; everything else is just goodwill to do something, but in the end, it is about the law, and the law is not clear". It appears evident that any kind of reform of the CICRs should necessarily pass through national legislation reforms, to avoid local distortions of the mandate. The CICRs find themselves embroiled in a dilemma between the need for more precise rules and the one to ensure local ownership. Odendaal & Olivier maintain that the ideal situation to ensure local ownership lie in a national mandate providing minimum guidelines, to leave space for community leaders to establish locally tailored structures and processes. However, such flexibility towards resident mandates represented a root problem of the CICRs dysfunctionality, *de facto* obstructing their prerogatives. Certainly, a balance should be sought between these two key necessities. CSOs and NGOs such as ZELS and the CDI worked extensively on this issue, seeking to establish more precise guidelines.[285] However, this did not encounter much success due to the scarce commitment of policymakers.[286]

5.3 TRANSPARENCY, ACCESSIBILITY AND PARTICIPATION

Giessmann emphasizes the elements of transparency, accessibility, and participation in designing effective I4P, asserting that "I4P, if based on these indicators, can provide a space for sustainable collaborative engagement".[287] The same concepts can be traced throughout the documents and literature about the CICRs, as essential aims of the decentralization process. For instance, the principle of *Equitable Representation* was given vital importance by the OFA, following which equal treatment should have been fully ensured in the post-2001 MK, particularly towards the employment in the public sector.[288] Moreover, the establishment of the CICRs would entail more transparency

[285] For example, see: Ivana Tomovska & Damir Neziri, "Committees for Inter-Community Relations: Policy Brief", *CDI*, November 2011 (available at https://irz.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/256_policy-brief-ENG-web.pdf); ZELS, Практичен прирачник за работа на КОМЗ, *ZELS*, July 2009 (available at http://www.zels.org.mk/Upload/Content/Documents/Izdanija/Publikacii/MK/02prak%20vodic%20MAK%20za%20web%20celosno.pdf).
[286] United Nations Programme to Enhance Inter-Ethnic Dialogue and Collaboration, *supra* note 220, 41-42.
[287] Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 15.
[288] CDI & ZELS, *supra* note 264, 6.

towards the work of the Municipal authorities,[289] and these organs should have "act[ed] as an instrument for enabling direct citizen participation within the decision-making process".[290] On paper, the CICRs would thus be expected to: ensure transparent processes of members selection, decision-making, and internal organization; guarantee equitable representation and free accessibility to all citizens in the election of ethnic representatives; engage, both directly and indirectly, the ethnic communities in a participated way of doing. Contrary to expectations, research findings present a negative picture of these aspects.

The *transparency* definition[291] employed is underpinned by the logic that "information empowers citizens to hold public officials accountable", leading to more responsive, effective, and legitimate governance.[292] In this light, transparency would entail enhanced accountability on the work of the CICRs, and legitimacy of action in the eyes of the population, as this could be fully informed about elective as well as decision-making processes. Evidence shows that transparency is ensured only to some extent. On the one hand, the CICRs decision-making process seems relatively transparent, even if some participants recognized that Municipal authorities are unable to provide timely and up-to-date information to the public. For instance, CID Member 2 declared that authorities should be swifter to publish information about the dates and places of CICRs meeting, as well as improve online dissemination of information (e.g. using Social Networks). On the other hand, CICRs display substantial transparency gaps both in the process of election of members, as well as regarding their internal rules of procedure and mandate specificities. This information should be outlined within the relevant documents (Statute, Rules of Procedure) made available by the Municipalities. As a matter of fact, this rarely happens, and CICRs members' election is majorly left to the discretion of political authorities without a transparent process. Only a limited number of Municipalities set defined criteria for the election of CICRs representatives. Although the findings outline a lack of visibility of the CICRs, individuating a strong 'disconnection' between the Commissions and community segments, the transparency gaps emerged from the research are likely to stir up distrust and lack of recognition towards the constituents of the CICRs, since no transparent procedures are set in place for their appointment. Likewise, since participants could not mention any whistleblowing case, additionally

