# CREATING SPACE

# FOR MAKING CHANGE

A REPORT FROM DIALOGUE TRAINING
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN POLAND

Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue

# INTRODUCTION

**100** civil society actors from a variety of organizations and public institutions all over Poland are trained in dialogue and conflict transformation by Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue (NCPD). This initiative from Orange Poland was a contribution to the celebration of 100 years of independence for Poland.

The idea and goals of this prioritized effort were expressed by the initiator himself, Konrad Ciesiołkiewicz:

*«To transform Poland into a more friendly and inclusive place to live by providing people with tools to reduce conflicts.»*

25 selected participants had additional training in dialogue facilitation in Gdansk, October 2019. This course qualified a group of highly motivated and skilled dialogue facilitators. During the facilitation training participants expressed their desire to explore opportunities, and to apply the approach and tools from the dialogue training courses.

The focus of Orange Poland, and the network of organizations, to train a wide range of civil society actors in dialogue and conflict transformation, is a much appreciated acknowledgement of the Nansen Approach. This provides a unique opportunity for constructive collaboration.

**In** a meeting in Warsaw immediately after the training course in Gdansk, Orange Poland confirmed its engagement and will to continue to coordinate the network of organizations and facilitators. One more important step, which became known in the meeting, was the decision to translate the Nansen Handbook for Trainers in Dialogue and Conflict Transformation, into Polish. The Nansen Center's methods and approaches have proven their utility for both Orange Poland and their network of civil society actors.

To gain broader understanding of how the training courses are received and applied, NCPD commissioned an internal review. The aim of this report is to assess the relevance of tools, methodologies and approaches that are introduced through NCPD training courses, and to increase our understanding of the context the participants work in, as well as their main concerns, achievements and challenges.

This report is based on participatory observation during training in dialogue facilitation in Gdansk, October 2019; a workshop conducted as part of the program; a questionnaire with written feedback from all participants; interviews with seven participants, and; an on-line interview between two key stakeholders: Daria Drabik from Orange Poland and Christiane Seehausen from Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



*Training in dialogue facilitation, Gdansk, October 2019.*

# BACKGROUND

In 2018 Poland marked 100 years of independence with official as well as civil society activities. This occurred at a time of strong political divisions.

The situation in Poland as described in a paper by Konrad Ciesiołkiewicz:

*«(…) low trust in the government, hostility towards others, society is divided by political conflicts, political views separate communities and negative economic development.»*

Identifying dialogue as a grassroots celebration that responds to the needs in current Polish society, Orange Poland decided to "provide 100 NGOs from all over Poland with competencies, tools, knowledge and practice, to support the organizations in building civic attitudes, cooperation and social capital."

Poland has a strong tradition of dialogue. The best known is the Polish Round Table Agreement in 1989 when Solidarity («Solidarnosc») paved the way to a free and democratic Poland. This history provides a solid foundation to build on when exploring the potential of dialogue in the current situation in Poland.

One of the questions raised during the training course was:

*How can this tradition be utilized to meet the current challenges of polarization, hate speech, discrimination, aggression towards minorities and a generally shrinking space for civil society?*

## NANSEN CENTER FOR PEACE AND DIALOGUE

Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue (NCPD) is a knowledge center and meeting point for dialogue and conflict transformation.

The center conducts peace and dialogue work both in Norway and internationally, and has experience from Western Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Poland, and more. In Norway, NCPD guides schools and municipalities in conflict transformation, and teaches and facilitates dialogue.

NCPD promotes peace, human rights, dialogue and reconciliation through training courses, documentation and sharing knowledge based on field experiences. NCPD is located at the Nansen Academy in Lillehammer, Norway.

# FROM VISION TO ACTION

This program started with visions and ambitions to mobilize civil society through a dialogue approach. An organizational structure was established with partners and motivated participants were recruited to make these ideas into reality.

## PARTNERS AND PEOPLE

Konrad Ciesiołkiewicz, director at Orange Poland in charge of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and chairman of the Social Dialogue Committee of the Polish Chamber of Commerce, initiated this dialogue training program for civil society actors in Poland and was himself a participant in the basic training course. The Nansen Center was commissioned by Orange to conduct the training.

Christiane Seehausen and Chro Borhan, both experienced trainers from the Nansen Center, facilitated all four basic training courses and the facilitator training. Daria Drabik, the coordinator of the program from its inception, also participated in the training courses and has been the engine of the program throughout all the training and in the follow-up process. The project is conducted in cooperation with Polish social partners: The Unit for Social Innovation and Research “Shipyard”, The School of Leaders Foundation, THINKTANK, Laboratorium Więzi (“Ties” Laboratory) and CSRinfo.

### ORANGE POLAND AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Orange Poland is a major telecom company with more than 13,000 employees. It is one of the most CSR-focused (Corporate Social Responsibility) companies in Poland and has arranged several activities to support the society, during the last 20 years.

In 2018 Orange initiated a campaign called «Turn off your ego, understand the other», to facilitate dialogue in Poland, in cooperation with Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue and five Polish non-governmental organizations (see above).

Goals are to increase openness, tolerance and human capital, and to prevent radicalization. Orange believe that a CSR culture brings benefits to both the company and its surroundings.


*Training in dialogue facilitation, October 2019.*

# Dialogue as a remedy towards hostility

*The key persons in the joint dialogue program in Poland: Daria Drabik from Orange (left) and Christiane Seehausen from the Nansen Center.*

Hostility towards other people was becoming more serious. Radical ideologies, defined as dangerous for the society, were visible. The dialogue project in Poland started because of negative trends in the society, and because Orange Poland decided to support a positive change.

The tendencies are alarming and we decided to respond with the resources that we had. We wanted to prevent radicalization and increase human and social capital in the Polish society, says Daria Drabik, responsible for CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) in Orange Poland.

Promoting a culture of openness and tolerance became a remedy towards hostility. The main idea was to support local organizations and grassroots initiatives by giving tools to people who are change-makers in the society.

-As radical ideologies are destructive for every society, we wanted to provide those who would like to support civic action with tools and power to transform conflicts in their communities. We wanted to help build relations based on dialogue, Daria explains.

The project was called «Turn off the ego. Understand the other.» and was the latest of several programs conducted by the telecom company. The campaign was a natural sequel to projects like «Orange Studios», helping citizens to get acquainted with modern technologies, also with an important social dimension, in one hundred small towns around the country.

-The culture of dialogue is much needed in all spheres of public life, but also in everyday private and business relations, as the level of social capital in Poland is very low. Our goal is to support a long-term development of the whole society and general quality of life, Daria says.

**Connecting with local communities**

It started after Konrad Ciesiołkiewicz, responsible for the CSR department, attended a conference. He was impressed by what one of the speakers, Christiane Seehausen from the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue (NCPD), said about dialogue. Later Daria and Christiane met and the ball started rolling. Orange decided to make a dialogue project as a contribution to the 100-year celebration of independence in Poland.

> ***We wanted a mix as rich as possible***
> ***-Daria Drabik***

-Almost 400 applied to the first dialogue training course for leaders in local societies. We were looking for people who were active in their local environment, working directly with people, engaged and highly motivated to support their communities. To build diversity we invited people from different fields: education, local governments, local NGOs, from public and cultural institutions. A connection with the local community was one of the most important factors for us, and we tried to recruit from different parts of Poland, including small villages. We wanted the mix to be as rich as possible, says Daria.

**Depending on relationships**

The success of projects like this are very much depending on relationships, according to Christiane Seehausen from the Nansen Center.

-To run this project we totally depend on people like Daria. We communicate very easily and Daria has everything that is needed. She is open-minded, interested, hard-working, flexible, service-minded,

professional and intelligent. She learned about dialogue by participating in a training, and without her commitment we would not be able to do this. I felt I could trust her from the beginning. I remember very well our first meeting. I was wondering why a telecom company would meet a small peace organization like the Nansen Center, Christiane says.

-We chose the Nansen Center because of Christiane and because she provided answers to the questions we had. We trusted her and the others involved. It was a wonderful experience and a deep cooperation based on mutual trust and understanding. In this way, it was so special, Daria explains.

-Poland has a long history of dialogue, but we are not very dialogical now. The term is sometimes used as a kind of manipulation or instead of negotiation. We wanted to help bring some more of the original meaning back. In Orange, dialogue is a part of our philosophy, but it was not so defined before we started this cooperation. Working with the Nansen Center was the best part of my job ever. I learned a lot, met so many wonderful people and I am so proud of the work of our participants. When we started, we had no idea how it would develop, Daria says.

