



Editorial

Dear members, old and new friends,

One of the main critiques, or maybe questions or concerns, about restorative justice is without doubt its impact and effectiveness. When we find ourselves explaining the values, principles and methods of restorative justice to people that have never heard anything about it, we often get the answer: ‘Yeah, it sounds really good in theory, but *does it really work?*’

On one hand, it is part of the human nature to question everything that seems too good to be true (maybe experts and practitioners found once themselves also in such a situation and they were not immune to this!). On the other hand, it is even necessary that we keep questioning our work, in order to keep growing and improving.

This is why the members of the Editorial Committee decided to dedicate this newsletter issue precisely to the questions about the social impact and effectiveness of restorative justice:

- why and how to evaluate restorative justice?
- what kind of impacts and effects may it have on communities?
- how can we communicate it effectively to people?

These are just some of the aspects that emerged, and we realised that the best answer would be to provide some practical examples from researchers, from practitioners and from local communities.

The idea came as a follow-up to the conference organised last year by the EFRJ’s Research Committee about the social impact of restorative justice and about how we can measure, evaluate, research and narrate it. Since the topic could be understood in a particularly broad way, we thought that maintaining the thematic areas used during the conference was a good starting point, to be then broadened to add also the local perspective, so to hear from the direct voices of communities that are implementing restorative practices. Thus, this newsletter will present pieces from some of the experts who presented at the conference, and the introductory article by the organisers Brunilda Pali and Anna Matczak will help

us with an overview of the themes touched upon and the professionals involved. Then, Joanna Shapland will focus on why and how we need to evaluate restorative justice, while Cristina Vasilescu will also present three concrete methods of evaluation. After that, we will read about the experiences of the House of Peace Foundation and the Centre for Restorative Justice of the Autonomous Region Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, both working at a local level with a community-based approach. We will conclude the series with a contribution about all the ways we can imagine communicating and narrating about restorative justice, from Lindsey Pointer: she will take us through the power of stories as they are perhaps the most immediate and powerful ways of transmitting feelings and, consequently, understandings.

This newsletter hopes to contribute in different ways to the reflection of researchers and practitioners in the field of restorative justice.

1. It wants to be a reminder for practitioners of what is important to keep in mind when evaluating and, before that, planning to evaluate restorative justice.
2. It aims to provide concrete examples, to the ones who are particularly new to the concept and want to know more about all the different ways through which restorative justice can be implemented in communities.
3. We hope to give some inspiration to all the people — experts, practitioners, supporters — that may have new ideas to transmit, communicate and represent restorative justice.

We hope you will enjoy the reading, and as always, all your feedback, comments and questions are more

than welcome. We would like to take this chance also to wish you all the best: may the upcoming year bring you great happiness, new opportunities and intriguing challenges!

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Introduction to the series: the impact of restorative justice

The online conference held on 5 November 2021 'Measuring, researching, narrating: Discussing the (social) impact of restorative justice' was incredibly inspiring to us, which is why the Editorial Committee chose to focus the next series of articles on these

topics. We will cover the following four thematic areas with one or more articles:

- efficiency and evaluation of restorative justice programmes,
- from evaluation towards the social impact of restorative justice,
- the role of international and local organisations in fostering restorative justice with different approaches, and
- the various forms in which the impact of restorative justice can be narrated.

Hoping to have stimulated your curiosity, we have the pleasure of opening the series, after an introduction from Brunilda Pali and Anna Matczak, with an article by Joanna Shapland, Edward Bramley Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Sheffield (UK), who will discuss why it is important to evaluate restorative justice and which aspects should be taken into account when doing so. (Follow the link above for more details and the recordings of the presentations given during the event.)

Putting in context and giving an account of the international conference: 'Measuring, researching, narrating: discussing the (social) impact of restorative justice'

Why do we do what we do, what is the impact of our work and how do we assess our work? These are questions that are not peripheral but lie at the heart of what we do.

In this piece we will offer some context and give an account of the international conference [Measuring, researching, narrating: discussing the \(social\) impact of restorative justice](#) that was organised on 5 November 2021 by the Research Committee of the European Forum for Restorative Justice. The conference aimed to engage the restorative community in collective, critical and productive discussions around themes of the social impact and the evaluation of restorative justice. The topics of social impact and evaluation had been and continue to be central on the agenda of both the restorative movement and of the EFRJ for decades, as it should be in every movement and every reflexive organisation.

This article describes the framework in which the themes of the previous articles have been developed:

we have read a lot about the four areas of interest covered during the conference — and beyond! — through the contributions of some of those researchers and practitioners in the field of restorative justice who dedicated their work to evaluating restorative justice programmes, fostering restorative justice cultures, practices and policies and assessing the social impact of restorative justice practices and narrating its impact.

The application of restorative justice ... within and outside the criminal justice system raises important questions around its effectiveness and its impact for its main stakeholders.

The popularity and application of restorative justice has grown immensely in the last decades, both within the criminal justice system as a response to crime, and within our societies and institutions as a response to social harms, wrongs and conflicts. The application of restorative justice — often rendered as restorative justice services, restorative practices, restorative processes or restorative approaches — within and outside the criminal justice system raises important questions around its effectiveness and its impact for its main stakeholders. The increasing implementation and delivery of restorative justice also raises questions about the impact on the transformation of the criminal justice system as a whole, as well as its social impact on our societies, cities and institutions. Therefore, there is a growing need to discuss not only the meaning of social impact but also the repertoire of tools that will help the restorative justice community to identify, analyse and manage the consequences of ongoing and/or proposed restorative actions. By doing so, we hope to be able better to showcase the value of our work as well as identify challenges, sustain the legacy of our actions and build more meaningful relationships with decision makers.

As a Research Committee, we thought we were well-placed to organise an international event where we could focus conceptually on these questions, while at the same time support the EFRJ in its reflexive process about its own impact as an organisation. We conceived this day around four major sub-topics:

1. Efficiency and evaluation of restorative justice programmes;
2. The role of international organisations in popularising and fostering restorative justice cultures, practices, and policies;
3. From evaluation towards the social impact of restorative justice; and
4. Narrating the impact of restorative justice.

In what follows, we will explain the rationale for each of the sub-topics, the questions that were discussed and the people we decided to invite.

The first session focused on a more ‘classic’ topic within the restorative justice literature: evaluation. In this session,

1. we wanted to get an overview of the types of evaluation-oriented research designs and methods that are used for evaluating restorative programmes and that are preferred by different

actors, policy makers and practitioners (qualitative/quantitative/experimental/critical) and their benefits and pitfalls;

2. we were also interested in understanding better whether there is a relationship between the evaluation method and the types of crime or harms researched, such as, sexual violence or hate crime, and the understanding of restorative justice that is prevalent in certain research, for example, process vs outcome;
3. we wanted to understand how the indicators and criteria of evaluation, such as recidivism, satisfaction, cost-effectiveness, restoration and transformation, are decided, whether they differ when seen from a policy maker’s and from a restorative justice point of view;
4. finally, we wanted to see whether there are examples of co-production of evaluation processes and methods between researchers and practitioners.

We invited two speakers whom we thought had very interesting insights to give on this subject. First of all, we invited Prof. Joanna Shapland, who can be considered an authority on the topic of evaluation, given her multiple research projects and writing on the subject. Secondly, we invited Prof. Kelly Richards for her innovative and consistent evaluation approaches in the application of restorative justice in cases of sexual violence.

The second session delved into understanding the role of international organisations and institutions, such as the EU, UN or CoE, in fostering restorative justice cultures, practices and policies, and the ways in which we can assess that. We were also interested in understanding which types of cooperation the EFRJ can foster in order to support restorative aims, for example, with other European or international organisations such as the [Confederation of European Probation](#), [Victim Support Europe](#), [Penal Reform International](#), or with international restorative justice sister organisations such as the [National Association for Community and Restorative Justice](#), the [Asia Pacific Forum for Restorative Justice](#), etc.

Finally, we wanted to discuss the relationship and affinity of the restorative justice movement with other ‘social movements,’ such as the Environmental Justice Movement, [Black Lives Matter](#), the [#MeToo Movement](#), etc. We invited as speakers for this session, Dr Jamie Lee from the UN, for her key position and knowledge as a policy maker, and Prof. Gerry

Johnstone, who has written extensively on restorative justice as a social movement.

The third session moved beyond the ‘classic’ topic of evaluation towards social impact. We had several aims for this session.

