



RESTORATIVE CITIES

Everyone needs to recognize themselves as part of the community in which they live in, to participate in the decisions that concern them, and to feel listened to when they are in difficulty and, in everyday life, all human beings need to feel confident, to trust and to be respected. Despite these basic human needs, local communities increasingly experience divisions between groups, violence against the weakest ones, repressive measures against those ones who look different, marginalization, and exclusion. A cultural change is necessary, able to overcome prejudices and stereotypes, to strengthen relationships, to take care of those ones in distress, and to heal social divisions. There is a widespread need for greater trust, responsibility and solidarity between people. This requires the commitment of everyone, including policy makers, to support a sense of community and strengthen social cohesion.

What are the specific challenges that today's cities face?

- Diversity within our communities is seen as a threat instead of opportunity
- Individualism in modern societies disconnects people
- Technology has created different forms of communication
- Increased polarization provides a fertile environment for hate crime and violent extremism
- Actions and omissions of each member have consequences on an individual and collective level, yet people are interdependent and each person's actions and failure to act have consequences on others
- A lack of civic responsibility can do great damage to the natural environment
- Some areas of the cities are abandoned and create insecurity among residents
- The most vulnerable people are often left alone, isolated and excluded from resources and opportunities
- Victim assistance and other social support services are not widespread and/or poorly advertised
- People need each other to repair the harm and to resolve issues within their communities

What is restorative justice?

Restorative justice is an approach of addressing harm or the risk of harm through engaging all those affected in coming to a common understanding and agreement on how the harm or wrongdoing can be repaired and justice achieved.

Restorative justice is an approach aimed at undoing injustice and preventing harmful behavior. It focuses on values such as: respect for human dignity, responsibility, solidarity, justice between people, in the relationship with non-humans and the environment. The aim is to strengthen relationships to create safe, peace-oriented, inclusive living conditions. The broader aim is the well-being of people and communities.

In practice restorative justice adopts these models: circle of support and accountability, city conferences, circle of peace, family group conferences.

A restorative city should also have specific services and training for community members, such as: restorative counseling on the damage suffered and/or conflicts to manage, restorative listening services at law enforcement offices, training on restorative practices in schools and in local social and justice services.





Its basic principles are as follows: direct and authentic communication; restorative processes designed according to local culture and resources; involvement of different parts of the community; honoring the restorative agreements with personal responsibility and social support; strengthening of the sense of collective responsibility within the community.

Restorative justice cities

In any society conflict can arise, but it is important to learn to manage it with respect for human dignity, seeking together the best solutions. For this, restorative justice is a precious tool: to help people to seek agreements between them, instead of separating them, to identify together a way to undo the injustices that produce pain, and to teach people to count on each other. In recent years various experiences of local restorative communities have developed in Europe. A movement has been created called "Restorative City": citizens, schools, workplaces, cultural and sporting associations, law enforcement professionals and others are brought together, increasing a sense of self-worth and belonging and the quality of life. These restorative communities rely on the basic human value of *justice* in our democratic societies, referred as an individual experience of fairness, solidarity, social cohesion, and not as a moral value imposed by law and politics.

Think about

Encouraging responsibility and safety

Widespread awareness and support work are essential to encourage the responsibility of each and the community as a whole. It is necessary to make it clear that inclusion has benefits for all. Preparatory work with each part of the community is important: each of them must know that they can count on the presence of the facilitators so that the dialogue takes place in a balanced way between the various parties. Each participant must be supported to assume the responsibility to engage in an authentic dialogue.

Integrating restorative justice in the wider system

Since the fundamental value of restorative justice is respect for human dignity, in a restorative city every action must favor the affirmation of human rights, and avoid the various areas of possible discrimination (gender, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic conditions, etc.). A particular focus should be placed on the relationship with criminal justice: dialogue processes including prisoners, others in alternative measures to detention, staff members of penitentiary facilities, victims and victim support services, and provision of restorative justice services in courts and police headquarters for all parties affected by the crime. For this, specific awareness-raising and training courses for justice professionals should be planned and working groups should be activated to initiate a cultural change in the country's justice approaches.