***-What is your personal motivation for this work?***

*Christiane:* -As a German, to work in Poland is for me very special. My mother is 85 and was living in Germany during the Second World War. She said that what we Germans have done to the Polish people is unforgivable, and that this project is important. Because NCPD is Norwegian and I am living in Norway now, I believe some doors has been opened. Norway is considered neutral in Poland. The relationship between Germany and Poland is more complicated. The time in Poland, all the talks and the family stories are for me personally very important.

-First of all, Daria has been a motivation, and also the participants. Some of the attending organizations are small, but they are doing incredible work under the difficult circumstances in Poland right now. This has encouraged me very much. I am impressed by how open the participants were for the methodology and how they embraced it. The dialogue method works a little bit against the typical Polish mindset, in my impression. I was worried that dialogue could be difficult to implement in Poland because a change of attitude would be necessary. And this is what Orange wants, to reduce ego and make people listen to each other and be more open to each other.

> ***I find the development very inspiring***
>
> ***-Christiane Seehausen***

*Daria:* -My first motivation was Christiane and the whole concept of working with an organization like the Nansen Center. I was curious about how we could make dialogue useful for the society in Poland. The project we were having in mind had no precedent in our country. The second part of my motivation came along with the applications submitted by people who wanted to participate in dialogue training. I was truly impressed with their experiences, attitudes and actions. I understood that this is a chance to meet and work with wonderful people who are literally changing the world. I felt that together we can do something of deep importance, influence and impact. That we can make life a little bit better for some communities.

***-What are the most important outcomes?***

*Daria:* -One hundred people have completed the basic dialogue training. Twenty-five of them went on to the facilitation training. This group of people has arranged workshops, meetings and facilitation processes. They have reached out to more than 300 NGOs, cultural and educational institutions, public institutions, organizations and universities. The number of people participating in the activities connected to dialogue is more than 10,000. They are from different parts of Poland and they represent the biggest cities, small towns and villages.

-Our participants have facilitated meetings commissioned by city authorities and conducted public dialogues for large group of participants. They also facilitated very local conflict resolutions, in schools or to support communities in a block of flats. They support migrants, facilitate meetings between right wing and LGBTQ+ organizations (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer), organize workshops for students, teachers and parents, religious organizations, civic activists, officials and many others. We made a survey recently and saw the whole and detailed picture for the first time. It was really impressive and inspiring. A coming report will tell even more about the outcomes. Seeing the work of our participants makes me believe more in humans. When we started, I did not imagine such a big scale.

*Christiane:* -The connection between the participants has been strengthened by dialogues online, starting after the Corona outbreak. And organizations are asking to have joint projects with the Nansen Center to train people to be capable of training others. In this way the teaching will in a greater degree reach the countryside. I find it very inspiring to see the development and that organizations also from smaller places are taking it forward.

> ***”Seeing the work of our participants makes me believe more in humans*** ***-Daria Drabik***

*Daria:* -We are satisfied by how organizations have developed during our training courses. The smaller ones have started to cooperate with the bigger and more professionalized ones, and they can learn from each other. Cooperating also with a partner like the Nansen Center gives the organizations more confidence and they receive more trust from their local communities. Also, the planned translation of the Nansen Center Handbook into Polish is important in this work. The organizations will help spread the book all over Poland.

*Christiane:* -In the future we will continue to use online tools for dialogues and consultancy. Nevertheless, we all are looking forward to arranging physical meetings again, after the Corona situation has normalized.

# STEP BY STEP

First phase of the training program was four five-day basic training courses in dialogue and conflict transformation held in Warsaw: August 2018, September 2018, January 2019 and May 2019.

*Second phase* was a five-day advanced dialogue facilitation training course held in Gdansk, October 9 – 13, 2019. All participants from the first training courses were invited to apply for the facilitation training. Through a selection process, 25 participants were accepted.

*Next phases* were discussed in a meeting with partners in Warsaw, October 14, 2019. In the meeting were representatives from Orange and the Nansen Center. One of the trainers, Christiane Seehausen, told the story of how she was first invited to Poland by "Foundation of Tolerance", and later "Leadership foundation", before this initiative by Orange Poland.

"The need is even more than when we started this. The potential is large. We now have 25 trained facilitators and a total of 100 who have conducted dialogue training. We will enter a new stage where we will apply what has been achieved and we need to be strategic to reach out further." (Konrad Ciesiołkiewicz)

The importance of coordination was emphasized. A rotation of coordination between the partner organizations was proposed. Orange Poland agreed to be the first, continuing the role they already have. Next organization could be Shipyard, represented in the meeting by the leader Jakub Wygnański and Katarzyna Pliszczyńska, who is one of the trained facilitators. Different ideas were discussed. Journalists were specifically mentioned as an important group to work with.

It can be difficult for journalists to find time for training, but there are other ways to work with them. Young politicians were another group that was identified for possible training. More specifically, the idea was to approach the newly-elected parliamentarians below the age of 35. There are 450 members of the national parliament, and a good part of them are young. They could be approached before they are absorbed in the thinking and practice of older and more established politicians.

In Warsaw there is now a strong group of dialogue facilitators, and there are also several in other cities and rural areas. It was suggested to invite "graduates" - those who are trained as facilitators - to be part of dialogue, creating tools for hundreds of people. The partners could make an offer: "If you have a problem in your community, we can help you with our facilitators". Facilitators could be empowered to organize their own teams and support community groups/networks.

# CONTENTS OF TRAINING

Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue provided two five-day training courses. The first “Dialogue and Conflict Transformation” is a basic course with an introduction to dialogue, focusing on the main elements of dialogue and the core skills of active listening and asking questions. Conflict analysis through mapping of self-perceived conflicts and identifying positions, interests and needs of the parties involved, is included in the program, as well as a brief introduction to dialogue facilitation.

In the second training course, “Dialogue facilitation”, the art of facilitation is learned through practicing and receiving feedback. Participants practice facilitation in conflict situations in small groups and draw from their own experiences. They also practice public dialogue based on topics of common concern in the larger group. Trainers give small presentations as introductions and debrief comments after every session.

*Dialogue facilitation in conflict situations:* one by one, participants play the role of facilitator with their co-participants as role players in conflicts obtained from their own experiences. After every session there is structured feedback on the performance of the facilitator. At the conclusion of the facilitation practice, groups come together for meta reflection.

Participants send conflict stories from their own experiences in advance and share the stories in groups that select one of them to work on. The stories that are shared indicate the kind of conflicts the participants are concerned about. These are conflicts in families, neighborhoods, schools, at work, within organizations and between NGOs and local communities. The conflicts are about values and the distribution of resources. Some reflect the most sensitive issues in contemporary Poland, such as sexual education and LGBTQ rights.

*Public Dialogue:* to prepare for public dialogue the group is divided in two. One group prepares statements for the “four corners” exercise, the other group consists of volunteers who want to practice facilitation of a public dialogue meeting.

In the public dialogue, participants do not play roles. They all participate as themselves and pose their own opinions, feelings and needs. This was expressed by one of the participants in the interview as revealing, “being yourself in a dialogue is an important experience, you speak out of your mind and face your own fears.”

Dialogue processes –a separate session on dialogue processes explained key elements and what a dialogue process can look like in terms of phases, contents and conditions for sustainability.

# PARTICIPANTS, THEIR CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

Participants for the training courses were recruited from all over Poland; they represented twelve out of sixteen provinces (voivodeship) existing in Poland. Although most come from Warsaw, many other cities and rural communities are represented. At the facilitator training, 13 were from Warsaw, while 12 came from other parts of the country. City centers, suburbs and rural communities, some of them poor and neglected, traditional conservative communities and modern popular movements, are all represented. Two participants work in Ukraine, as well as Poland, and with the Ukrainian minority in Poland. One is involved in projects in Georgia. The varied backgrounds allows for interesting exchanges of experiences and views, securing a dynamic environment for mutual learning.

Participants are experienced professionals working in schools, NGOs, public administration, the church and as self-employed. Some are activists engaged in voluntary work in addition to their professions, while others work in idealistic organizations with volunteers. Most of the participants in the facilitator training had previous experience with similar work, from counselling, facilitation, mediation and teaching.  The vast majority are women.

They are all sincerely motivated and committed to improving their skills as dialogue facilitators and trainers with an ambition to make change in their communities and the Polish society.
Polarization and shrinking space for civil society are identified as main challenges, and the resistance against criticism, lack of self-reflection and inclusion.

