

Introduction

Conference topic

With the fifth conference of the European Forum for Restorative Justice, the organisers wanted to further promote restorative justice in Europe.

A substantial part of the conference was devoted to the AGIS project "Restorative justice: an agenda for Europe". Verona was the place for the final conference of this project, which focused, on the one hand, on *the potential role of the European Union in the further development of restorative justice in Europe* and, on the other hand, on *the development of restorative justice in Southern Europe*.

Firstly, and concerning the first of the two AGIS projects, working groups at the conference were to explore the needs and possibilities for further EU regulation and action in the field of restorative justice and to discuss concrete ideas and proposals.

Secondly, the work of the AGIS project on Southern Europe was supposed to become finalised. After having identified the difficulties encountered in Southern Europe for consolidating the implementation of restorative justice, in this conference the strategies devised to meet these difficulties, as well as the experience gained through specific projects and different services existing in the South of Europe were presented.

Above all, restorative justice is about people acting together to resolve their conflicts and to find a way to set wrongdoing right by repairing the harm incurred. It builds on the cooperation between different professions and institutions supporting the efforts of the stakeholders. Moreover, for the restorative justice movement to gain momentum and to become ingrained in society, an understanding and accepting attitude of the wider public, including the media, is needed. For this conference we had therefore invited participants to take a closer look at the practices and the structures of cooperation between the major actors in this field.

Involvement of policy makers and politicians and developing regular collaboration between them and service providers is one of the cornerstones of the implementation of restorative justice. This requires a common understanding of mutual expectations and of each others' responsibilities. Ways to model this cooperation and to establish sustainable structures of collaboration, taking into account the highly changeable politic scene, were discussed in various workshops.

Cooperation between researchers and practitioners, as well as the impact of research on policy makers, constitutes another relevant interface when striving for the promotion of restorative justice in Europe. In this respect, a promising avenue for cooperation consists in a dialogical approach that takes into account both the needs of practitioners and of researchers. In addition, the effective presentation of research results to policy makers and to the public via the media did receive attention.

Thirdly, **addressing the public** implies that we establish effective mechanisms to raise public awareness and to ensure active participation of citizens. But, not only individual citizens should come to perceive restorative justice as a viable response to conflict and wrongdoing. For restorative justice to gain legitimacy as a new approach to justice, it has to be able to secure constant dialogue with civil society and be prepared to integrate citizens' voice and perspectives. Possible ways to strengthen this aspect and avoid that restorative justice grows detached from the civil society should be explored better. A series of workshops reported on models and on practical experiences in this important field.

Conference format

We strived again for a highly interactive conference. Each half day started with a plenary session dedicated to one of the five main themes outlined in the programme. These themes were further explored in the course of workshops followed by café conferences. However, workshops on all the themes were organised throughout the conference, thus providing participants with an opportunity to attend more than one workshop on a given theme. Each workshop consisted of only one or two presentations to give ample time for discussion, not only between presenter and participants, but also between participants.

Workshops and café conferences are a central feature of our conferences. The purpose of the latter is to create an opportunity for open, intensive and 'horizontal' exchange on the topics of the conference. But experience so far has shown that it is not easy to have a programme design that provides for both open and informal discussion 'coffee-house-style' and 'substance' and structure. We had therefore made another attempt to invent a design for workshops that become café conferences.

We decided to have *each workshop followed by a café conference that involved the same participants* that were present in the workshop. The café conference was accordingly dedicated to the same theme as the workshop.

Thus, each single *presentation was immediately followed by a short period for asking questions of understanding* to the presenter(s) and then it shifted to the 'café conference setting'.

The 'café-conference setting' was a spatial arrangement that allowed for *informal discussion* and consisted of tables distributed across the room with three to six people around them.

In the 'café conference setting' the chair was responsible for the whole workshop/café conference session. He/she structured the café conferences by preparing beforehand some questions to be discussed: questions that could guide reflection on the presentations (for example: What is new/exciting/stimulating for me about the presentation; What would we contradict; What would we like to know more about; What is strange, or doubtful; What will we 'take home' as relevant for our own work).

EDITORIAL NOTES

For this web publication we rely mainly on the 'summaries' submitted by the presenters; sometimes these are whole length presentations, sometimes they are indeed only short summaries and/or in several cases we had to use the PowerPoint slides prepared for the conference together with the abstract contained in the conference brochure. In addition we do have workshop notes for the majority of workshops. Again some of them are very comprehensive and repeat to a large extent what is to be gathered from the summary. We have therefore used our discretion and included them in full length only in those cases where they really provide additional information on the content of the workshop presentations and/or on the discussions that have been held in the café conferences.