Raising awareness about restorative justice

Restorative justice is still poorly understood, especially by non-expert citizens. To raise awareness and better inform about the potential of restorative justice for the community, it is necessary to have adequate information tools for different contexts (schools, voluntary associations, prisons, neighborhoods, etc.), to





different age groups, to different social and cultural groups, to different parties involved (victims, perpetrators, families, etc.). People get involved if they clearly understand the relevance of restorative justice. The advantages of learning to solve together the conflicts that can arise in social relations should always be highlighted through participatory discussions.

Training restorative practitioners

Practitioners must be able to facilitate the involvement and participation of all parts of the community: citizens, social services, law enforcement, local administrators, schools, prisons and so on. Network building is essential for a restorative city. Professionals should be trained in universities or centers with proven expertise in both restorative justice practice and training. It is essential that the training is theoretical (restorative justice foundations, values and principles, programs), practical (exercises in the classroom allowing participants to get involved) and experiential (observation and contact with restorative justice practices in community, guided and supervised by expert trainers in restorative justice and, specifically, in restorative communities).

Dealing with vulnerabilities

Children, minorities, other than humans are important groups to reach: a restorative community takes care of all its members, especially for the most neglected, ignored, marginalized, or mistreated. To reach them, a widespread presence in the community, in schools, in host communities, in neighborhoods, on the streets is necessary. Work in the community is a precious resource: gatherings, awareness, opportunities for meetings with citizens, as far as possible facilitated by local administrations and associations (humanitarian, religious, etc.) that share the value of inclusion.

Identifying risks and challenges

The main challenge when creating a restorative city is perhaps to accept that the transformation is not immediately visible. The processes of change in a social community take a long time and move within widespread networks. In order not to be discouraged and keep the involvement of groups and people active, it is necessary to disseminate the results that are obtained gradually. Communication at the community level is essential. To this finality, it seems useful to keep active contacts with the local press and with the various communication agencies, organize events to share the work in progress and to encourage the commitment of all to improve the well-being in the community's life. Some risks regard the belief that restorative justice replaces criminal justice and that restorative justice is a soft response to conflict and crime without considering the consequence of harmful behavior. Focusing on its values and principles is necessary to ensure that the complexity of the mission of a restorative city is taken into account and does not replace the social welfare system.





EUROPEAN FORUM FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Connecting People to Restore Just Relations

4

Resource kit

- The International Journal of Restorative Justice (issue 2, 2019): <https://www.elevenjournals.com/tijdschrift/IJRJ/2019/2>
- Working Group on Restorative Cities (2019-2020): <https://www.euforumrj.org/en/working-group-restorative-cities>
- Patrizi, P. (Ed.) (2019). *La giustizia riparativa. Psicologia e diritto per il benessere di persone e comunità*. Roma: Carocci.
- Pali, B. & Aertsen, I. (Eds.) (2018). *Restoring Justice and Security in Intercultural Europe*. New York: Routledge and Frontiers in Criminal Justice.
- FP7 project ALTERNATIVE - Developing alternative understandings of security and justice through restorative justice approaches in intercultural settings within democratic societies (2012-2016): <https://www.euforumrj.org/en/alternative-2012-2016>. KU Leuven, Belgium

Author: Patrizia Patrizi, European Forum for Restorative Justice, Professor in Sassari University – Italy

Reference: European Forum for Restorative Justice (2020). Thematic Brief on Restorative Justice Cities. Leuven, Belgium.

EUROPEAN FORUM FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE VZW

Hooverplein 10, 3000 Leuven, Belgium

www.euforumrj.org

info@euforumrj.org

Tel. +32 (0)16.373.598

Mob. +32 (0)466.20.91.12

0474 656 137 • RPR Leuven

Supported by the
Justice Programme
of the
European Commission