[289] Sreten Koceski, "Committees for Inter-com- munity Relations - all want to know for the Committees for Inter-community Relations - experiences and recommendations", *CDI*, November 2011 (available at https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/komz.pdf), 120.
[290] Koceski, *supra* note 208, 5.
[291] Bauhr & Grimes, *supra* note 234, 5.
[292] Stephen Kosack & Archon Fung, "Does Transparency Improve Governance?", *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 17 (2014), 66.

dismissing the possibility that any wrongdoing could externally emerge, transparency is also not secured in case of misconducting or power abuses.

Accessibility was considered a priority of the MK decentralization process, which aimed to bring governance closer to the citizens[293] to enhance institutional responsiveness and fair representation. The responsiveness of LPCs is also listed by Giessmann as a crucial factor for the success of local I4P.[294] Through the definition of accessibility employed for the research purposes, the author sought to assess whether discriminatory barriers existed, excluding citizens from freely and openly running for a seat within the CICRs. Moreover, the use of the accessibility criteria was valuable to assess the CICRs responsiveness to community needs. Findings bring up issues regarding the first strand. Political affiliation and, to some extent, ethnicity emerge as substantial obstacles to the unfettered access to CICRs membership. Contrary to participants' perceptions, secondary data denote the disrespect of the principle of equitable representation in several Municipalities, where some minority groups do not benefit from equal representation within the respective CICR.[295] Extension of the highly politicized context of MK, political affiliation stands as a selective entry barrier to access the CICRs, undermining the equity and fairness of CICRs membership. As a consequence, the recognition of the CICRs might result undermined by the degree of politicization around members selection. As the UNDP reported: "the political factor leads to a low-capacity within the government to deliver services, and equitably and efficiently represent citizens' interests".[296] Furthermore, citizens were reported to be unprovided of mechanisms to swiftly report issues directly to the CICRs. This accessibility gap highlights once again the creation of a disconnection between the CICRs and the communities they should supposedly represent; they do not appear in any way rooted and linked with the grassroots basis of local communities.

Lastly, *participation* is recognized as a fundamental element for ensuring both effective governance and effectiveness of local top-down I4P. Following the OSCE, "engaging citizens in local governance improves accountability and the ability of local authorities to solve problems and creates more inclusive and cohesive communities".[297] Likewise, Giessmann underlines that for LPCs to be functional, "vibrant and active civil society participation is [..] required".[298] Research findings

[293] Koceski, *supra* note 208, 5.
[294] Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 42.
[295] As prescribed by the law: "The Commission from paragraph 1 of this Article shall be composed of an equal number of representatives of each community represented in the municipality", see: Law on Local Self-Governance, *supra* note 191, Article 55.
[296] United Nations Programme to Enhance Inter-Ethnic Dialogue and Collaboration, *supra* note 220, 21.
[297] OSCE Mission to Skopje, *supra* note 248, 71.
[298] Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 40.

provided a negative overview of the participatory opportunities of citizens *vis-à-vis* the CICRs. Theoretically, representatives should be selected by their respective communities, and then appointed by Municipal authorities. However, this happened in very few instances, with CICRs members nomination being an exclusive prerogative of politicians. In some cases, communities provide a list of candidates to the Municipality, which, however, can decide whether or not to take into consideration the suggestions. If citizens are *de facto* excluded from participating in the election of their representatives, they fail in including their own communities at the negotiation tables. Supposedly, elected officials should "engage in regular communication with the citizens to learn of their needs and inform them on the work of the Municipality".[299] However, such a participatory element is left on paper, and no consultation takes place between CICRs members and the communities they represent. Overall, citizens look completely devoid of participatory mechanisms through which to engage with the CICRs. The research did not detect formal mechanisms to consult other civil society actors such as NGOs. The literature on local I4P stresses that "local peacebuilding should be owned and managed as much as possible by local communities themselves".[300] Research findings show that the principle is not much contemplated in the CICRs case study, and local communities are excluded from both direct and indirect forms of participation.