1. We wanted to see which possible ways there are through which we can assess the social impact of restorative justice application in society and social institutions, for example, initiatives such as restorative cities, restorative schools and restorative workplaces.
2. We wanted to understand and develop better ways of differentiating between the scale of impact at the micro level on interpersonal relationships and neighbourhoods, at the meso level on institutions and at the macro level on societal transformations and ways of assessing the effect of the micro interventions on the meso or macro levels of transformation.
3. Finally, we were looking for a better understanding of possible ways of researching cooperation and partnerships and ways of quantifying or qualifying the impact of social interventions.

To achieve some of these aims, we invited Dr Cristina Vasilescu, with her valuable experience and knowledge on measuring the social impact of social interventions, and Prof. Jennifer Llewellyn, a leading voice and scholar in the restorative movement who has always pushed the boundaries of the impact of restorative justice from the scale of criminal justice to social institutions, and all the way to transitional contexts.

Our final and more creative session aimed at focusing on how we best narrate the impact of restorative

justice. More specifically, the session explored:

1. best examples of communicating research results to policy makers, to specific target groups, to society at large;
2. potential collaborations between researchers, artists, practitioners and, journalists, to increase the potential of narrating the social impact of restorative justice;
3. the role of the arts in increasing social impact;
4. ways to communicate restorative justice better to the public.

We invited for this session two leaders in the restorative justice movement who have been at the avant-garde in their role of communicating the power of restorative justice: Prof. Lindsey Pointer, who maintains a website on games and activities for understanding restorative practices, has organised an international competition on images of restorative justice, and written a children’s book on the topic, and Dr Lucy Jaffe, who leads a world-wide known organisation, *Why me?*, which has significantly contributed to increasing awareness and access to restorative justice, including their pioneering project on improving the access to restorative justice services in the United Kingdom for those who speak English as an additional language.

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Evaluating restorative justice — according to its aims

Evaluating restorative justice or restorative practice sounds like a very technical thing, perhaps one to be left to researchers or specialists, and far removed from the day-to-day business of responding to referrals, telling potential participants about restorative justice and delivering a service to those who have been harmed, or have harmed. But, though there are some key principles to bear in mind, actually evaluation — and its precursor, monitoring — are key elements for all those delivering services. They let the scheme, and those funding it or thinking about participating, know whether what they are intending to deliver is actually being delivered. I first consider why it’s important to evaluate, and then how to do so.

Why evaluate restorative justice?

There are some very practical reasons why restorative justice providers want to evaluate what their schemes are doing, and also some ethical reasons. The practical reasons include:

- Being able to report back to funders as to how their money has been used and to enable economic analyses, including cost benefit analysis;
- Being able to attract more funding;
- To build on training provision and facilitator confidence — essentially to build reflective practitioners;
- To document what the process is. The great unknown question about restorative justice and restorative practice is what kind of restorative justice is best for which individual cases. Unless it's known what has been delivered, it will be impossible to tie up the effects with what was delivered.

The *ethical* reasons for evaluating include:

- To be accountable to participants.
 - To be accountable more generally to those referring cases, to the general public and to any criminal justice process, including making sure that the process is helping and not causing harm.
- Those participating in restorative justice or restorative practice are generally vulnerable people, whether through being victimised, or through earlier adverse experiences, so evaluation is actually part of safeguarding.
- To see whether what is being delivered is justice, is restorative and meets the other values of restorative justice.

Evaluation has to be about whether the restorative justice/practice is true to its aims

... the essence of a process being restorative justice is where there is communication both ways between those who have been harmed ... and those who have harmed ...

Restorative justice has been said to be an 'umbrella concept' (Shapland et al., 2011). There's no one accepted definition, with different national and international instruments having subtly different views. In addition, restorative justice embodies a considerable number of different processes, even when restricted to dealing with criminal offences. They include direct mediation, indirect or shuttle mediation, conferencing, circles, panels and, more broadly, forms of truth and reconciliation commissions. If we include restorative practice, the kinds of processes adopted can be much wider, including where those who have been harmed meet with those who have harmed others. For me, the essence of a process being restorative justice is where there is communication both ways between those who have been harmed (often termed 'victims' or 'survivors') and those who have harmed ('offenders') about an offence or offences which link them.

It's not all vague though. *Restorative justice and restorative practice have some core values*, which run through all the different kinds of processes and which are key to the process being restorative. They are central in the international instruments, such as those from the Council of Europe and the European Union, and for good practice. The core values, in relation to restorative justice and restorative practice relating to crime, are:

- Participation by individuals must be voluntary (for those harmed and those who have harmed).
- Participation aims at being inclusive, with both the person harmed and the person who has harmed being actively involved, but often including as well those close to them (their supporters), and sometimes those from the community, as well as from criminal justice.
- Participation centres on facilitating communication between participants, with everyone having the opportunity to put their view and have a fair say, and no one being dominated.
- The process should be made as safe as possible, with any meetings being arranged in a safe space for all participants, and directed by a neutral, trained facilitator.

Making this process of communication inclusive may involve just a small number of participants for some offences — two or three, together with the facilitator (sometimes called the mediator). But it can involve large numbers of people, for example, in neighbourhood disputes, or with extended families. Moreover,

there are always lots of stakeholders involved: those from the scheme, the lay participants, those referring, those funding the activity. All of this can make evaluation complex, because all these stakeholders' views may need to be ascertained — and they do not always want the restorative justice/practice to feature exactly the same aims.

Restorative justice and restorative practice schemes have often been developed to follow particular theoretical views as to how restorative justice 'works.' These can emphasise shame and subsequent reintegration into the community (e.g. Braithwaite, 1989), or healing and restoration (e.g. Zehr, 1990), or procedural justice (e.g. Tyler, 1990). For each of these theoretical perspectives, the key aims of the scheme may differ.

The key principle of evaluation is that the scheme must be evaluated according to the aim(s) it espouses.

The key principle of evaluation is that the scheme must be evaluated according to the aim(s) it espouses. It would be quite unfair to evaluate a scheme in relation to an outcome it was never seeking to attain.

The aims of the scheme may (or may not) include the following:

- Meeting the person harmed's needs (as expressed by that person);
- Producing a procedurally just process;
- Providing financial compensation to the person/people harmed or other forms of material restoration;
- Reconciling the person harmed and the person who has caused the harm (particularly if they know each other);
- Preventing reoffending (as measured by conviction or rearrest, depending on jurisdiction);
- Reducing the use of imprisonment or other more coercive criminal justice outcomes;
- Reducing the likelihood of reoccurrence of the same kind of offence or problem, or calls to police as a result of that kind of problem.

Hence the first step in evaluation is for the scheme itself and the evaluator to agree on what the key aims

and desired outcomes of the scheme are. It is important to note that, as mentioned above, different stakeholders quite commonly have different outcomes in mind as to what constitutes 'success.' Government objectives, for example, often include reducing reoffending, but for the scheme and the participants, reconciling the participants or meeting the needs of the person harmed may be the most important. Ideally, the different stakeholders can be got to agree both on what the aims are, and what priority each should have. If not, those running the scheme and the facilitators will have a difficult time!

Monitoring

In terms of how to evaluate what a restorative justice scheme is doing, we need to distinguish between monitoring and evaluation.

Monitoring is what any scheme should be doing, itself, as routine. It means keeping proper records of cases, referrals, participants, contacts, what has happened at each contact, outcome agreements (where these occur), whether outcome agreements are fulfilled and brief feedback from participants. It's essentially the routine documentation of cases and what happens to them. It means setting up good electronic databases so that any queries (from, for example, participants or referrers) can be answered easily and quickly. There is now some software that is specifically for restorative justice cases, rather than being criminal justice case management, but its development is still really in its infancy.

Because restorative justice sets itself up as a means of doing justice, and as being inclusive, that means that it needs to be accountable to those who agree to participate ...

As discussed above, monitoring is a basic duty of all schemes offering restorative justice and is part of being accountable to all those using the schemes. Because restorative justice sets itself up as a means of doing justice, and as being inclusive, that means that it needs to be accountable to those who agree to participate — so that they can, for example, find out (if they have forgotten) what the details of an outcome agreement were. In the same way as prosecutors and judges need to record the outcomes of criminal cases, so restorative justice providers need to record what happened in restorative justice.

One key element is also what exactly happened when the case is closed, as far as the scheme is concerned.

- Have participants been told the case is closed or are they still waiting to hear something?
- Was it promised that they would be told whether an outcome agreement's tasks had been completed — and have they been told?
- Are they able to contact the scheme again if they need further support, or have they been given the contacts for other support providers?