From interviews with participants you can see how the Nansen training courses have contributed to widening the understanding of dialogue in different contexts. The common denominator seems to be about providing the space and facilitating without pressure on the topics, the opinions, or the speed of participants.  This approach is referred to as open, challenging and rewarding, allowing for inclusion, and dealing with sensitive issues. Specifically, the dialogue methods are appropriate in preparing for public consultations, that are institutionalized in Poland. There are examples from schools, workplaces and local communities, in urban, semi-urban and rural communities, in Poland and in Ukraine.

# Starting in schools, we can later work in the community

Natalia Kertyczak

The Ukrainian minority that was originally in Poland has its own schools where Ukrainian is taught as the language of instruction. We are planning to have some small workshops on dialogue in these schools. They are all in different regions of Poland, far away from Warsaw. We plan to reach out to these schools with workshops on dialogue and tools for conflict analysis, says Natalia Kertyczak who works as a project coordinator for Education for Democracy foundation, with projects mostly in Ukraine, but also in Poland.

In some communities there are still strong tensions between Ukrainian and Polish groups, conflicts about history. In the communities there are so many internal conflicts as well. We were thinking that training in schools could open for more. We have four people in my foundation working on this. I will share the tools with them. Tools for conflict analysis can be beneficial for these communities. A friend activist from one of these communities also took part in the basic dialogue training.

> ***(…) there are still strong tensions between Ukrainian and Polish groups***

We also plan to use these tools in our activities in Ukraine. We had a meeting in Kiev with a group of Ukrainian trainers (there were a few members from our Polish team too). I did an introductory workshop where we discussed how to use it in communities; for example, for local needs assessments. People in the communities where we work can take their own initiatives and apply for funding from us. We cannot resolve their conflicts, but we can at least share the idea of dialogue and give tools such as conflict mapping and the onion. This can help them to take a step back and look at this conflict situation and try to analyze it.
During the introductory workshop, and later during the training carried out by Ukrainian trainers, the mapping was very engaging. Conflicts are often related to schools. Often in rural areas schools are

not sustainable and the quality of education can be low. Localization is often an issue. Other conflicts in the community are about housing, local investments and communication with local authorities.

> *Often in rural areas schools are not sustainable and quality of education can be low*

I go to Ukraine every second month, but it is not me who goes to the communities to conduct the training. We have a group of trainers in Ukraine. They know the context better. I meet them and get feedback. At least once a year we have a meeting with the team. We work in 6 regions. Trainers are from different regions, but not the same as where they work. In Donbas we stay in the part controlled by the Ukrainian government. We have translated some of the activities from the Nansen handbook to Ukrainian and we plan to translate the whole handbook into the Ukrainian language, with the Nansen Center's consent. I found it quite difficult to translate since English is very compact. For example, we were struggling to translate the word humility. In Ukrainian, humility has a strong religious connotation.

On one hand, it was as if our group of trainers in Ukraine heard the concept of dialogue for the first time. They said, we do not want to work on conflict resolution. They earlier had training on conflict resolution and negotiations, but they were not enthusiastic about it. The idea of dialogue was something new. One of our trainers said this changed his life. They liked the idea of dialogue vs discussion/debate. We said that what we want is not that you go to a community to facilitate a dialogue between conflicting parties because this is not something we are prepared for and we should not be parachuting in the communities saying that we will now facilitate. We explained that the idea is to build the understanding, try to listen to the other side.

> *The idea of dialogue was something new. One of our trainers said this changed his life*

There are some people who live in Ukraine who have the impression that all see the situation the same way. But some people maintain contact with Russia and don't support this change. We focus on listening and understanding. To strengthen this work, we need time and space. That is always the most difficult. It is a challenge to work on sensitive issues; it is important, but difficult when we open things up and there is no follow up. Our benefit is that we keep contact with the same communities over time. Sometimes it is helpful just coming together.

# We need dialogue to express our fears

Julian Czurko

I am from Lodz, the 3rd largest city in Poland, in the center of the country. I have my own company as trainer and coach, and I also lead Rococo Foundation working on cultural education and research. In the past I worked with NGOs for many years. I am an educator in the Foundation for Modern Education SPUNK – named after Pippi Longstocking's friend, Spunk – that focuses on sexual education in Poland.

In my city, there is an institution called Center of Dialogue. Its mission is to talk about different experiences of exclusion, which is inspired by four historical cultures of Lodz: Jewish, Polish, Russian and German communities living together in the same place. The Center initiates dialogue between different groups organizing "living libraries" and my fellow NGOs bring the know-how to these meetings.

The main challenge we face is disinformation and propaganda, especially before elections. LGBTQ + and sexual education topics are brought as a main excuse to divide people. Our government uses the term "gender ideology" and LGBTQ+ to fight with progressive groups. Conservative groups designed this term to evoke fear of transsexualism, non-traditional masculinity, and undermining patriarchal roles in society. Fear is turned into power. The SPUNK Foundation is at the center of the discourse.

> ***The main challenge we face is disinformation and propaganda***

The discourse shifted and now fear of sexual minorities is bigger than fear of immigrants. It switched four years ago when immigration was the main topic. Despite propaganda, there were no problems with immigrants in Poland. Moreover, they were important contributors to our communities and aging society. The switch was made because parties made research that pointed to new topics which

> *(…) now fear of sexual minorities is bigger than fear of immigrants*

would provoke emotional reactions. The results showed that people from the left are afraid of climate change, and those from the right side, especially men, are afraid of “gender ideology”. Polarization really worked.

Our message is not heard in the media. We need dialogue, a chance for people to discuss and express their fears. As SPUNK, we realize projects for the City Hall’s Health Department, and in cooperation with public schools and care institutions. We teach about sexual healthcare: pregnancy, HIV, contraception methods, and how to protect against STIs. We also focus on building healthy relationships, emotions, building positive body image and dealing with discrimination. Media, especially conservative media, portray us as if we give instruction to young people on how to become lesbians, transsexuals, etc.

We watch how these topics are used in polarizing the society and we, as activists, feel that it is our job to address them. Our educators try to be visible in the media with our counter-narratives. We are active in social media. We also propose tools for critical thinking during our workshops, to help young people to think and analyze problems on their own. We not only teach, but also facilitate dialogues and use activities where participants make visible stands to statements, just as we did in the “Four Corners” exercise during Nansen Training.

I am trained in a method of facilitation that uses metaphors. It is called Clean Coaching. People express their feelings using the language of their metaphors. The metaphors help to get to the point very quickly. For example, one could express that anger is like a tiger. When they speak about something external, like an image of a tiger, they are encouraged to say more about it. Then you can ask some questions that are not directly about anger, nor are they personal. You can ask about that tiger: what it needs, what kind of tiger it is, what will happen next?

> *When dialogue ends, violence starts*

When the metaphor appears, it wants to be seen, recognized, and it carries information about how the represented problem could be solved. It is a medium that avoids psychological and communication barriers. My idea is to combine this with the Nansen Approach to dialogue, to create an open approach that would use metaphors while not focusing on the goals and outcomes. I can see many areas where I can combine these two.

*- You are so familiar with different methods, what is for you the added value of the Nansen-training?*

The approach itself, it changed my perception of dialogue. I finished cultural studies and I had lectures about philosophy for my PhD. They showed me “dia-logos” as dispersed truth, that challenge people to negotiate it or discover it to recreate one, common image. Now, after the Nansen training, I see dialogue as a process of juxtaposing them in a bigger mosaic rather than unitary image. A process that gives opportunity to experience the change.

> ***In the Polish situation there is not only a potential, but a strong need for this kind of dialogue***

Dialogue is not only a cognitive problem. For me, now, it is an alternative to violence. When dialogue ends, violence starts. It is a completely different approach that focuses on relationships, empathy, being very present and mindful for other people. It is like a practical anthropology, where you try to discover other people, their worlds, and the space that you co-create together.
I am impressed by stories from our trainers because you go to communities that deal with very difficult topics and that is very impressive to me. I can see how it transforms me, and how it can transform a situation where I could apply this approach.

In the Polish situation there is not only a potential, but a strong need for this kind of dialogue. The propaganda divided people so deeply that there are, many, many bridges to be built. This approach gives tools to build safe space for communication that could trespass all the borders, walls, other obstacles. It is so open, so neutral, and because we don’t expect others to change, the change can happen on its own, in the right time, in its own space.

> ***The propaganda divided people so deeply***

To spread this, we need to organize a network of facilitators. I am happy we just started working on this. But we are still the “happy few”. We need even more people who know this approach, who can facilitate, or invite us for this kind of facilitation. The members of this training group work in different areas and we know our local communities. This can be utilized to gain recognition from public institutions and municipalities. Those who are in power could be creating policies that would recognize dialogue as a tool of achieving goals of the state or regional institutions. That would be a big change. But to go further in this direction, we will need funding. And that will be a problem now because our conservative government transfers most funds to rightist, nationalist and/or catholic organizations. There is no transparency on funding and NGOs suffer a lot.