5.4 ANSWER TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION

In the attempt to respond to the Research Question, three core sub-issues were identified and discussed. Findings from the interviews supplemented by secondary data resulted in a comprehensive negative picture on the operativity of the CICRs as I4P at the local level, which are certainly not living up to their expectations. Based on the research results, it is concluded that the initial hypothesis under which the I4P would be dysfunctional and failing to undertake their core prerogatives is valid under current conditions. A number of important findings were made. The results indicate that the CICRs were never able to play a decisive role as institutionalized *fora* devoted to joint problem solving and dialogue among ethnic communities, thus contributing to the advancement of inter-ethnic relations at the Municipal level in any substantial way. The research found out how the CICRs have been sidelined and bypassed by political authorities, playing a certain role in forwarding recommendations or acting first-hand to solve inter-ethnic tensions in infrequent occasions.

The findings demonstrate that the disregard shown by political authorities and subsequent dysfunctionality could be responsible for the gap of visibility of these organs, which are widely

[299] Koceski, *supra* ntoe 208, 5.
[300] Ondendaal, *supra* note 210, 21.

unknown to the broad Municipal population. The lack of public awareness could also be connected to the absence of participatory channels through which local communities can engage with the members as well as with the internal decision-making process of the CICRs. In this way, ethnic communities are majorly marginalized with respect to the life and work of the CICRs. Political influence is visible at different levels, tempering core prerogatives of the CICRs. The politicization of CICRs membership hindered especially the insurance of transparency, equal accessibility and local communities' participation in the election of CICRs members. Local ownership was dismissed, and political dynamics took over the necessities to make of the CICRs "non-threatening space[s] where communities search for inclusive, mutually beneficial options to their problems".[301]

Lastly, the author notices the scarce interest demonstrated by political authorities in rendering these bodies functional and determinant for grassroots peacebuilding. The fact that Municipal authorities do not usually devote neither financial nor technical and administrative resources to support the work of the CICRs emerges as a significant obstacle to their material functioning. CICRs members find themselves lacking means, technical preparation, and compensation for their commitment. Moreover, Municipal authorities tend to leave undetermined the legislative framework concerning the functioning of the CICRs, in order to dispose of more room for maneuver to control them.

The author's overall impression is that salient issues surging between ethnic communities are addressed directly by Municipal political representatives and that the CICRs are relegated to play an insignificant role in fostering inter-ethnic dialogue.

5.5 POLICY IMPLICATION - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE IMPROVEMENT

Lastly, some recommendations are advanced, aimed to overcome the shortcomings individuated by the research results. These are elaborated drawing from both the literature on I4P and the conversations carried out with research participants. The recommendations want to have policy implications, being addressed to local and national policymakers as well as to NGOs, CSOs, and IGOs engaged in MK. Likewise, these provide useful guidance towards the broader design of effective I4P at the local level, drawing upon the challenges individuated within the CICRs case study.

[301] Odendaal & Olivier, *supra* note 281, 5.

- Multi-stakeholders Composition: van Tongeren highlights how LPCs should manage to strike a balance between "independence and a government-steered body."[302] Odendaal suggests that: "LPC needs to be composed of local organizations or movements relevant to the local peace process, and LPC membership needs to be decided by local people". Currently, the CICRs are highly politicized bodies, where members are political exponents. For real independence, CICRs composition must be reformed. Political authorities should not be excluded from the Councils, but their direct presence should be reduced, just like their capacity to appoint CICRs members. This latter duty should mostly rely on local communities through, for example, local elections. For instance, the participatory election of representatives is a feature of the Councils of National Minorities in Croatia.[303] To become as inclusive and responsive as possible, the membership could be extended,[304] welcoming on voluntary basis stakeholders from the civil society, such as representatives of society sectors (religious, business, gender, cultural) and NGOs/CSOs. In this way, formal actions of the CICRs could be more responsive and aware of different needs and interests, counting on more extensive expertise, and coordinating with initiatives from the informal sector.[305]