Both in our original research in England and Wales in the early 2000s (Shapland et al., 2011), and in more recent research across Europe (Shapland et al., 2022), facilitators and schemes agreed that what was to happen after restorative justice was probably the weakest point of provision. Facilitators put very considerable effort into preparation and into any meeting or communication, but being clear about the end of the restorative justice process was vaguer. Yet that is also important. If, for example, those who have been harmed do not hear about whether outcome agreements have been completed, they may come to doubt the sincerity of the harmer and whether he or she really meant to promise to do what was agreed (Shapland et al., 2011).

Evaluation

Evaluation is whether the scheme or provider is achieving its aims.

Monitoring, then, is vital. Periodic evaluation is also important. Evaluation is whether the scheme or provider is achieving its aims. Doing evaluation often requires more research skills or experience than providers may possess in-house, so it is worth partnering with, or commissioning university researchers to help to do this. An independent evaluation also tends to carry more weight with funders and referrers than one done by the provider itself.

What should be looked at in the evaluation depends on what the scheme's aims are. It might include looking carefully at whether the scheme is meeting the needs of those who have harmed — and that is likely to involve interviewing past users of the scheme. Many schemes ask participants to fill in a brief 'satisfaction' questionnaire and that may include some free space to comment on their experience. Those

answers will provide some clues as to what it may be worth asking about more specifically. However, 'satisfaction' ratings by themselves usually do not give enough detail to see what is really appreciated, or where the scheme can do better (is it the process, the amount of information, the outcome, feedback opportunities?). Though participants' responses often highly correlate between different aspects they have experienced, participants are able to rate and be more specific as to their most appreciated, or least appreciated, aspects (Shapland et al., 2011).

Other aims may include how those who have harmed feel they have been affected and whether there has been any change in their lives. That will mean locating and interviewing past users who have harmed — sometimes a lengthy process, because it means gaining access to those in custody. Or an aim may be to reduce reoffending. The difficulty here is that one is trying to measure differences in reoffending (normally through re-convictions) between those with similar criminal careers who have experienced restorative justice and those who have not. In other words, it is important to have a good control group and measure the re-convictions of both groups. The best way to do that is to set up a randomised controlled trial, because we know that those who agree to participate in restorative justice are different from those who refuse (so simply comparing the two does not give reliable answers). However, running a randomised controlled trial is a specialist activity requiring considerable research skills. Any of these types of evaluation are likely to be quite costly and to require funding for the evaluation itself.

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The key elements of choosing the right research method for evaluation is that they need to relate to the key aims of the scheme. It is also important to be able to relate the findings re outcomes to the restorative justice process itself. So it is worth documenting clearly what the restorative justice process of the particular scheme is. And that will help with the monitoring as well. Overall, good implementation of restorative justice — keen facilitators, support from the top, enough referrals and funding — are more important than perfect evaluation research methods. *But monitoring and evaluation are not optional.*

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How to evaluate social impacts of restorative justice: lessons learnt from the field

The following reflection draws on the author's experience in policy evaluation and in particular in the evaluation of restorative justice interventions at community level, for example, the [ConTatto](#), the [App@Con](#) and the [Un Futuro in Comune](#) projects. The current reflection does not aim to deepen the evaluation design proposed for these evaluations, but rather to focus on lessons learnt from these experiences to provide learning on key aspects to be considered in assessing the social impacts of restorative justice.

Before getting into details on lessons learnt, it is useful to clarify the main concepts under analysis:

- social impact and
- social impact evaluation.

To what do social impact and social impact evaluation refer?

Various definitions of impact exist in the literature. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019, p. 10) defines impact as the:

Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

The European Commission speaks about outcomes and defines them as the

the specific dimension of well-being and progress for people that motivates policy action, i.e. what is intended to be changed, with the contribution of the interventions designed (2015, p. 7).

When it comes to social impacts, the International Association for Impact Assessment (Vanclay et al., 2015) defines them as deployed or potential changes in one of the following areas:

- people's way of life
- their culture
- their community
- their political systems
- their environment
- their health and wellbeing
- their personal and property rights
- their fears and aspirations (Vanclay et al., 2015, p. 2).

Many of these areas are particularly relevant for restorative justice interventions. A wide literature (Aos et al., 2006b; Augustine et al., 2018; Bolivar, 2012; Brown, 2017; Cellini, 2009; Chapman and Campbell, 2016; Davis, 2018; Rietman, 2017; Fronius et al., 2019; Gal, 2016; Wachtel, 2012; International Institute for Restorative Practice, 2014; McIvor, 1991a;

Petersilia and Turner, 1993; Rosenblatt, 2015; Sherman and Strang, 2007, etc.) acknowledges the effects of restorative justice on the various social impact dimensions covered above, namely people’s lifestyles, people’s health and well-being, people’s fears and aspirations, people’s culture, community, people’s rights and the environment. Therefore, the social impacts of restorative justice interventions refer to the expected/unexpected, positive/negative impacts in one of the above-mentioned areas.

A heterogenous picture is also registered when it comes to the definition of impact evaluations, and in particular of social impact evaluations.

Gertler et al. (2016) define impact evaluation as assessing changes in the well-being of individuals, households, communities or firms that can be attributed to a particular project, programme or policy, whereas the European Commission (2015, p. 6) as evaluations that answer the following questions:

- did the public intervention have an effect at all and if yes, how big – positive or negative – was this effect ... ?
- why did an intervention produce intended (and unintended) effects?

These two definitions underline two different visions of impact evaluations that have been widely debated in the evaluation literature (Stame, 2004; Stern et al., 2012). The World Bank’s definition (Gertler et al., 2016) concentrates on measuring impacts, whilst attributing the difference in the obtained impacts to the input, that is, the policy/programme/project. The European Commission’s definition challenges this vision, acknowledging the complexity of relating social impacts to a sole input and moves beyond it, focusing on opening the black box of interventions, namely questioning why a specific impact has been obtained. The next section will further explore this debate.

When it comes specifically to the evaluation of social impacts, it is worth noting that this does not represent a unique technique ...

When it comes specifically to the evaluation of social impacts, it is worth noting that this does not represent a unique technique as many versions co-exist depending the objective of the evaluation or on the unit of analysis considered (Melloni, 2017). In a prospective perspective, it aims to anticipate and

mitigate the negative social impacts of a specific intervention and to strengthen the positive one, providing, thus, information for the selection of interventions. It has also been used in an *ex-post facto* perspective to verify the achievement of social impacts foreseen and to enhance the accountability of the interventions implemented. Furthermore, it has also been used for the continuous management of changes produced by the implemented interventions in order continuously to mitigate potential damage and strengthen potential benefits. As to the unit of analysis, social impact evaluations have been used to

- deliver complex interventions (policies, reforms, programmes),
- assess development cooperation projects and, more recently, social innovation interventions and social investments.

In all perspectives, it has been generally used prospectively, such as for instance in the case of the Social Impact Assessment implemented in the United States, the Impact Assessment implemented at the European Commission level or the Poverty Social Impact Assessment implemented by the World Bank (Melloni, 2017). However, some approaches have been used both in a prospective and *ex-post facto* perspective. This is, for instance, the case of the Social Return on Investment. Social Return on Investment, drawing on the return on investment and cost-benefit analysis, refers to the measurement and monetisation of the social and environmental value creation.

The social impact evaluation of restorative justice interventions refers, thus, to the *ex-post facto* assessment of social impacts achieved by the interventions under scrutiny irrespective of the approach adopted to do it, whether attributive, contributive or monetisation.

Which lessons have been learnt on the ground?

The first lesson relates to the ‘*why to evaluate*’ question.

... an unbalanced use of the social impact evaluation poses several risks.

Evaluation has two main functions: on the one hand accountability towards the funder of an intervention, the stakeholders and beneficiaries of the intervention and on the other hand policy learning to

inform the intervention (re)design and implementation and the wider policies related to it. While the accountability function is a relevant part of evaluation, it is the policy learning that is at the centre of the evaluative research. However, often these two functions are unbalanced on the ground, following funders' focus especially on the control of what has been achieved with the investment realised, often combined with a limited evaluative culture and practice of the implementers. If in the past, this has been translated into a focus on the control of the achievement of outputs foreseen by an intervention, more recently there has been a shift from outputs to outcomes/impacts, especially in the context of an increase in the mainstream of the 'pay by result' logic into social interventions (as the restorative ones are). However, an unbalanced use of the social impact evaluation poses several risks.