# My attitude towards the role of the facilitator changed

Agata Urbanik

Before Nansen Center training, I worked as a facilitator in different settings – public consultations, strategy making, group work within organizations or informal initiatives. I perceived myself as an active guide who ought to show possible routes and solutions, and is responsible for creating a vessel in which the whole group should reach a predefined goal.

Experience of the dialogue training changed my perspective towards the role of the facilitator. It was not so much the case of the tools we were presented. What struck me was the shift in paradigm, the idea of the background presence of a facilitator, whose goal is to create such conditions for dialogue in a group that the facilitator herself is no longer necessary. People engage in meaningful contact with each other, not needing an intermediary. Responsibility for the contents of the process and solutions placed on the table belong only to the group.

It was a revelation for me how simple rules of dialogue are: listening to a story of another person, asking questions, telling one's own personal story in return, without the urge to persuade anyone to one's truth, can lift so much pressure from the room. It can be difficult. It can get uncomfortable. But it leaves plenty of space to deepen one's own perspective.

> ***"It was a revelation for me that the simple rules of dialogue (…) can lift so much pressure from the room***

At first, I was slightly bemused – will there be a space for dialogue in real life situations, in processes that require tangible outcomes, such as public consultations, strategic planning etc? Then it turned out that one can use topic-based dialogue sessions as preparatory meetings for such processes, making them even more worthwhile. It made even more sense to me – you don't have to wait for the ideal opportunity to use dialogue, it's rather about internalizing a dialogue attitude.

What I really enjoyed about the advanced dialogue training is that we worked on a variety of conflict stories based on our experience which we submitted beforehand. It deepened our work and allowed us to understand conflict dynamics better. In the basic training I lacked a real dialogue situation; we practiced only with role plays.

It was great that on this occasion we participated in a topic-based dialogue where we could speak our own minds and hearts, face our own challenges. Not only was it an important personal experience, it also was vital for us as facilitators. Since after the training I am asking people to trust me and immerse in a dialogue situation, I ought to experience participating in it myself in the first place.

I also find that topic-based dialogues lower barriers to entry – both for facilitators (especially those less experienced) and participants. If there's tension or a conflict that needs to be voiced, once a brave space is set, it will emerge anyway.

## ❞ *Dialogue is extremely needed in Polish society*

Dialogue is extremely needed in Polish society, which like so many societies nowadays is deeply polarized, torn by conflicts and anger. The world seems to be painted black and white: it's either them or us. Therefore, acknowledging a more complex, more complicated version of a story can be regarded as a weakness. Whereas it could be just the opposite, a sign of a great strength.

To give you an example: last year I visited the European Solidarity Centre on a guided tour. This great exhibition documents the Polish path to democracy, the history of "Solidarność" (Solidarity), a social movement from the 1980s that greatly contributed to the fall of communism in Poland.

At the end of our walk, in a room devoted to the partially free elections of 1989, the guide said that the transition from communism to free market democracy was difficult and some groups were left out. But that was it. I guess the concept of the exhibition was different, to finish the story of "Solidarność" with enthusiasm and high hopes for the future.

But I regret there was no more information about what happened after 1989, when the ideals met reality, when the diverse communist opposition groups lost their unifying enemy, when Polish society was faced with economic "shock therapy". Such a shame, because it could have given some tools to understand what has happened during 30 years of free Poland and what is going on at the moment, to give voice to the groups which were excluded and paid the biggest cost of the transformation.

It could have given food for thought on the legacy of "Solidarność" and the place of solidarity in our society nowadays. I regard the lack of it as highly symbolic – as a sign of all those conversations we are not having.

# Creating space in rural areas to talk, ask and understand

Sulislawa Borowska

I worked in Kashubian folk high school for 22 years on informal education. This is a rural area in the Pomoranian region, same as where we are now in Gdansk. We work in a context of multiculturalism, with the German minority of Jews, Ukrainian and Kashubian. This area was always multicultural. We work with different groups: with farmers, with women, local leaders, mainly women. The place where I live is mainly Kashubian and they are Catholics. Religion is important here. Kashubians were always Polish and we were always living in the neighborhood with Polish and Germans. I am Kashubian, and understand the language, but don't speak it that much. There are less Kashubian than before.

The folk high schools are not financed through the state in Poland. We do not have long courses like you have in Norway. The students are women from urban and rural areas. We have weekend courses on handcrafts and traditions. The aim is to learn something and to get to know each other. Social activities in public life. Folk artists and local artists. This year we focus on senior clubs. I am a leader of five clubs. These are for retired people above 65. Teachers can sometimes retire from 55 or 60. Anyone who wants to come can join the clubs. Now people are more open and join clubs. Society is changing in Poland and more people want to come. Ten years ago, people did not want to leave their houses.

We have 30 beds and space for people to stay. On weekends people can live here. A small staff of three people work here. Teachers work on contract. I grew up in this school; my parents were teachers here. In the future I would like to do more teaching and less management.

## *Civic attitude needs time*

The main challenge in rural areas is education. We are still in the process of building civic society. It is only 30 years since the revolution in 1989. The aim of education was different from now. Civic attitude needs time; to create the space to learn, be able to discuss, to listen, to be able to feel pride, and that my voice is important. What I was admiring, especially in Danish schools, was that they were able to talk, and eager to talk about their lives, dreams and aims. From living in folk high school, I have seen people coming from different places. I have seen this diversity. I am not surprised that people support the peace and justice party, since they did not have the space to ask, to understand. They were forgotten by the government, especially the women were not told they have the right to think about

themselves. The church is putting a burden on people. You should love other people as you love yourself. We did not have the space to discuss what this means. The first folk high school in Poland began in 1906, then we had the wars. In 1982 there were sixteen boarding folk high schools in Poland. Now there are five. Two of them are new, and they build on the educational approach of Grundtvig - one of the founders of Danish Folk High Schools.

> *We create the space where we are open to ask and not ashamed not to know something*

I would like to organize workshops on dialogue, create the space, not facilitating in conflict, but create the space. In rural areas sometimes people are even afraid to say their name. In the end of the weekend we sit in a circle and I ask, what did you get out of the weekend? And they do not feel comfortable talking. To make the people speak, be brave to speak up, we need to go step by step. The same happened to me; I used to be not brave enough to speak. Now it is not more paralyzing. The world is changing. I like to mix groups with different ages, gender and cultures. Sometimes you must prepare people who are not used to speaking in public. While making pottery, people talk about their dreams. They say this is the only time I can refill energy, get a little bit of fresh air. We create the space where we are open to ask and not be ashamed to not know something.

# Public consultations from joint decision making to dialogue

«Kasia»

Main added value of the training was the general approach and the tools. We could make use of them in our projects and for sure we will try to implement some parts of training into our activities. I presume we will be more willing to conduct and promote public dialogues than the dialogue facilitation method. Public dialogue meetings are more coherent with what we are doing now, and it will be easier for us to find partners amongst self-government officials.

> *There is much room for improvement*

The tools and skills from the training I am already using as a moderator. At a small scale, it is useful in my work activities, as I work in public consultations. There is much room for improvement though. During our meetings with residents, I have a lot of opportunities to speak with them on any given aspect of their lives, but most of the time, we do not dive into true dialogue. They are more willing to share opinions or even argue about things that matter for them than go deeper. And I often fail to engage them in such a conversation.

Partially it is due to the way in which public consultations in Poland are planned and perceived by people (officials as well as citizens). They are more about decision making and influencing the decisions than a dialogue process. But still, I think we can use the dialogue approach within regular projects of public consultation, and I hope that the city officials will find space not only for joint decision making (as they do today) but for the genuine dialogue with citizens as well. The public dialogue could be a meaningful part of the participatory process, especially in its preparatory phase.

> ***I hope that the city officials will find space not only for joint decision making (...) but for the genuine dialogue with citizens***

# Providing space by stepping back

«Gosia»

It is difficult in a war situation like in Ukraine to say that you don`t want to win. It is hard to communicate dialogue; immediately you are accused of giving up in a war. It is complicated, probably deeply cultural. It might be related to the Soviet past we share. It is deep in the culture that your value is described in terms of what you achieve, that you want something. Even at school you describe yourself in terms of achieving your goals, you passed this, you passed that, this influence is everything.