- Resorting to Insider Partials & Professional Facilitators: Odendaal & Olivier suggest that "skilled facilitation capacity is [..] necessary for the successful functioning of LPCs".[306] The literature on LPCs[307] recognizes the cruciality of disposing of members (usually from civil society) who are trusted by the community and have a good knowledge of mediation skills, to act as a middle ground during sessions. Professional external facilitators could also assist the work of the CICRs to stimulate constructive attitudes among the parties, may the insider partials lack the emotional distances to mediate their own conflicts.[308] If CICRs membership was reformed and extended, it could become beneficial to include these figures.

- Rotating Leadership Positions or Resorting to Middle Ground Actors: parties should be prevented from exploiting leadership positions (e.g. President) to dominate on the others.[309]

[302] van Tongeren, *supra* note 102, 106.
[303] Hina,"Danas se održavaju manjinski izbori, 250 tisuća ljudi može izaći", *VL*, May 2019 (available at https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/danas-se-odrzavaju-manjinski-izbori-250-tisuca-ljudi-moze-izaci-1317179).
[304] For instance, in the case of the LPCs in South Africa, any relevant civil society organization could freely apply for membership inside the Councils. See: Odendaal, *supra* note 210, 19.
[305] *Ibid*, 20.
[306] *Ibid*, 24.
[307] See for example: Odendaal, *supra* note 220, 19; Giessmann, *supra* note 15, 44; Odendaal & Olivier, *supra* note 281, 15.
[308] Odendaal & Olivier, *supra* note 281, 5.
[309] *Ibid*, 15.

A recommendation made by Odendaal & Olivier is to rotate the position of leadership frequently or to appoint 'insider-partials' from the civil society to cover these positions.[310] LPCs following this principle were established both in Nepal and Northern Ireland.[311]

- Technical Support: research results outline that CICRs members are unprovided with technical skills to fulfill their duties effectively. However, capacity building is recognized as a milestone for setting I4P.[312] This should not exclusively focus on technical capacities (e.g. data collection, external communication, etc.); rather, it should also contemplate peacebuilding and expertise.[313] NGOs can play a huge role in this domain. For instance, within the Nepal peace process, NGOs successfully provided peacebuilding training to LPCs.[314]

- Financial Support: practical experiences demonstrated that no LPCs ever worked in a sustained way without financial support.[315] Research findings underline that CICRs members having to work voluntarily represents a major issue. Thus, the CICRs should dispose of a fixed budget provided by the Government (since Municipalities usually do not have many resources) and used to pay the salary of CICRs core members, as well as to fund the actions and activities of the bodies. A successful example of LPCs in this respect can be drawn by the South Africa experience, where sustained funding from the central Government covered the expenses of LPCs activities and functioning.[316] The budget should be ensured with full transparency not to foster distrust among citizens.

- Legislative Clarity of Mandate: the CICRs need to strike a balance between having a flexible mandate for local ownership (as the situation currently is), and imposing limitations to refrain political authorities from manipulating it at their advantage. It is a hard balance to achieve in practice[317] since a decisive change should pass through a reform of the LLSG. However, civil society actors such as ZELS and the CDI have worked extensively on this issue and forwarded proposals.[318] Emphasis should be put on the requirements of specificity and exhaustiveness

[310] *Ibid.*
[311] *Ibid*, 21.
[312] *Ibid*, 16.
[313] *Ibid*, 24.
[314] Odendaal, *supra* note 210, 57.
[315] *Ibid*, 23.
[316] *Ibid*, 38.
[317] *Ibid*, 4.
[318] See: Tomovska & Neziri, ZELS, *supra* note 285.

in the Statutes and Rulebooks governing the functioning of the CICRs, with some core information that should be specified (e.g. criteria for members election).