- A first risk regards the limited capacity of the evaluation to influence the decision-making process and to unveil elements for improving not only the assessed intervention, but also the general policies in the fields touched upon an intervention, for example, criminal justice policy, education, housing, healthcare policies, etc. in the case of restorative justice interventions. A limited learning capacity also risks limiting the effective replicability of an intervention in other contexts.
- Another risk consists in the generation of a 'crowding out' effect, meaning that implementers may give priority to less vulnerable beneficiaries who guarantee a higher probability of achieving the expected social impacts (Melloni, 2017). This risk is particularly relevant in interventions that foresee a 'pay by result' approach.
- The third risk regards the hindering of the innovation and experimentation capacity of interventions designed, as the higher the innovation level the higher risk of failure. This may push some implementers to choose already tested interventions.

This unbalanced function of evaluation can be reduced through the creation of a culture of social impact evaluation as a learning activity aimed to continuous improvement of interventions at both funders' and implementers' levels.

While the creation of an evaluative culture can take a long time, it is the evaluator's responsibility to clarify the purpose of the evaluation . . .

While the creation of an evaluative culture can take a long time, it is the evaluator's responsibility to clarify the purpose of the evaluation, taking into consideration the perspective of all relevant actors (funders, intervention managing organisations and partners, beneficiaries), even if divergent, and to stimulate the learning interest of the beneficiaries of the evaluation activity. When the social impact evaluation refers to a complex intervention, whether a reform, a policy or a programme, an initial phase of awareness raising and training on social impact evaluation and its benefits in terms of policy learning may prove useful to create a shared understanding of the evaluative logic and language among the implementers.

A second lesson relates to the 'how to evaluate' question.

A wide range of approaches to the assessment of impacts of an intervention, including the social ones, are described in the evaluation literature (Stern et al., 2012), such as

- experimental (randomised control trials, quasi experiments, natural experiments),
- statistical (longitudinal studies, econometrics, statistical modelling),
- social value monetisation (social return on investment),
- theory-based (theory of change, process tracing, contribution analysis, realist evaluation, congruence analysis),
- case-based (naturalistic, grounded theory, ethnography, QCA, within-case analysis),
- participatory (empowerment evaluation, collaborative action research).

This section will focus on the discussion of three of these approaches that, to the knowledge of the author, are more often used to assess the social impacts of restorative justice interventions:

- attributive (in particular randomised control trials),
- theory-based and
- social value monetisation.

For a long time, social impact evaluation methods have been almost entirely focused on assessing if what is expected to happen has actually happened ...

For a long time, social impact evaluation methods have been almost entirely focused on assessing if what is expected to happen has actually happened and on attributing that effect to the respective intervention (i.e. net impact). However, this approach has been challenged by several authors (Chen and Rossi, 1989; Weiss, 1995; Pawson and Tilley, 1997, etc.), as it does not open the black box of policies/programmes, namely what happens between the input and the outcome of a policy/programme/project (Stame, 2004). Promoters of theory-driven evaluation stress that without opening the black box evaluations, are ‘at best social accounting studies that enumerate clients, describe programmes and sometimes count outcomes’ (Chen and Rossi, 1989, p. 299). Other authors have also challenged the actual possibility of distinguishing the net impact in a complex context.

It is precisely this influence of the context and of the actors on the outcomes of a programme that is emphasised in theory-based evaluations, such as the theory of change (Weiss, 1995), and in particular in realist evaluations. In fact, realist evaluation (see Pawson and Tilley, 1997) considers that it is not programmes that bring about changes in an undesired condition tackled by an intervention but rather people from a particular context who, when involved in a specific intervention, activate a mechanism, such as naming and shaming, self-efficacy or prestige, that generates change. Mechanisms explain what it is about a system that makes things happen. Thus, in the realist perspective, evaluation has to be based on a context-mechanism-outcome configuration. It is the evaluator’s duty to extrapolate mechanisms that generate causation in an intervention and to unveil for whom they generate change.

Monetisation of social value (SROI — Social Return on Investment) is an approach consolidated in several countries, for example, the US and UK, and more recently in others such as Italy. It consists in a synthetic measure of the monetary value of social investments. While its rapid communication to external stakeholders has increased interest in the social impact evaluation of social organisations, the evaluation literature points out several limitations. An initial and relevant limitation relates to the greater focus on the social accountability function of evaluation than on its policy learning role. Another limitation

relates to the risk of focusing the implementers’ attention on social effects that are easily monetised and to exclude other impacts that might be more relevant, but also more difficult to monetise (Cordes, 2017), which in the end might create an imbalance in the offer of social programmes (Yates and Marra, 2017). The excessive reductionism of complex reality is another critique raised in the literature (Melloni, 2021). Furthermore, some authors question the utility and relevance of monetising intangible outcomes, such as, for instance, the sense of community (Gibbon and Dey, 2011). Other authors (King, 2014) stress that the selection of measurement criteria and especially of proxies for the calculation of the SROI is highly subjective and sometimes opaque.

... far fewer evaluations have gone beyond the effects of restorative justice to understand why, how and for whom they work.

The restorative justice field is not new to the debate on how to evaluate. While numerous evaluations, using attributive, such as randomised control trials, and monetisation (SROI) methods have been carried out, showing what works in restorative justice, far fewer evaluations have gone beyond the effects of restorative justice to understand why, how and for whom they work (Bolitho, 2017; O’Mahony and Doak, 2017; Saulnier and Sivasubramaniam, 2015). Suzuki and Yuan (2021) point out that this is hardly a new problem in restorative justice impact evaluation, being indicated more than a decade ago. Nevertheless, impact evaluation of restorative justice has continued to limit its focus to the ‘what works’ question, probably in the attempt to legitimate its validity. In this context, scholars draw attention on the need for evaluation, including also social impact evaluation, in this field to incorporate the ‘why, how and for whom’ questions to inform improvements in restorative interventions (Suzuki and Yuan, 2021; Walgrave, 2011; Bazemore and Green, 2007). In a context of embedding of restorative justice into wider policy frameworks, for example, restorative cities and education policies, a multi-sectoral, multidimensional and multi-stakeholder perspective on changes achieved and on how, why and for whom policy interventions work together to produce these changes is needed. Theory-based impact evaluations can best answer this need. However, this does not mean that theory-based evaluation has to operate in isolation from the attributive or monetisation evaluation approaches. Such approaches can be combined better to respond

to stakeholders' needs bearing in mind that, whatever the evaluation approach selected, it has to answer the intervention stakeholders' learning needs in order to avoid turning the evaluation into a 'tick the box' activity.

A last lesson relates to 'what do we need in order to evaluate impacts' question.

Three main ingredients are essential for an effective evaluation of the social impacts of restorative interventions:

- *Time.* Restorative justice needs time to produce impacts. For instance, Blood and Thorsborne (2005) estimate that it takes 3–5 years for restorative justice interventions in schools to produce impacts on school values and management culture. Often the time needs of social impact evaluation barely coincide with the need for information from both implementers and funders. This is why impact evaluations should ideally be accompanied by ongoing evaluation during the intervention lifetime.
- *Competences and independency.* Evaluators of restorative justice interventions should possess both evaluation and restorative justice competences. Ideally a mixed group made of restorative practitioners and evaluators should be set up. This would also contribute to increasing the reputation of the evaluator and the legitimacy of the evaluation findings. Furthermore, the evaluator should be independent, that is, not involved in the delivery of the programme activity.
- *Adequate financial resources.* Often evaluation is the Cinderella of an intervention budget. However, the evaluation of complex interventions, such as restorative ones, takes time and requires adequate skills, which need to be acknowledged in terms of budget.
- *Willingness to evaluate.* This is particularly relevant for avoiding turning social impact evaluation into a 'tick the box' activity without any kind of policy learning and influence on the intervention design and delivery.
- *Mainstreaming restorative values in the evaluation design.* This implies in particular paying attention to

- including and respecting all voices and perspectives on the intervention even when divergent,
- voluntary participation in all evaluation activities,
- being open and transparent,
- fairness and
- deciding together with stakeholders the rules of engagement, that is, the evaluation dimensions, questions and methods.