I work in Ukraine now. Before, I worked in Polish NGOs dedicated to civil society development. I observe similar challenges in Ukraine.  It is about basic civic responsibility: to take care of your neighbor, the environment etc., that was much lacking in the Polish society. Even though everyone is complaining, it is now much cleaner on the streets, a sign of good public services and people's growing responsibility. The change really is possible. I remember from earlier that people were just throwing trash as they were standing, now they look for a trash bin, and take basic responsibility for public space like cleaning up after your dog. That did not happen in the early 90s. This generation walks around with small bags to pick the dog litter up.

In Ukraine, I work in the peacebuilding field. Together with partners, we work in communities with civic engagement, activism, change agents, different people who localize problems in their society and they try to make a change. I believe that change starts at the very local level. If people are responsible for their street, they will also be responsible for their country.

> ***"It is difficult in a war situation like in Ukraine to say that you don`t want to win***

Methods I learned at dialogue training courses with Nansen Center have proven to be very useful for my work. I see how I change my style of engaging, from moderator to withdrawing more and observing what is happening. I am training to be, in a way, invisible, so after some time you will not need me. I think my colleagues appreciate the fact that I learned to step back. That helps creating a situation where people talk to each other without a need for a third party, or so-called mediation. I also started paying much more attention to the space where meetings, or dialogues are happing.  It has to be a safe space, but also comfortable and beautiful. I believe it is important for people to relax and, to show the other sides of themselves. So that, eventually, we can concentrate in dialogues on connectors, not dividers.

And so, in a way, that was the process of my cooperation with partners in Ukraine. In the beginning it was easier finding dividers than connectors; instead of concentrating on the things that connect us. In our organization we value grassroots knowledge. Each of the partners have their own methodology. There is a good synergy between us and them. Some are working on a very local level, others on more a central one. There is huge potential to cooperate and learn from each other. However, wherever there is diversity, there is a need for dialogue, to understand, that it is great that we are different, that diversity is our strength.

Introduction to the Nansen Approach was a revelation, a game changer for my understating of dialogues and my role as facilitator among my colleagues and partners. After Nansen training I pay a lot of attention to providing safe space, e.g. by talking to every single participant in a dialogue beforehand so that everybody knows what to expect. Nansen Center says, give the space, my instincts say, have control.

> ***Nansen Center says, give the space, my instincts say, have control***

In my work I realized that my dialogue partners and I are more relaxed when we all made it clear that they have the knowledge, not me. I can have an idea and some inspirational thoughts, but they own the space and the knowledge. It is not a classic dialogue in Nansen sense, but thanks to inspiration coming from Nansen training, I see an amazing change in cooperation, after we started giving each other time and space just for interacting and spending more relaxed time together.

Also, it is important to admit that not everybody wants to be a part of dialogical relationship. If people are not that interested, and say we did not want dialogue, we want to win in every interaction, it is also ok. It is not the format I promote, but it is important to understand the individual, cultural and political source of such positions. And maybe it is also an important element of activism, to stay with an open mind and always research the position of the others.

I think that is why dialogue is such an unpopular subject. Dialogue without agenda means that you capitulated, while major thinking is that the only option is to win. This goes from the level of political discussions about the war and on the level with your private relationships. Communication of dialogue is seen as communication of weakness. How can we use other means, how to use creative means to make people used to sound of the word dialogue?

I would start at schools and early education. If it was possible, I would work on teaching teachers, working with parents; a systematic way to promote the idea of dialogue from the very early stage, to cover all society.

> ***If people are responsible for their street, they also will be responsible for their country***

# We want to build local leaders

## Ewa Patyk

I work in the community center "Dom Sasiedzki - Goscinna Przystan", district of Orunia, a suburb with around 16,000 inhabitants, the southern part of Gdansk. This is a neglected area, with social and economic problems. For ten years I worked with providing social services, starting as coordinator of "After School Club" for children. Now I am managing "Equal Chances" service point for residents who are in crisis for different, economic and social, reasons. I coordinate the point and work with clients from the local community.

We are at the center of problems in an area where people with social and economic problems were sent. There are many poor people who have been unemployed for a long period of time; the highest number of evicted and in debt, and; a high number of immigrants from eastern countries. We do not have starvation, but we have children who do not get an education and have health problems. Very often they do not benefit with good health services. The biggest problem is that all is in one place, like a ghetto. Taking care of the local environment is a fairly new habit of, but it is not as bad as it was 25 years ago.

> ***We are at the center of problems in an area where people with social and economic problems were sent***

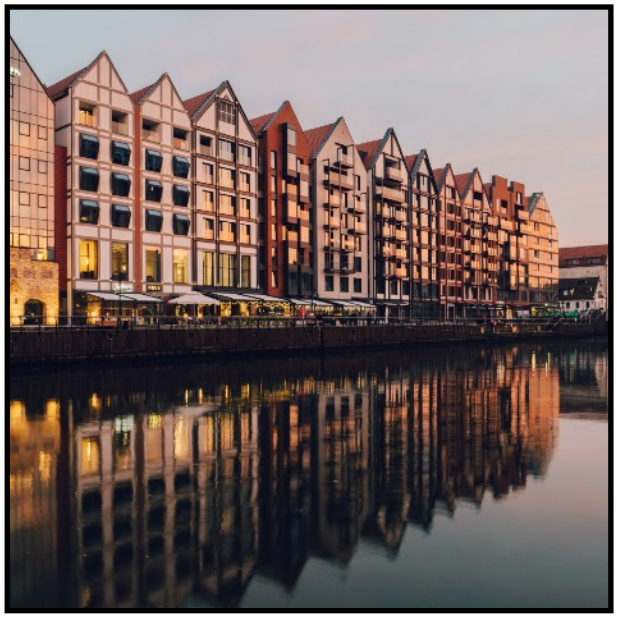
Then we had the mob and drug dealers. Now it is safer, but the number of social issues is still so big it is hard to make change. There are a few similar locations around the city. If you ask for the worst districts in Gdansk, we will be number one among three others. Apartments are cheap here. The place is perceived as insecure and unsafe for business. I live in the area. I feel safe because everyone knows me. I am not sure I would be that safe if I did not know everybody. The district is divided because of communication, a main road, and a train track. There is no free passage. When the train is coming, sometimes you must wait for 30 minutes. It is difficult for business and for health care. I have a private practice and have it in another suburb because no one wants to come here.

One of our main concerns is to support local leaders in developing local communities. Another, in terms of providing social services, we are trying to establish a setting in a way that empowers the clients and respects the people. Our people are sometimes treated worse than middle class people. We try to establish some models of cooperation built on trust.

The Nansen training was a great opportunity. I do not have access to a lot of education or training of this kind. I do a lot of interdisciplinary work where we invite different social actors to the table. We have a solution focused approach. Sometimes the client asks for a meeting. In some cases, we work on the goal of the family and few other people can be involved from different departments and

> *(…) we are trying to establish a setting in a way that empowers the clients and respects the persons*

institutions. I also facilitate "Local Safety Team" - where we provide meetings bringing everyone together and we meet twice every month to implement plans, financing, research, diagnosis and establishing a district team for youth safety.  Now we manage to have them agree on issues. By participating in these training sessions, I got a better understanding of the process and saw the need for more preparatory meetings. The idea of “multipartiality”, to support all parties, was hard for me because I live in the same area as clients and institutions, and I had relationships with these actors.



*A training session in Gdańsk 2019.*

# THE CHANGE WE WANT TO MAKE

The main motivation for participating in dialogue training is to make change on different levels in society, to make use of an inclusive dialogical approach to change yourself and the relationship to others, and to the wider community and society.

Common desires are less polarization, more dialogue and respectful listening. Participants want to change the way we talk and cultivate a culture of dialogue, both locally and in general. Included in this is to learn how to ask and reflect about the meaning of words. They want to start dialoging on difficult topics to help people get a better understanding of each other through listening to different standpoints and becoming open to acknowledge them.

The idea is to get people together to exchange opinions, appreciate diversity and empower individuals by teaching what dialogue is, notice societal challenges and try to address them. An expressed ambition is to make people who attend public meetings, arranged as part of consultation processes, to be more understanding to each other and willing to listen to each other's perspectives. One participant said that "society should incorporate dialogue in its lifestyle and way of thinking. Consequently, no more ping-pong of positions or fighting about the conflicts, but understanding them in diversity and disagreement, then there is a potential for innovation."