- More strength but no "teeth": CICRs stance *vis-a-vis* political authorities must be strengthened to achieve improved accountability. For instance, a reform of the legislation should impose the obligation to consult these bodies for any decision having repercussions on intern-ethnic relations. However, it is crucial that the CICRs maintain their advisory role and do not develop "enforcing" powers, which could be detrimental to their legitimacy.[319]

- Online forms to strengthen responsiveness: the CICRs demonstrates a lack of formal mechanisms through which issues can be reported swiftly by citizens. A valid proposal entails creating a digitalized complaints system, through which the CICRs can be addressed directly *via* online forms.

- Sponsor the CICRs to improve visibility: the CICRs lack of visibility among the population. Municipal authorities, civil society actors, and the CICRs themselves should channel efforts to promote awareness-raising campaigns and activities to make these bodies more widely known.

- Peace Architecture: Odendaal confers paramount importance to connect local I4P with national bodies capable of providing advisory capacities and facilitating access to wider resources.[320] In Sierra Leone, when LPCs were experiencing some issues, they could receive political backup and advice from the National Committee.[321] In MK, it is imperative to establish similar synergies among the CICRs and the central Committee. This could massively facilitate the coordination of local efforts and improve inter-ethnic relations on a national scale.

[319] They risk to become "an arena for contesting power". See: Odendaal & Olivier, *supra* note 281, 5.
[320] Odendaal, *supra* note 210, 15.
[321] *Ibid.*

6) CONCLUSION

War and conflict are recurrent phenomena in our societies. The way we deal with them marks the odds of their recurrence. The International Community has often struggled in dealing effectively with post-conflict scenarios, demonstrating evident shortcomings in building the foundations of sustainable peace in war-shattered countries. Part of this failure relates to the compartmentalized operationalization of the idea of peacebuilding and the prioritization of the objectives of statebuilding at the expense of the focus on the grassroots foundations of peace. However, peacebuilding demonstrated the need to coherently address both ambits and in a coordinated manner to pave the way to enduring peace. Moreover, this latter showed the need to be continuously nurtured, especially in violently divided societies, rather than being considered a short-term ended process. In the wake of these necessities, the experimentation of I4P in conflicting countries such as Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa produced encouraging results, providing valuable food for thoughts in the domain of peace studies. The core of this innovative approach is the consideration that societies need to embed peace within standing *conflict transformation* structures and networks. Despite their potential, the theory and practical experiences of I4P remain under-researched and often overlooked by international actors engaged in post-conflict settings.

In this light, this dissertation was inspired by the innovativeness of the I4P theory and aimed to add up empirical perspectives in this domain. The author considered necessary to focus on I4P acting at the grassroots since this strand of peacebuilding is usually less considered by scholars and major international actors (e.g. UN). These grounds unfolded the interest for a comprehensive analysis of the experience of local I4P in MK. More specifically, the research investigated in-depth the condition of the CICRs, exploring their capacity to live up to their expectations as effective I4P. Based on the triangulation of the data collected, it is possible to conclude that the CICRs are majorly dysfunctional and cannot adequately fulfill the expectations of their mandate. These were established at the Municipal level to act as institutionalized platforms to foster dialogue and joint problem-solving among ethnic communities, thus improving the state of inter-ethnic relations at the grassroots of the North Macedonian society. However, research results clearly indicate that their contribution to the improvement of inter-ethnic relations in the Municipalities where they were established was minimal, accounting for a sporadic activity only during the first years of their establishment. The findings outline that the CICRs operativity was tampered by an extreme disregard of political authorities, and an excessive politicization of their internal dynamics. These elements contributed to undermining several aspects that are considered crucial for the effectiveness of these types of I4P, such as

independence, local ownership, and material support to their functioning. In turn, the absence of these fundamental aspects detrimentally reflected in terms of transparency, accessibility, and participation of the local communities to the work of the CICRs. The CICRs and the communities they are called to represent appear rather far and disconnected. Currently, the underlined challenges cripple the functioning of these bodies, impeding the fulfillment of their expectations as I4P aimed to foster inter-ethnic cooperation at the local level. In this respect, the words of van Tongeren resound prophetical: "governments that do not consider the wisdom of organizing an inclusive and participatory peace structure, may do so at their peril".[322]