Conclusions

Social impacts evaluation of restorative justice has an enormous potential for boosting both the legitimacy of restorative justice at society level, through unveiling its effects in all domains of social impacts considered in the literature, such as people's lifestyles, fears and aspirations, culture, health and well-being and rights, community cohesion, democracy and participation and environment, and its effectiveness. However, this double potential depends on several conditions:

- interest in evaluation as a policy learning exercise and willingness to question the perceived effectiveness of the intervention adopting an evidence-based view to it;
- adopting an evaluation approach that does not limit itself to the 'what works question', but that analyses also why and how it works and for whom;
- ensuring adequate resources (time, knowledge, funds); and
- mainstreaming the restorative values and principles in the evaluation design and delivery.

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‘Let’s meet. Everything starts with a conversation:’ the role of local organisations in popularising and fostering restorative justice cultures, practices and policies.

The [House of Peace Foundation](#) was created by people who like talking. All our activities are bound together by the motto: ‘Let’s meet. Everything starts with a conversation.’ We work in

omnipresent processes of change, including those born out of conflict, as change is the only value of conflict, provided that it is created by all the involved parties.

For these reasons, we initiate or collaborate in a whole range of diverse activities with a common goal of transforming conflict and building consensus. The following examples are just a fraction of our activities, referring to many areas of social life. We feel that presenting such a broad spectrum will make it possible to see the universality and power behind our work.

... conflict is a path to change. It can bring creativity and growth, or disorganisation and ruin.

As just mentioned, conflict is a path to change. It can bring creativity and growth, or disorganisation and ruin. Prolonged, unresolved conflict tends to escalate, and its effects can be devastating and very costly for all the parties involved. On the other hand, conflicts and disputes are natural elements of social life. With several different parties, conflicting interests and tensions arise. Mediation can be a constructive support in such situations. Such a method of resolving conflicts involves a third person, who helps the parties communicate with each other and facilitates reaching an agreement. The mediator does not judge or pass judgment: they support the parties in the dispute to communicate, without interfering with the outcome. Such processes are at the heart of our Emergency Mediation Project. Within its framework, we offer free assistance in resolving disputes available to all Wrocław residents. The service is financed from the city budget and may assist anyone in need of efficient and quick support in a conflict situation. The project also includes counselling, workshops and training, as well as an annual conference. In particular, 2022 was devoted to the social understanding of multicultural conflict, as it is commonly confused with conflict over access to goods and services.

Seeing mediation methods as an effective means of influencing not only adults but children and young people as well, we work extensively in the field of education, cooperating with many schools and peer communities. Among other projects, we have been running the [Peer Mediation Programme](#) for ten years. While teaching non-violent communication, we emphasise integrative activities, building and maintaining relationships, as well as developing the social and emotional competences of children, adolescents and adults. Such a comprehensive and long-term programme helps to prevent school violence. We show

that conflict will also arise even with strong relationships, communication competence and the ability to manage emotions, as they are a natural mechanism. However, well prepared individuals/groups affected by the conflict will know how to seek win-win solutions. If such skills are lacking, conflict will escalate and most probably turn into violence.

The complexity of such processes requires multiple partners, a real platform for communication and, above all, tremendous mutual trust.

Peer mediation methods are also about experiencing citizenship and participation. This is important given that the past decade has seen the development of social participation, grassroots movement activity combined with inclusive local government policies. The ideas of civil society, sustainable development, intersectoral cooperation, care for public space and corporate social responsibility all constitute a three-dimensional, comprehensive perception of the local community. This approach characterises our activities undertaken as part of neighbourhood projects. All of them deal with revitalisation and social activation, viewing it through building local networks, with active participation of responsible business and intersectoral relations. The value of the latter, its importance and role, is particularly well demonstrated in contexts of major social conflicts, in areas involving sensitive, difficult and perennial issues. The complexity of such processes requires multiple partners, a real platform for communication and, above all, tremendous mutual trust.

This approach is exemplified in our cooperation between the Wrocław municipality and the Roma communities. Since the second decade of the twenty-first century, Roma communities have independently established a settlement in the city area, commonly known as the encampment and functioning in the perception of Wrocław residents under such a name. It was inhabited by more than 200 people, who lived in makeshift barracks built from recycled materials, largely found in landfills. The settlement was deprived of access to the basic facilities (running water, sanitation) and, while being socially and systemically invisible, it turned into a kind of ghetto with difficulties typical to such places. The municipality wanted to solve the situation in a responsible and conflict-free manner, for a number of reasons, includ-

ing illegal occupation of the area and people living in impoverished conditions. It was almost impossible for a single institution or organisation to create such a solution, so a project was created involving all the stakeholders, with the House of Peace as its leader. The result was developing a system that enabled the community consensually to change its place of residence, and thus close down the encampment (which took place in April 2018). Working with the community required balancing between building mutual relations and trust while gradually pursuing the immediate goal of the project, which was to get rid of the encampment and integrate the families into the local community. It was done with full respect for the will of the families. Participation in the project was voluntary, preceded by many informational and explanatory meetings about the scope of support and its principles.

Within its framework, the Foundation still coordinates cooperation between institutions, NGOs and schools and manages training apartments, which are a transitional element on the way to independence (obtaining social housing). At the intersectoral level, coordination is led by a team composed of the Department of Social Affairs Director and representatives, the Director of the Municipal Social Assistance Center and the Director of the Wrocław Integration Center, as well as representatives of the House of Peace Foundation (management team). Working groups were also formed within the team, in order to create solutions for specific challenges that emerged during the program implementation.

Another innovative activity based on cooperation between different sectors and communities is the initiation and coordination of the 'Trees in the City' coalition. The group was born out of a conflict over the planting of trees in urban space and their impact on the underground utility grid. The work involved municipal entities responsible for greenery and urban design of the city, activists, business representatives and network managers. The result of the group's work was the creation of a model combining the needs and interests of many stakeholders. In retrospect, the model developed has become a model for good practice in many local governments. In Wrocław, it was further proof that conflict can be a creative and rewarding way of change for all the involved parties. [Infrastruktura w zgodzie z drzewami](#) about the model is available in Polish.

The Wrocław Citizens Panel is another activity undertaken in Wrocław which reflects the nature of deliberative democracy, defined as a democratic equilibrium built from the bottom up, taking into

account citizens' opinions (Braithwaite, 2015; Zalewski, 2016). The activity was co-implemented with the Foundation for European Studies. Randomly selected citizens had the opportunity to participate in developing answers to two main panel questions:

- Which means of public transportation should connect the city centre with the outskirts — bus or tram?
- In order to improve the quality of life and for the sake of the environment, should we introduce special traffic zones in the city with, for example, entry restrictions for vehicles with certain types of engines, entry fees, pedestrian traffic zones or an increased number of paid parking zones?

The added value of the panel was to see the growing sense of agency and involvement of those who took part.

The added value of the panel was to see the growing sense of agency and involvement of those who took part. The random selection of 75 citizens from different parts of the city made it possible to invite to this form of participatory activities those residents who, for various reasons, have so far remained passive in terms of getting involved in the city affairs.

Another example of a restorative initiative is the Lower Silesian Dialogue Center (DOD), established by the Foundation in 2020 to enable establishing and maintaining relations between socially active entities in the region, particularly in Jelenia Góra, Opole and Zgorzelec. DOD allows for meeting and supporting each other based on joint activities, leading to the solution of social problems that are important for a given area. Each community has its own features, history and issues. Long-standing, inflamed conflicts often prevent different entities from working together. In our experience, it is possible to remedy local conflicts, even those volatile ones where people have already formed warring groups and differences in perspectives and/or interests seem irreconcilable. More often than not, a simple conversation about issues important to local communities helps the opposing parties to realise that they are fighting over the same thing. This, in turn, can spark future cooperation.

... we base both meeting formulas on dialogue methods, seeing dialogue as a conversation that requires special conditions — safety, trust and respect for diverse views.

When describing our activities, we need to mention the initiative that was born within the ‘Wrocław Talks’ project, namely a group with the pertinent and telling name of ‘The Midwives of Dialogue.’ It was a response to the need to support the process of building dialogue between many parties involved in the management of the city/local community at different levels. This turned out to be one of the most challenging and rewarding areas of our work as we deal with the transformation of conflicts existing in Wrocław social space, involving many parties and emotions and affecting various spheres of life. Since 2019, at the invitation of Adam Bodnar, Polish Commissioner for Human Rights at that time, the ‘Midwives’ have been organising dialogue meetings for polarised groups representing extremely different world views. The pretext for the first meeting was the potential of individuals and groups who participated in the research that produced the Report ‘Significance and reactions to the Polish Independence Day March in Wrocław, 11 November 2018.’ The meeting was a truly unusual event. For most of the participants, such discussion was a new experience of mutual relationship, as they usually stood on opposing barricades, looking at each other through anger or even hatred. During the meetings held periodically, participants discovered their common issues and realised that existing differences can and should be discussed. The need for such discussion is underlined by the fact that we have expanded the formula to include ‘dialogue breakfasts’ enabling more frequent meetings in smaller but still very diverse groups. It is worth emphasising that we base both meeting formulas on dialogue methods, seeing dialogue as a conversation that requires special conditions — safety, trust and respect for diverse views. The starting point is listening, but also humility and openness. Dialogue is not aimed at a specific operational goal, always focusing on a deeper understanding. In our work, we strive to create space for such a safe and transformative conversation.