To turn intentions into action, there is a need to identify opportunities, who to work with, what are relevant and accessible institutions, topics and where is the place to start? Participants come from different places and have a variety of backgrounds, as can be seen in their responses. This allows for activities on different levels that can affect and enhance each other, and this provided efforts to link and utilize the emerging network of trainers and facilitators. Public dialogues, inclusive processes in the workplace, facilitation of educational processes and preparations for public consultations are the activities that are mentioned most frequently.

## Who to work with?

Schools, city councils and local governments, various workplaces and NGOs are among the institutions that are relevant to work with. It is a question of making use of the opportunities you have as a citizen, employee, activist or "gründer". Some examples that are specifically mentioned referring to different levels in society:

- Schools: working with youngsters and parents in schools, including lessons of dialogue at schools.
- Local decisionmakers: introduce methods of conflict transformation and convince local decisionmakers that such tools will be useful for them for more cooperative and dialogical city councils.
- Local government: introduce a dialogue approach wider to a local government. Presented it as a possibility to work on important topics between citizens and civil servants and other "actors"

involved in “city life”. Working on attitudes of and towards civil servants, how to make politicians more attentive and open to civil servants.

- Workplace: use dialogue as a method to transform management in the workplace. “The change I want to see is change in approach to conflicts in my work. I want the work plan to be more inclusive, more dialogical, more transparent, more in line with dialogue values.”
- State structure: create an all-round dialogue implementation in the state structure. Public issues should be discussed and not only decided upon by the politicians.
- Women activists: “I would like to support women activists from rural areas and small towns, who are part of the conflict in their community, in learning about the tools of dialogue, for them to help each other and in the future, with my help as a facilitator initiate dialogue sessions.”

## The most important topics

In October 2019, the topics and main issues, put on the table were:

- Climate change: educate activists for a common action for climate changes. Raise awareness and responsibility about climate change.
- Educate activists on how to talk and work in a more dialogic way.
- Minorities: how to provide more openness towards minorities.
- Diversity: a public dialogue on what should the city do.
- Situation of seniors: to empower the community to start talking about important issues, that are not the interest of the municipality – example: situation of seniors.
- Difficult subjects that are hidden and unspoken.
- For the digital dialogues held in April and May 2020 there were other topics merging from the COVID-19 pandemic:
- How to maintain active citizenship in times of crisis?
- How to maintain security and freedom?
- How to build trust in post-Corona times?


## Where?

Space and locations identified by participants in October 2019 were physical spaces: rural areas, communities, public space and cross-border initiatives.

- Rural areas: to support building the space in rural areas where people will be able to talk, to listen to each other, to conduct dialogue, be listened to, to pose the questions.
- Communities: to introduce in my community more dialogical and relational approaches towards the people different from them. I would also like to participate at the meetings where dialogue is practiced.
- Public space: dialogue in public space with citizens and officials. Empowering of local leaders in dialogue competence.
- Cross border initiatives: create a healthier atmosphere for Polish-Ukrainian dialogue, increase the communication skills, decrease frustration and make people able to talk about their differences in a more constructive way.

In the spring of 2020, because of restrictions caused by the coronavirus, it was not possible to have meetings in any of the physical spaces mentioned. Digital platforms were suddenly the only opportunity to meet with more than a few people.  On the initiative of Orange Poland and Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue, and with participation of enthusiastic “Nansen graduates”, six digital dialogues were held. A summary of the contents of these dialogues is included as an appendix.


*European Solidarity Center in Gdansk was the venue for the dialogue facilitation training, a place of historical importance in Poland and known for the Round table talks and Polands way to democracy.*

# TOOLS AND APPROACH

When asked what they got out of the dialogue training courses, some of the participants responded that “it is not so much about the tools, it is more the approach”. Others refer to specific tools that are particularly useful. Since most of the participants are already professional mediators, counsellors, coaches, teachers, social and development workers and some are involved in peacebuilding platforms, we are curious to learn more about the added value of the Nansen Approach to dialogue and conflict transformation. In the two subsequent dialogue training courses the participants were introduced to an approach for more inclusive processes, including specific tools that can be applied in different situations.

In addition to the composition of tools, there seems to be something about the atmosphere created by the trainers tuning into the needs of the participants, that adds an extra dimension to the Nansen training courses. A process-based learning, where the trainers “follow the flow”, meaning that they listen carefully not only to what is said, but also to what is communicated by body language and in interactions between participants. There is a continuous “check-in” with the participants to make sure they are all connected and provided the space to talk and actively participate.

The commitment, personal qualities and qualifications of the trainers provides strong guidance to the learning environment. Their openness and willingness to share affects the whole group and provides the safe space needed for participants to be active and contribute on their own terms. Composition of the group of participants is equally important. This includes recruitment, securing a varied group of people coming from different places and with life experience from diverse fields of work, voluntarism and activism. Variation in age and gender also helps to secure a dynamic interactive learning process.

**Tools:** The Nansen Training courses present several tools. Among the tools are the essentials of dialogue: active listening, asking questions and sharing of reflections. In addition, tools for understanding conflict: conflict analysis, conflict mapping, identifying position, interest and needs of actors in conflict, dialogue facilitation in conflict situations and facilitation of public dialogues on relevant issues.

**Approach:** The Nansen Approach is characterized by inclusive dialogue where all participate on equal terms in a safe space. Participants appreciate the inclusivity and openness, that it is cooperation-based and has a collective impact. The trainers and participants, their commitment and participation, composition of the program and how it is facilitated, the challenges of going all-in and of reconsidering patterns of thought and action. The space given to be “authentic” is essential. A concept like authenticity comes up. The question is raised by trainers: “What does authenticity mean to you? And you have to think again about the term you used, explain and explore. The approach is open and explorative, without expectations for specific outcomes, but rather with more questions coming up, always thriving for deeper understanding.

**Some quotes from participants:**

“We create the space where we are open to ask and not be ashamed of not knowing. This approach gives tools to build bridges, just to trespass all the borders, walls, obstacles. It is so open. It is so neutral. We don’t expect others to change. The change can happen on its own time, its own space. To spread this, we need to organize a network of facilitators.”

“My attitude changed towards the role of the facilitator, being in a group with less presence, not pushing people towards a solution. I see how I change my style of engaging from moderator to more withdrawing and observing what is happening. I am, in a way, invisible. So, after some time, you will not need me. They appreciate the fact that I step back.”

“In a friendly and mindful group, I watched myself doing different and odd things. I stopped liking to agree with others. I love to find and celebrate differences and I look for a value in them. Finding only similarities and agreeing creates nice atmosphere and a feeling of commitment. But then the dialogue stops – and then a sense of full understanding is an illusion that keeps us from entering less safe zone. I started to like to create an atmosphere where it is safe and appreciated to have different opinions and keep the atmosphere and feeling of understanding – not despite expressed differences, but because we had an opportunity to express and compare them.”

**Relevance:** to assess relevance, we asked how the tools and approach can be applied. Participants report that what they learn can be used directly in their daily life, at home, in the family, workplace and in organizations.

# HOW WILL WE USE WHAT WE LEARNED?

Participants want to facilitate public dialogues and lead dialogue workshops. They see a potential in facilitating conflict situations among people involved in the same organization and want to organize and conduct dialogue sessions, creating places for public dialogues in urban and rural settings. Among the groups that are mentioned to make workshops for are youth, schools and teachers, women, and local leaders active in rural society.  Local schools and NGOs are places appropriate for solving conflicts. Local councils are another option. Dialogue and conflict mapping are both relevant inputs. “Introduce dialogue in local community centers as a way of looking for solutions to deal with difficult situations among citizens.”

There is motivation “to gather people to talk in difficult situations, to process, to feel better after telling about tragedies and important things in life.” There are participants who want to “coordinate dialogue sessions in preschool to make community more engaged and feel responsibility for the organization, parents, teachers, board and children” and “showing children how to talk about difficult things.” Making use of tools in everyday life, personal life and social activities is mentioned by most participants. Another arena which is frequently mentioned is work life: “Applying dialogue tools to

make regular dialogue sessions in own company," and, more specifically: "Four corners for employees to talk about issues, problems and challenges they see."

"Prepare educational workshop for civil servants on what is dialogue, and how they can implement this approach in their work on daily basis."
Dialogue is a relevant approach for public consultations, especially in preparatory phases, and policy recommendations.

"Public Dialogue in European Solidarity Centre (ECS), open discussion meetings for important social topics in Gdansk and maybe districts of Gdansk." ECS was the venue of dialogue facilitation training, a welcoming environment and appropriate space.

As mentioned in two of the participant interviews, dialogue tools and approach are employed in Ukraine. "Workshops and training for local communities in Ukraine, and Ukrainian schools in Poland, e-learning course in Ukrainian."
"I would like to organize workshops on dialogue, create the space, not facilitating in conflict, but create the space."