It is fair to say that until political authorities show little interest in making of the CICRs proactive peacebuilding devices, the current shortcomings will endure. Significant reforms to the composition and prerogatives of the CICRs will have to necessarily pass through the hands of the national legislators to prevent the Councils from falling prey to local politicizing dynamics. It may sound harsh, but without obligations coming from the law, Municipal authorities are likely to keep sidelining the work of these organs. MK presents a situation where the ghosts of conflict still hover; the hope is that national policymakers will take action to avoid another 2001-scenario. In this light, enhancing the functioning of CICRs can undoubtedly represent a significant asset.

6.1. AVENUES FOR RESEARCH

The research findings pave the way for further research opportunities. For instance, further inquiry could concern the impact of external support (NGOs, OSCE) on the functionality of the CICRs, and examine whether this represented a determinant factor for greater effectiveness of the CICRs in the first years after their establishment. Certainly, MK does not pose a typical example of a highly divided society.[323] Additional research could instead focus on gauging the effectiveness of I4P in violently fragmented societies. Nigerian LPCs stand out as under-researched examples in this respect. Furthermore, the literature on I4P could benefit from a better understanding of how to improve I4P performance by building upon *indigenous* capacities for peacemaking and peacebuilding. For instance, the research individuated the existence of Local Prevention Councils in MK as traditional structures for *conflict transformation*, gathering the main community stakeholders to discuss incidents among ethnic groups. It is of utmost importance to study how such traditional structures

[322] Van Tongeren, *supra* note 102, 107.
[323] For instance, Osaghae proposes an interesting categorization of 'divided societies'. North Macedonia could account as a 'divided' society also due to the fact that the involvement of the civilian population has been minimal in the 2001 conflict. See: Eghosa E. Osaghae, *The Role and Function of Research in Divided Societies*, in: Marie Smyth & Gillian Robinson (eds.), Researching Violently Divided Societies: Ethical & Methodological Issues, 2001, 16-17.

can be linked to the build-up of top-down I4P to maximize their effectiveness, and how the role of traditional leaders could be integrated within such structures. Ultimately, the indicators employed by the present research require improved understanding. The debate could benefit from enhanced methodological precision in framing these criteria for measurement purposes. Besides, researchers could deepen their study comparing different peacebuilding experiences to better frame their degree of conceptual validity to assess the performance of I4P. Overall, the studies in the I4P domain have so far mainly drawn upon the recompilation of existing experiences. However, there is a clear need to set up detailed theories and methodologies to acquire a more robust standing within peace studies.

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Annex A – Interviews Questionnaire

1) I would like to hear your thought on whether the institution of the CICRs has improved the status of inter-ethnic relations between the Albanian and Macedonian ethnic groups?

- If yes, in which way the CICRs contributed?
- If no, why do you think?

2) In your view and experience, which do you think is the major problem or obstacle to an effective functioning of the CICRs?

- What would you consider another key problem or obstacle, second for relevance?
- Why do you consider these two elements so relevant?

3) Defining 'transparency' as the *ability for community members (citizens) to access information relevant to evaluating CICRs work and functioning,* I would like to hear your thoughts on the level of transparency of the CICRs.

- Are the criteria for selecting CICRs members made public and easy to access for anybody?
- Is the mandate of the CICRs public and easy to access for anybody?
- What about the transcripts of the CICRs' discussion and/or voting sessions, are these open and made public?
- What instead for the decisions taken by the CICRs, to which extent are these published and visible to the larger public?
- I would like to hear from you if there are risks of having negative consequences for CICRs members reporting abuses of power or other internal wrongdoings (e.g. to the media)?
- In your opinion, which practical ways are best to improve all the above?

4) Defining 'accessibility' as *the possibility for community members, regardless of their ethnicity and language, to access to the CICRs, both as members and to report a certain issue,* I would like to hear your thoughts on to which extent does accessibility, under these two aspects, exist?