In addition to restorative measures aimed at human relations in the broadest sense, we recognise the need to discuss the meaning and role of space arrangement and design. Mistakes in this area can often be a source of conflict. Thus, we are launch-

ing activities on architecture/space and its impact on relations. Currently, we relate them to the context of the school environment, where we emphasise the important role of meeting the need for security, including that in space. Such conditions make it easier to focus on relations and work with the various difficulties related to them. This is to draw attention to the school, where a sense of security and support is important not only for free and peaceful learning, but also for supporting relations. The Foundation addresses issues such as a sense of responsibility for the space:

- What makes us feel safe in the space?
- How to make it ‘ours’ and how to do it already at the level of conversation/design — as design is a conversation?
- How to design to foster dialogue?
- What can we do to act systemically?

It is important for us to believe that we can rely on cooperation with partners, especially the municipality and other NGOs.

We share our experience gained through restorative actions as members of the Council for Restorative Justice and the Council for Equal Treatment. However, it is worth and important to emphasise that these actions have power through intersectoral cooperation, mutual trust and a sense of agency. It is important for us to believe that we can rely on cooperation with partners, especially the municipality and other NGOs. When done alone, many of the above initiatives would not have succeeded.

Dorota Whitten

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Giustizia riparativa come strumento di benessere per la comunità

Giustizia riparativa nelle comunità è il titolo del progetto che il [Centro di Giustizia riparativa della Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol](#) ha proposto dal 2020 al 2022. Finanziato da Cassa delle Ammende, ha coinvolto per la sua realizzazione alcuni Enti Territoriali nella Regione Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, tra i quali la Comunità comprensoriale del Burgraviato e nello specifico il Distretto sociale di Merano.¹

Il primo obiettivo è stato quello di costruire un tavolo di regia composto da Enti, Servizi e Associazioni per rilevare sul territorio potenziali o esistenti conflitti e di programmare e realizzare azioni concrete. Nonostante la pandemia da Sars-Covid 19, all'attivazione della rete, la comunità locale meranese ha risposto da subito con grande interesse, portando poi alla realizzazione di una serie di azioni che presentiamo qui di seguito.

Sportello per la mediazione dei conflitti

La prima azione è stata quella di mettere a disposizione della popolazione uno «sportello di mediazione sociale» accessibile a cittadini/e che hanno portato i loro conflitti con i vicini di casa, e ai comitati di quartiere che hanno chiesto di affrontare alcuni conflitti legati ai parchi cittadini. In questi casi lo strumento scelto per affrontare il conflitto, e provare a trasformarlo, è stato quello dei «peace circle».

Community circle

Si è proposto a tutti/e coloro che erano interessati alla questione di portare il proprio punto di vista. A chiunque ha mostrato interesse è stato offerto un colloquio individuale «preliminare» e la possibilità di partecipare al circle con gli altri interessati dal conflitto.

I principi della giustizia riparativa — consensualità, confidenzialità, ascolto non giudicante — hanno permesso alle persone di incontrarsi in un clima che ha facilitato la comprensione e la proposta di soluzioni il più possibile condivise.

Verso una scuola riparativa

Uno specifico gruppo di lavoro ha riflettuto sulla conflittualità nella fascia giovanile, che ha talvolta come conseguenza l'abbandono scolastico, e una specifica scuola, la Scuola professionale provinciale alberghiera «C. Ritz», ha accettato la sfida di provare a diventare una «scuola riparativa».

Per cominciare a sensibilizzare gli insegnanti il 25 ottobre 2021 è stato realizzato l'evento «Verso una Scuola riparativa».

Eventi pubblici di sensibilizzazione

Il 15 novembre 2021, come evento conclusivo del progetto, si è svolta a Merano una mattinata di convegno aperto dedicata al tema giustizia riparativa come strumento di benessere della comunità, che ha visto un'ampia partecipazione. Il Convegno ha permesso non solo di iniziare una riflessione sull'approccio teorico e metodologico e sugli strumenti di giustizia riparativa e di condividerne i capisaldi, ma anche di rendere possibile un confronto rispetto alle esperienze vissute, agli esiti e alle prospettive delle azioni intraprese.

Dal progetto pilota alla città riparativa

Il progetto pilota si è concluso a gennaio 2022, ma, dato l'interesse e visto il riconoscimento della giustizia riparativa come strumento importante per l'approccio alla conflittualità, la collaborazione tra il Distretto sociale di Merano, il Comune di Merano e il Centro di Giustizia riparativa della Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol ha proseguito e prosegue tuttora.

Ad oggi è attivo lo Sportello di mediazione sociale, si è approfondita e accompagnata la riflessione sul parco giochi iniziata, e se ne è aperta un'altra su un secondo parco giochi cittadino. Si è iniziato a dare corpo alla richiesta della Scuola professionale alberghiera «C. Ritz» di diventare «scuola riparativa» formando un gruppo di insegnanti e di studenti/esse per aprire uno sportello per la mediazione dei conflitti scolastici. E si è infine deciso di riaprire un tavolo di riflessione con i referenti meranesi dell'Istituto per l'Edilizia Sociale al fine di affrontare la tematica della conflittualità negli alloggi sociali e nei quartieri maggiormente a rischio di sviluppare tensioni e conflitti.

La voce dei protagonisti

Abbiamo chiesto ai due referenti presso il distretto sociale di Merano di darci il loro punto di vista sul progetto.

Quale è stata la ricaduta sociale sulla città?

... la gestione del conflitto mediato dall'approccio di giustizia riparativa ha stimolato ambienti sociali e rigenerato flussi di comunicazione e di relazione.

Nell'esperienza meranese, la gestione del conflitto mediato dall'approccio di giustizia riparativa ha stimolato ambienti sociali e *rigenerato flussi di comunicazione e di relazione*. L'obiettivo della risoluzione del conflitto o del problema non sempre si è potuto raggiungere, ma il percorso di avvicinamento, di rispetto e di inclusione è comunque avvenuto.

L'applicazione concreta del circle come strumento di mediazione tra cittadini/e con posizioni diverse ha permesso l'apertura al dialogo, al riconoscimento e al superamento di pregiudizi, all'ascolto autentico, alla comprensione di altri punti di vista e alla consapevolezza delle responsabilità individuali nel percorso di analisi e di risoluzione del conflitto.

L'approccio di giustizia riparativa, le azioni intraprese e gli interventi di mediazione hanno stimolato, nelle diverse comunità locali interessate, un approccio relazionale tra cittadini/e rivolto più all'inclusione che all'esclusione, alla considerazione e all'accettazione dell'essere e del pensare dell'altro, che ha permesso di valorizzare i luoghi e i loro abitanti e di riattivare un senso di condivisione, di solidarietà e di empatia.

Avete preso parte da persone attive e interessate ai tre community circles del progetto. Come descrivereste la vostra esperienza?

Lo strumento della giustizia riparativa è stato proposto in diversi momenti nella città di Merano, in varie occasioni, attraverso dei circles con la popolazione. La preparazione all'incontro da parte delle mediatrici di tutti i partecipanti ha prodotto un clima di fiducia e di autentico ascolto.

Siamo rimasti sorpresi di come si sia provato a trovare soluzione ad una problematica sociale.

Essere partecipe a questi momenti è stato interessante perché ci ha permesso di porre l'attenzione in uno spazio condiviso su un tema portato e di sentirsi, anche personalmente, fuori dal ruolo istituzionale, parte della comunità. Siamo rimasti sorpresi di come si sia provato a trovare soluzione ad una problematica sociale. Ci sembra che quello che è accaduto sia che la gestione del problema, in modo condiviso

e ragionato, ha favorito la creatività rispetto a soluzioni, magari precedentemente non immaginate. *Essere capiti, accolti, ascoltati rivela una disponibilità inaspettata e sviluppa un senso di comunità rinnovato.*

Dal progetto è nata l'idea di provare a rendere Merano una «città riparativa». Che cosa rappresenta per voi questa visione e concretamente come la immaginate?