*Newly graduated Dialogue facilitators in Gdansk, October 2019.*

# CHALLENGES, QUESTIONS AND INSIGHTS

With loads of experience from professional life and as citizens, participants reflect on challenges, share new insights and pose new questions. This is the true dynamic of a dialogue workshop or training course.

Here are some quotes from what was shared of reflections, questions, and new insights:

"The hardest part for preparations is analyzing needs etc., then step back without coming with suggestions."
"My instinct says keep control. Nansen Center says, give the space"
"How to keep the distance, how to deal with that. How to take care of yourself, sleep normally etc.?"
"What are the limits of dialogue – can all be included: extremists, neo-Nazis, is it right to give space?"
"What about the silent majority of those who do not speak up?"
"The facilitator needs to acknowledge that the partners are the ones who can resolve the issues, not us. We, as facilitator, never know the consequences of what happens outside the room. We must believe that they can find their way."
"To build the trust as a facilitator is the most challenging work. How to change from debate to dialogue?"
"Creating and maintaining the safe space is the most important. When people say they do not feel safe anymore, this can be addressed, and you can for example ask what is needed for you to feel safe. The whole group can be addressed to make them responsible."
"How to connect? When there is such great disagreement, how can we connect? They may think more in the same way than they assume. To understand the other perspective, it can be helpful to think: how would I be if I were in their shoes? Where do the ideas come from?"

*" The distinction, between moderator and facilitator, may be one of the keys to understand the Nansen Approach*

Among the topics discussed throughout training was the difference between a moderator and a facilitator. “A moderator wants to reach somewhere, has an aim, own agenda. A facilitator lets the people create the agenda themselves. “Facilitare” means in French – to make easy. Be there assisting the process, like a midwife. Facilitator is not a term that is well known in Polish. To put light on the table, coming to the surface. A facilitator’s agenda is to create space and understanding. In facilitation the potential is in the group. In therapy the aim is to understand yourself. In facilitation the aim is to understand others.” (quote from one of the participants)

> ***” Participation in a dialogue process is an opportunity to see your own role and potential for building relationships and making change***

The distinction, between moderator and facilitator, may be one of the keys to understand the Nansen Approach to dialogue and conflict transformation. This approach emphasizes the role of the dialogue facilitator as one who provides the space to let people talk freely. There is no hidden agenda or expectations to what comes out of the conversation. The strength of this approach lies in the true ownership of those involved.
Participation in a dialogue process is an opportunity to see your own role and potential for building relationships and making change. For this to happen the facilitator must step back and leave the floor to the owners of the topic or the conflict that is on the table. This also highlights the responsibility of those involved.

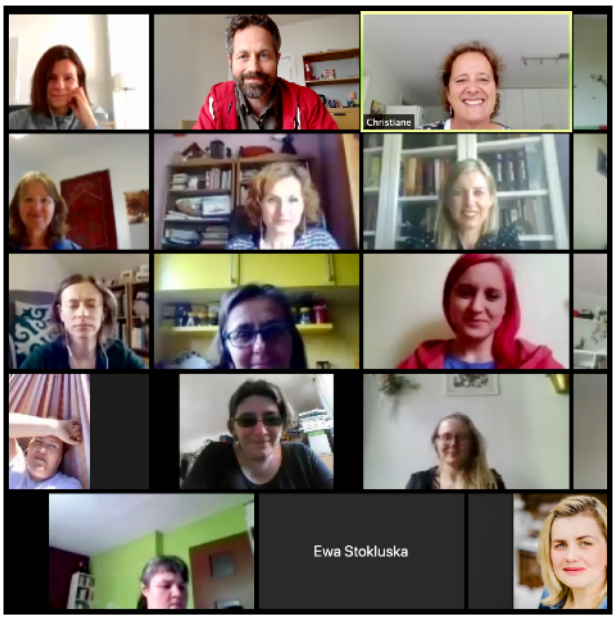
> ***” There is no hidden agenda or expectations to what comes out of the conversation***

The process of dialogue training and facilitation in Poland has made it clearer that this approach is somehow unique and needs further exploration and prevalence.

Still, there are several questions to be raised: what are the limits of dialogue? When and how to include those who challenge the human values of openness, respect, and inclusion?

For every session and every process more questions will come up and there will be more challenges to face. Step by step we open for new perspectives and new insights.

> ***” The strength of this approach lies in the true ownership of those involved***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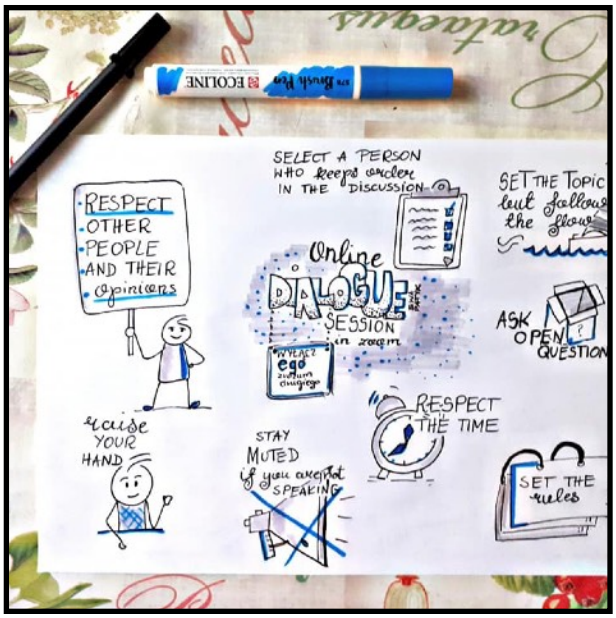
SELECT A PERSON WHO keeps order IN THE DISCUSSION
SET THE Topic
RESPECT OTHER PEOPLE AND THEIR opinions
Online
DIALOGUE
SESSION
ASK OPEN QUESTION
RESPECT THE TIME
STAY MUTED
SET THE rules

APPENDIX:

# DIGITAL DIALOGUES IN TIMES OF CORONA

## ONLINE PUBLIC DIALOGUES IN POLAND 2020

### –A response to the Covid-19 pandemic

**"Turn off the ego. Understand the other"** is the name of a new exploratory dialogue project jointly organized by Orange Poland and the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue. As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the cancelled and postponed professional activities that came with it, the two partners collaborated during the spring of 2020 by conducting public dialogues through online video platforms

The approximately 40 participants in this dialogue are members of an alumni community of civil society workers who have been trained by Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue during the last two years. Through six dialogue sessions, the participants reflect and share experiences on topics emerging from the current global pandemic. Each session covered different topics. The first session was for sharing how they all were affected by the Corona pandemic. Topics for the next meetings were "Active citizenship in times of crisis"; "How to balance security and freedom?"; "Building trust in post-corona times", and; "How to prevent disinformation and fake news?" The sixth and last session was for reflections on this digital dialogue experience and about the way forward, how to proceed with further cooperation between the participants, Orange and the Nansen Center?

In the digital dialogue sessions, everyone has a chance to express their ideas, worries, experience and feelings relevant to the topic of the day, and a set of agreed upon ground rules ensure a safe and open digital communication space.

After the six digital dialogues, participants will continue their work and activism. With this experience, they are prepared to apply the digital format for dialogue meetings in Poland, and for providing physical dialogue spaces when the time comes and it is permitted and safe for groups of people in Poland to meet again. Hopefully, this project can inspire and cultivate public dialogues all over the country. More than ever there is a need for physical interactions, respectful conversation, and understanding within communities.

This initiative for digital dialogues in a time without opportunities to meet physically is a direct effect of dialogue training and the network that is created through the initiative "Turn off the ego. Understand the other" and represents a strong statement and sign of motivation and willingness to explore new and innovative opportunities for dialogue in the Polish society.

# WHAT DID THE PARTICIPANTS SAY?

Reflections and statements from five digital dialogues during the COVID-19 pandemic in May-June 2020

## 1: How to maintain active citizenship in times of crisis?

DISINFORMATION / CIVIC EDUCATION / SYSTEMIC CHANGE
This is an important time to reflect on the civic education in our country. There is a lot of disinformation which creates chaos, and civic education is needed to foster critical thinkers. Additionally, it is important to not just focus on solidarity through practical action, but also to change the system.

BLACKMAIL / VULNERABILITY
It feels like we are blackmailed: I cannot go and protest, I have to focus on staying alive, staying healthy, keeping my job. At the same time, the democracy is taken away from us step by step. We become vulnerable because we get used to safety in the home, and the outer world becomes scarier.