- In your view, does any citizen have potentially the possibility to run for a seat of the CICRs' assemblies?
- To which extent do you think that ethnicity affects the degree of accessibility, especially for what concerns the election of community members to the CICRs assembly?
- Is there any foreseen mechanism through which normal citizens can report an issue happening into the community to the CICRs?
- In your opinion, there exist practical ways through which all the above could be improved?

5) Defining 'participation' as the *capacity of community members to take part in the decision-making process of the CICRs,* I would like to hear your thoughts on the level of participation of the CICRs?

- To which extent the citizens are able to participate in the selection procedure of the CICRs members in their respective Municipalities?
- Concerning the internal decision-making process of the CICRs, how much citizens and through which channels can participate in this process?
- In your opinion, in which ways could participation be enhanced?

6) Finally, I would like to know from you whether an effective institution of the CICRs would benefit the improvement of inter-ethnic relations in the Municipalities, and therefore peacebuilding?

- Please, expand a bit further the reasons and why you think an effective operativity of the CICRs have the potential to foster inter-ethnic relations.
- In your view, on which areas the CICRs' mandate should focus more?

Annex B – Informed Consent Form

Information about personal data in the Dissertation Research

In connection with the research on the operativity of the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations in North Macedonia within the framework of the final dissertation for the *Master of Social Sciences in International Security and Law* at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU). The student Matteo

Piovacari will collect personal data of participants in the research. The student and SDU are jointly responsible for protection of the personal data. Participation is voluntary. Data collection is done through direct interviews or written online correspondence.

Purpose of processing information for the dissertation

The research work for the final dissertation is keen to obtain subjective data from experts on the work of the Commissions in order to assess the current status and possible challenges to the effective functioning of the same bodies. The student will seek to collect and analyze rich qualitative data on what key stakeholders consider the main challenges and flaws of the structure and work of the Commissions, and how such challenges could be overcome. Therefore, the investigation aims at shedding light on current shortcomings or successes of the Commissions, with the purpose of proposing feasible solutions for improvement.

SDU will process the following personal data of participants: Name, Surname, Job title & Organization Affiliation, Municipality of work, Email.

However complete anonymity in terms of identity will be adopted when publishing the results, and further specifications in matter of privacy can be discussed directly with the student.

How SDU will use your personal data

Your personal data will be used confidentially – in compliance with the applicable law. Your personal data will only be used for research and publication of research results. SDU will ensure that your personal data will be securely stored and will only be available to the student conducting the research. Your personal data will be stored until the dissertation process is finalized and will be anonymized or deleted on 30 October 2020 at the latest.

Join the research

When personal data is processed (collected, used etc.) for a research project, the Danish Data Protection Act includes a special clause, that makes it possible to collect, use etc. personal data for research and statistical purposes (§ 10 in the Danish Data Protection and Article 6(1)(e) in the General Data Protection Regulation).

This special clause entitles SDU to use your personal data for research and statistical purposes without your consent, but also prohibits any other use of your personal data. Therefore, there is no risk that your personal data will be used for any other purpose than research. Furthermore, your personal data will not be published in scientific journals without prior authorization from the Danish Data Protection Agency.

Therefore, you shall decide if you wish to participate in this research so that SDU can use your personal data. If you want to participate, SDU will collect the above-mentioned personal data and use them for the research purposes. If you no longer wish to participate in the research project, you can any time contact the student. SDU will cease to collect any new personal data about you. However, SDU will continue to use etc. any personal data collected before your withdrawal.

Further information

If you have any further questions about the research you can always contact the Researcher Appointee, Matteo Piovacari:

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If you have any questions about data protection and your rights as a data subject, you can always contact SDU data protection officer, Simon Kamber:
Email: dpo@sdu.dk

If you want to lodge a complaint about SDU's processing of personal data, you can always contact the Danish Data Protection Agency on www.datatilsynet.dk