Negli ultimi anni, la città di Merano da una parte ha sofferto di solitudine e dall'altra ha tentato di rivitalizzare il dialogo tra cittadini/e, creando occasioni di confronto, perlopiù con i rappresentanti politici. La dinamica creata generava spesso frustrazione da entrambe le parti.

Agli enti locali, alle scuole, ai servizi pubblici giungevano spesso richieste personali o individuali con la preghiera di trovare soluzioni *ad hoc*. Ma le soluzioni difficilmente posso essere trovate in questa maniera, poiché potrebbero creare malcontento altrove.

E quindi perché non uscire da questa dinamica e creare spazi condivisi, in cui tutti gli attori partecipanti, in base alla loro possibilità, ricercano e propongono risoluzioni condivise?

I servizi sociali del distretto di Merano hanno colto la necessità del cambiamento e grazie alle proposte del Cento di Giustizia Riparativa, alla mediazione sociale e alla capacità di negoziazione, sono stati più capaci di aprirsi al territorio, favorendo lo sviluppo dei circles cittadini.

Questa è la «Merano — città riparativa» che immaginiamo: *un luogo dove le persone si incontrano* e, in un clima di rispetto e fiducia, interculturale ed intergenerazionale, lavorano insieme per superare ostacoli e difficoltà e si riappropriano del ruolo attivo nella propria comunità. Quella che vorremmo costruire è *una città viva*, aperta, sensibile, capace di rialzarsi in un'ottica solidale e *che non ha paura dei conflitti, ma che li affronta come un'utile risorsa*.

Siete curiosi e volete avere più informazioni su questo progetto? Guardate [questo breve filmato](#) (in italiano e tedesco) appena pubblicato dal Centro di giustizia riparativa della Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol! Grazie per averci ispirato!

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Notes

¹Per rendere i nostri articoli disponibili e accessibili a un maggior numero di persone, quando se ne presenta l'occasione sosteniamo gli autori a scrivere nella loro lingua madre. Questo articolo è disponibile in italiano e inglese.

Restorative justice as a tool for community well-being

Restorative Justice in Communities is the title of the project that the [Centre for Restorative Justice of the Autonomous Region Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol](#) has proposed from 2020 to 2022. Financed by Cassa delle Ammende, it involved a number of Local Authorities in the Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol Region in its implementation, including the Burgraviato District Community and specifically the Social District of Merano.²

The first objective was to build a steering committee made up of organisations, services and associations to detect potential or existing conflicts in the area and to plan and implement concrete actions. Despite the Sars-Covid 19 pandemic, when the network was activated, the Merano local community immediately responded with great interest, leading to the realisation of a series of actions that we present below.

Desk for conflict mediation

The first action was to make a 'Social Mediation Desk' available to the population, accessible to citizens who reported their conflicts with neighbours, and to neighbourhood committees who asked to deal with certain conflicts related to city parks. In these cases, the tool chosen to address the conflict and try to transform it was the 'peace circle.'

Community circle

Everyone who was interested in the issue was able to bring their point of view. Anyone who showed interest was offered a 'preliminary' individual interview and the opportunity to participate in the circle with others affected by the conflict.

The principles of restorative justice — consensuality, confidentiality, non-judgmental listening — allowed people to meet in an atmosphere that facilitated understanding and the proposal of solutions that were as shared as possible.

Towards a restorative school

A specific working group reflected on conflict among young people, which sometimes results in them dropping out of school, and a specific school, the 'C. Ritz' provincial professional Hotellerie School, accepted the challenge of trying to become a 'restorative school.'

In order to start raising awareness among teachers, the event 'Towards a Restorative School' was held

on 25th October 2021.

Public awareness-raising events

On 15th November 2021, as the project's closing event, an open conference, which was well attended, dedicated to the topic of restorative justice as a tool for community well-being was also held in Merano. The conference made it possible not only to start a reflection on the theoretical and methodological approach and the tools of restorative justice and to share its cornerstones, but also to make it possible to compare the experiences, outcomes and prospects of the actions undertaken.

From the pilot project to the restorative city

The pilot project ended in January 2022, but given the interest and the recognition of restorative justice as an important tool for dealing with conflict, the collaboration between the Social District of Merano, the Municipality of Merano and the Centre for Restorative Justice of the Autonomous Region of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol continued and is still continuing.

As of today, the Social Mediation Desk is active, the reflection on the playground was begun, deepened and supported, and another one opened on a second city playground. The request by the 'C. Ritz' professional Hotellerie School to become a 'restorative school' was implemented by forming a group of teachers and students to open a school conflict mediation desk. And finally, it was decided to reopen a discussion with the Merano representatives of the Institute for Social Building in order to address the issue of conflict in social housing and neighbourhoods most at risk of developing tensions and conflicts.

The voice of the protagonists

We asked the two contact persons in the social district of Merano to give us their views on the project.

What was the social impact on the city?

... conflict management mediated by a restorative justice approach stimulated social environments and regenerated communication and relationship flows.

In the Merano experience, conflict management mediated by a restorative justice approach stimulated social environments and *regenerated communication and relationship flows*. The goal of resolving the conflict or problem could not always be achieved, but the path of rapprochement, respect and inclusion nevertheless took place.

The concrete application of the circle as an instrument of mediation between citizens with different positions has allowed openness to dialogue, recognition and overcoming of prejudices, authentic listening, understanding of other points of view and awareness of individual responsibilities in the path of conflict analysis and resolution.

The restorative justice approach, the actions undertaken and the mediation interventions have stimulated, in the various local communities involved, a relational approach between citizens aimed more at inclusion than exclusion, at consideration and acceptance of the other's being and thinking, which has made it possible to enhance the localities and their inhabitants and to reactivate a sense of sharing, solidarity and empathy.

You took part as active and interested people in the project's three community circles. How would you describe your experience?

Restorative justice has been proposed on various occasions in the city of Merano, through circles with the people. The preparation for the meeting by the facilitators of all participants produced a climate of trust and genuine listening.

We were surprised to see how strongly an attempt was made to find a solution to a social problem.

Being involved in these moments was interesting because it allowed us to focus attention in a shared space on a chosen topic and to feel, even personally, outside of our institutional role, part of the community. We were surprised to see how strongly an attempt was made to find a solution to a social problem. It seems to us that what has happened is that the

handling of the problem, in a shared and reasoned manner, has fostered a creativity, perhaps not previously imagined, with respect to solutions. *Being understood, welcomed, listened to reveals an unexpected willingness and develops a renewed sense of community.*

The project gave rise to the idea of trying to make Merano a 'restorative city.' What does this vision represent for you and how do you concretely imagine it?

In recent years, the city of Merano has on the one hand suffered from loneliness and on the other tried to revitalise the dialogue between citizens, creating opportunities for discussion, mostly with political representatives. The dynamic created often generated frustration on both sides. Local authorities, schools, public services often received personal or individual requests with pleas to find *ad hoc* solutions. But solutions could hardly be found this way, as they could create discontent elsewhere.

So why not break out of this dynamic and create shared spaces, in which all participating actors, according to their possibilities, search for and propose shared solutions?

The social services of the Merano district have grasped the need for change and, thanks to the proposals of the Restorative Justice Centre, social mediation and negotiation skills, they have been more able to open up to the local area, fostering the development of city circles.

This is the 'Merano — restorative city' that we imagine: *a place where people meet* and, in a climate of respect and trust, intercultural and intergenerational, work together to overcome obstacles and difficulties and regain an active role in their community. What we would like to build is *a city that is alive*, open, sensitive, able to rise up in solidarity and *that is not afraid of conflict, but approaches it as a useful resource*.

Are you curious and would like to know more about this project? Watch [this short film](#) (in Italian and German) just published by the Centre for Restorative Justice of the Autonomous Region Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol! Thank you so much for inspiring us!

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Notes

²In order to make our articles available and accessible to a larger number of people, we support authors to write in their mother tongue when the opportunity arises. This article is available in Italian and English.

Narrating the impact of restorative justice: do you have to feel it to get it? The potential of experiences, stories, and art for communicating restorative justice.