UNCERTAINTY AS PART OF ACTIVISM
We need to embrace uncertainty in our activism. We have no way of planning. Online activities are not what we wish, but it is better than nothing. To build a society that is resilient we need to embrace uncertainty.

PERSONAL FOCUS / GUILT AND RESPONSIBILITY
I am not a model citizen right now. I am really focusing on my family and friends and I am incapable of doing more. How do we mobilize energy to be active citizens? The feeling of guilt is there all the time. I am not feeling the local community or solidarity other than my friends and family. What can I do?

## 2: How to balance security and freedom in a society?

UNDERSTANDING WHY / COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT
I need to have a reason to give up my freedom and I need to understand why I should do that. What really harms me is when I don't understand why. This makes it more practical for me. What makes you feel secure? Trying to obey rules while also seeing that everyone is following the same rules and what we agreed on. Even if I don't understand all rules, I still feel I would obey the rules to feel more secure, because not following them makes me feel less secure. It is a democracy, so I agreed to rules to some degree.

FORCED RULES / CREATING MY OWN SECURITY
I don't feel I agreed on the rules, I feel they are put on us. I am not satisfied with my level of freedom. The government is taking the rules and interpreting security in problematic ways. I don't find it as a

common agreement. What gives you the feeling of security? My own security that I am creating for myself. The responsibility I am taking on me and the people I am in contact with. I don't get security from the central governing institutions. It is my own practice that makes me feel ok and healthy.

FOCUS MY ENERGY / LACK OF INFORMATION CREATES INSECURITY
The question of freedom is very individual. I should be thinking about my security, but I don't think about it. I would like to have the right to think about my physical security, but I don't because I have to use my energy to think about the freedoms that are taken away from me. I do not trust the political reasons. I feel insecure because I don't know what is happening, they are not informing us well.

TESTING THE LIMITS OF THE POPULATION
Since this is a crisis, I feel the government is testing ground and pushing the limit to see what people accept. Somehow it is similar like after a terrorist attack, measures can be introduced for the first time and we give signals to governments to see where they can draw the line. I don't want to put people in danger and there is a need for rules, but when you see the politicians not following the rules it doesn't help.

THE BALANCE IS DECIDED BY THE LEVEL OF MUTUAL TRUST
Trust is double sided. We need to trust them, and they need to trust us, and this is very dependent on what kind of limitations are imposed on us. We need to know that the person that is leading the boat is the right person, not about all the icebergs that we almost hit.

FEAR OF NEIGHBORS
This crisis is creating negative tensions and divisions between the city and the village. A lot of fear. "Us and them" mentality. We need the spaces to discuss our fears. To come together and to talk, if not we start to become the enemy very quickly.

## 3: How to build trust in post-corona times

TRUST IS A MUSCLE
It is important to consider trust on different levels - micro, meso, macro. Perhaps we can view trust as a muscle, it needs to be trained and maintained. Being social trains the muscle and now we are not keeping the muscle intact because of isolation.

OPENNESS IS KEY
Openness is key to create and maintain trust. In my experience, in a public meeting, people were less open because they were uncertain about how the information they gave would be used by others. Openness may have a big impact on people, those who dare to be open inspire others.

LACK OF INFORTMATION WEAKENS TRUST
The isolation took too long which made people more frustrated and angry. Without enough information it makes the situation more uncertain and then trust weakens. Especially trust in the health care system would help a lot. It's not about social trust, but more about the individual trust that we will be ok and healthy.

# 4: How to prevent disinformation and fake news?

THE MOST BASIC SOURCE FOR FAKE NEWS IS FEAR
In a concrete example I experienced, some started to create stories like «it will be disaster», «it will destroy for others». What did not work in facing this was Facebook or Google. It was difficult to communicate with opponents; the emotions were so strong. What works best is dialogue, but it was difficult to arrange it. Some did not want to talk face to face. Time and building relationships helped. When we met, I felt that trust was growing.

THE FEELING OF SAFETY
When we feel unsafe, there is no space to look for information and we make fast decisions to feel safe. In this time of Corona, the level of fear is much higher, and then also the fake news is more popular.

TIME TO LISTEN
Time to listen is important, and to create a safe space. We need to give each other a chance to talk about fear and how we see the future. Different opinions are natural. It is important to try to understand the position of the other and not attack.

THE SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED SPACES NOT FOLLOWING THE WORLD
The Polish school system has not changed much from the communist time. There is theoretical knowledge, but no teaching in how to discuss and how to pose questions. Poland did not believe in education and did not reform the education system. It is about time to discuss on a national level, what are the aims we want to follow? I would like the kids to have curiosity, opinions and to be arguing. I would like teachers to give them the right to say something, to disagree, to have opinions and emotions that are worth listening to.

# 5: Public dialogue and the future

## -How did you experience the dialogues? What did you learn and what could have been done differently?

DISTRACTION / MEETING REGULARLY
There are some difficulties with technology and distractions. But thanks to Corona virus and Zoom we meet regularly and voluntarily. It is a precious thing and it can create new collaborations both offline and online. These are the most interesting and best meetings I had online during this whole pandemic.

EMPOWERING / GROUP THERAPY
This was really empowering. I needed the inspiring talks, and it gave me some sort of hope and feeling of community. Maybe a little bit like we were in the same bubble, but at the same time some

moments were so moving, deep and intimate, possibly bringing us closer than we would have been physically.
What we had here in the first meeting was so crucial, that we used time to have a round to talk about how we feel and where we are at mentally. We kind of needed a group therapy before we could even start with the dialogue. It is worth continuing and I hope it will.

BETWEEN ILLUSION AND EXPERIENCE
On the one hand it really felt like it was a good space for dialogue, but I also think it was a safe space because we knew most of each other. I am unsure of how it would work with a new group of strangers. I really miss the opportunity to have direct responses to what people said, not even to say something, but also to lose the non-verbal reaction and communication. At the same time, this pandemic period discovered opportunities of these platforms that I was not appreciating before. We were somewhere in between illusion and experience, it was not real, but it felt real at the same time.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BUBBLE / VALUE IN TECHNOLOGY
I was looking forward to these meetings every week. I also thought about this dilemma about us being in a bubble, but at this moment in time I think we needed to be in a bubble to get important and meaningful insights. Before I thought online tools are just something we use when we cannot meet face to face, now I see the value in the different means of communicating and connecting. It was good training and I would also recommend it to be part of the training. These reoccurring meetings also helped me feel better as a facilitator.

## -How can we collaborate in the future and what could that look like? What kind of support do you think you can give each other?

REGULAR MEETING / TOPIC BASED DIALOGUES / CONSULTATIONS IN THE FUTURE
I am thinking about a regular meeting, once a month. Maybe we could follow up the topic-based dialogue as a method. It could be interesting to have some consultation hours about concrete cases, projects, and situations.

CONTINUING PRACTICING FACILITATION
If we continue with topic-based dialogues it would be great to have facilitators from one of us to rotate and practice on each other. With feedback from Christiane and the others.

INVOLVE THE LARGER SOCIETY
Maybe we can organize something together as a network for people from the outside/larger society.

# Sources

- Two background papers from Konrad Ciesiołkiewicz; “Let`s dialogue in Poland” and “Let`s focus on dialogue in Poland” unpublished
- Applications from participants for facilitation training
- Notes from observing training in Gdansk
- Conflict stories presented in the training courses
- Interviews with 7 participants, typed and transcribed
- Interview with trainer and coordinator
- Questionnaire – individual, sharing in regional groups, sharing in the plenary
  - Notes from individual questionnaires and group discussion
  - Additional information by e-mail
  - Notes from meeting with partners October 14 in Warsaw
  - Correspondence with Daria Drabik and additional questions

**To learn more about methodology** of Nansen Training and Approach, we recommend to take a look at The Nansen Handbook for Trainers is Dialogue and Conflict Transformation (2018, 2019)

# Credits

**This report is written by:** Norunn Grande, Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue, with assistance from Kai Nygaard and Siri Syverud Thorsen.

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Nansen Fredssenter
Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue

# A REPORT ABOUT DIALOGUE WORK IN POLAND

*Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue at the Nansen Academy, Lillehammer, Norway.*

Our thanks goes to Orange Poland, 100 participants and more, in Poland and across borders. We are grateful for this fruitful cooperation and journey together, that gives valuable input to Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue as a learning community of dialogue practitioners. We are eager to take more steps together to learn, explore and provide space for inclusive dialogues that prepares the ground for change and peaceful coexistence.

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