I recently learned the term ‘spark bird.’ For bird watchers, the ‘spark bird’ is the bird that first ignited their interest in birding, that first grabbed their attention and interest. If you meet an avid bird watcher, ask them about their ‘spark bird’ and watch their eyes light up! It is much the same in the restorative justice world. It is common for circles of restorative justice advocates getting to know each other to share the stories of how each person came to the work of restorative justice. This prompt is a treasure trove of restorative justice ‘spark birds.’

In the stories told, we often hear about an experience (participating in a restorative justice case or seeing a different, more restorative outcome to an incident of harm than they ever could have imagined previously). What is often the case is people talk about a time that they really *felt* the impact of restorative justice through witnessing it or personally experiencing it.

This raises an important question relevant to our collective pressing need to communicate restorative justice effectively to wider and wider audiences: *Do you have to feel it to get it?*

In order to generate more momentum for restorative justice ... we need to achieve broader understanding and buy-in for restorative approaches ...

In order to generate more momentum for restorative justice implementation and policy-change, we need to achieve broader understanding and buy-in for restorative approaches among the general public. It is not feasible for every person to experience a restorative justice process directly; so we must investigate other ways to generate the *feeling* of a restorative justice encounter. In this piece, I will suggest three methods for generating that feeling that deserve greater exploration and creative efforts: experiences, stories and art.

Experiences

In investigating ways to help people get restorative justice, we need to look to experiences beyond par-

ticipating in an actual restorative justice process — experiences that are quick and accessible to large groups that we can weave into a variety of different contexts.

Ideally, these experiences will generate that emotional resonance necessary to till the ground so that the seeds of learning about restorative justice can take root.

I often like to begin talks or workshops on restorative justice (particularly when delivered online) with a simple activity from [Restorative Teaching Tools](#). In this activity, I pose three questions, pausing after each question to get responses from the group (either in a Zoom chat box or through speaking up to share), distilling a few themes, and sharing my own experiences.

- Think back on a time that you, as a community member, became aware of a crime having been committed — what did you need?
- Think back on a time that you experienced harm — what did you need?
- Think back on a time that you caused harm — what did you need?

Normally, I debrief this activity and, as a group, we talk about how these common human needs are met and not met in different approaches to justice-making.

What this activity does is efficiently generate a degree of emotional resonance with the experiences of responsible parties (offenders) and harmed parties (victims) and with the common human needs generated by harm and crime that we endeavour more

effectively to respond to within restorative justice processes.

... that deeper feeling of being connected to each other that often emerges from restorative encounters.

Circles practice is often used as a way for a group of people to experience the type of space and communication that is made possible by restorative justice processes as well as that deeper feeling of being connected to each other that often emerges from restorative encounters. I am personally of the opinion that circle practice should be integrated into restorative justice educational opportunities whenever possible because of the experience it can provide for those looking to better understand restorative justice.

In *The Little Book of Restorative Teaching Tools* (Pointer et al., 2020) as well as the [website](#), you can find a collection of games and activities for teaching restorative justice. Games and activities provide an accessible (and often even fun!) way to experience restorative justice. Games have a power to decrease resistance to new ideas by drawing us playfully out of our normal ways of interacting and into a space of more possibility and creativity. This power of play makes it a great way to bring people into a state of emotional resonance with restorative approaches.

Stories

The day they came face-to-face with the teen who accidentally shot and killed their son, Bradley and Meagan Hulett confirmed, in their minds, that prison was the last place the shooter should end up (Moore, 2022).

Many news stories and features on restorative justice begin much like this, with a piece of a story that draws you in and immediately generates the deeply emotional experience of picturing an unimaginable horror and an unlikely response.

We see this reliance on stories everywhere. Stories are ancient human technology and are central to how we learn. Stories create a sense of connection, build familiarity and trust and help to create an openness to learning. Good stories contain multiple meanings; they can convey complex ideas in a way that is much easier to grasp. And, above all, stories are engaging, they draw us in and spark our interest.

It is no wonder then that stories have dominated our methods of communicating and narrating restorative justice. Collections of restorative justice case studies are often used in restorative justice education efforts. A number of outstanding documentary films have been crafted to share the stories of particular restorative justice cases.

We are also increasingly seeing restorative justice stories in popular media. My colleague with the [National Center on Restorative Justice](#) (USA), Avery Arrington, has a passion for identifying and collecting examples of restorative justice encounters in popular culture. One such example is from season four of the TV show *Queer Eye* in which Karamo Brown brings together the subject (or 'hero') of the episode, Wesley, and the man who shot him for a dialogue. In the conversation, Wesley has an opportunity to have his questions answered and both men reach a point of greater healing and resolution. While not called restorative justice in the episode, dialogues like this in popular media help to expand the public imagination of what is possible in a justice response.

I am particularly excited about the potential of fiction to spread stories of restorative justice.

I am particularly excited about the potential of fiction to spread stories of restorative justice. There are many great examples including recently *Wayward Creatures* (Lorentz, 2022) and *Play the Game* (coming January 2023). My own children's picture book on restorative justice, *Wally and Freya*, was published in 2022 by Good Books. The intention of the publisher is for this to be the beginning of a 'Restorative Justice for Kids' series that will help to introduce restorative justice to young people and their teachers, parents or caregivers. If you have an idea for a story, I encourage you to submit a manuscript.

Art

Stories are, indeed, one form of art and art more broadly holds immense potential for communicating restorative justice.

Art moves us and when we are moved by what we see and experience, it can spark change.

A tagline of the [Center for Artistic Activism](#) is 'Affect creates effect.' Art moves us and when we are

moved by what we see and experience, it can spark change.

My own interest in art as a method for creative communication in restorative justice was sparked by Brunilda Pali's work and deepened by the EFRJ's [REstART Festival](#). In 2020 and 2021, the National Center on Restorative Justice issued a call for artistic representation of restorative justice, which generated a [gallery](#) of visual art poetry, and short stories.

The upcoming special issue of [The International Journal of Restorative Justice](#) on *Advancing Restorative Justice through Art*, co-edited by myself and Brunilda Pali, documents many ways that art is being drawn on to communicate and strengthen restorative justice. If you are interested in learning more about creative approaches to communicating and practising restorative justice, I encourage you to check out the special issue.

One of the great treasures of restorative justice is the creativity of the process. It allows for the previously unimaginable to emerge.

In our efforts to communicate restorative justice to the public, it is imperative that we tap into that same force of creativity that drives restorative re-

sponses and draw on the possibility of art, stories and facilitated experiences to generate a feeling of restorative justice that will drive greater uptake. We must approach the problem like artists.

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Calendar

EFRJ Winter Academy 30 January–3 February 2023. It will feature three parallel live courses from which participants can choose:

- [Sensitive & Complex Cases in Restorative Justice: Domestic Abuse](#),
- [Victims' Needs and Restorative Justice: Good Practices and Safeguards](#) and
- [Restorative Approaches for Young People: In Education and Institutions](#).

Leuven, Belgium. Register with the [EFRJ](#).

EFRJ Seminar 22–23 June 2023 Pamplona, Spain

EFRJ Summer Retreat for Restorative Trainers 24–28 June 2023 Navarra, Spain (In person, in English.)

EFRJ Summer School on prisons and restorative justice 24–28 July 2023 Varna, Bulgaria (In person, in English.)

EFRJ Member Events

EFRJ members organise many more events at the local level. If you wish to keep posted, subscribe to our bi-monthly [Newsflash](#), which includes news on upcoming events, new publications, policy initiatives, call for projects and much more. The archive of past newsflashes is available on the [EFRJ website](#).

Call for submissions

Articles

Each edition we will feature a review of the field of restorative justice, reflections on policy developments and research findings/project outcomes.

Please consider sharing your perspective with colleagues.

Book reviews

We very much welcome reviews of books and articles from our membership. If you have published a book and would like to submit it for review, please send it to the [Secretariat](#).

Events

Please let us know about upcoming restorative justice related conferences and events. We are happy to share this information via the [Newsflash](#).

Not an EFRJ member yet?

Join forces with other restorative justice professionals throughout Europe and beyond and sign up via [our website](#). (If you are a member but have not yet renewed for 2021, you can use the same link.) The process only takes five minutes. You can also email the [Secretariat](#) or use the address below.

As a member you will receive:

- three electronic newsletters a year
- regular electronic news with interesting information



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- reduced conference fees and special book prices
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- opportunities to learn from, meet and work with restorative justice colleagues
- reduced subscription fee to *The International Journal of Restorative Justice*
- and much, much more ...

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The views presented in this Newsletter are the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the EFRJ.

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