



Social Science and Political Practice in International Relations – Bridging two Systems

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1 Political Practice in the 21st Century

International Relations in the 21st Century are more ambiguous than ever. The world can today be interpreted as a multi-polar one, where nation states, international organisations and transnational companies are in no way the only relevant entities. Small actors can have big impacts, some call it “an age of terror”. We live in a world of increasing complexity, where answers, if we have them at all, have a short lifespan. Buzzwords for these phenomena are globalisation, electronic revolution through the Internet, climate change, an age of terror, to name just some of them. We live in times characterized by rapid change. For political practitioners in international relations it seems to have become more difficult to act appropriately within this world situation. Increased uncertainty about the future becomes more immanent. Impacts and outcomes of policies and actions are more unpredictable, although their influence is greater than ever, because of the increased interconnection through globalisation. Cause and effect of incidents are distant in time and space (Bojer/Knuth/Magner 2006, p. 5). Time spans for making decisions decrease, thus time pressure becomes daily mastery. It seems that for political practitioners who face these problems support is greatly beneficial. The need is apparent and science jumps in to deliver this support. However, this cooperation has shown itself to be difficult. Scientists often complain that politicians do not follow their advice, while politicians complain that scientists are escapists who do not consider political reality (Cassel 2005, p. 176). But why are scientific solution strategies often not adopted by politics?

2 Social Science and Political Practice: An Assessment

The initial point for assessing the relationship between social science and political practice is today's society. According to modern systems science, societies can be defined as the interconnection of mutually related and relevant communication (Luhmann 1984). Modern societies are functional differentiated and can be understood as polycentric networks of social systems (Wilke 1994, p. 215). These societal subsystems – be they politics, science, economy, art, education, etc. – have their own logic and, accordingly, special semantics. This makes them operationally closed or autonomous. Each system has its own guiding distinction (Kopp 2005, p. 53). Respectively, incidents are evaluated according to this guiding distinction. For example the political system evaluates incidents by means of power gaining or losing. Although societal subsystems are autonomous they are structurally coupled, meaning that they do interact with each other. However a signal from outside will, by the system only, be perceived as a perturbation. A perturbation is an impulse or irritation that is processed according to the structure and inner logic of the addressed system itself. Perturbations are structurally determined. In other words, social systems do not react they just act (Görlitz/Burth 1998, p. 241). If we want to perturb a system

in order to achieve a certain result in form of an action, we have to make sure that the addressed system understands the used language.

Coming back to the question why advice or proposals of the scientific system are not adopted by the political system, the assumption would be that reasons can be found in the diverging logic of the two systems. Moreover, they do not just follow diverging logics but they also use diverging semantics. As a result they have difficulties in communication.

The political system has the function to produce and implement collectively binding decisions (Willke 1994, p. 215). As mentioned before, the guiding distinction for the political system is to gain, preserve or lose power. ‘Power is the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their circumstances and fate’ (Barnett/Duvall 2005, p. 39). Power can be operationalised as influence. Political practitioners gain influence to make policies in their interest. The perspective of the political system concerning time frames is very much based on the election cycles, which makes them short and restricted.

Contrary to the political system the science system has the function to produce knowledge, knowledge of complex circumstances (Schöll 2005, p. 22). Knowledge can be operationalised as truth (Luhmann 1990a, p. 271). Assumptions are formulated in form of hypothesis and tested. If they turn out to be right they are validated unless someone shows that they are not true; in which case they are falsified and abandoned (Popper 1971). Scientists gain reputation by generating exceptional findings. The science system is the continuous infinite accumulation of knowledge. Therefore the time frame is long term. For a concluding comparison of the diverging logics of the two systems see table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of logics of the political and science system

ACTOR	Scientist	Politician
FIELD	Empirical and Theoretical Science	Political Reality
GUIDING DISTINCTION	Truth: falsified verified	Power: gain loose
OPERATIONALISED	Reputation	Influence
TIME FRAME	Long term	Election cycles

As a consequence there is a barrier in the communication between the two systems, the systems use different languages and logics (Kopp 2005, p. 54). What is needed to overcome this lack of communication? According to Habermas, good quality politics is dependent on communication and hand-in-hand working of actors within both systems. Therefore, questions of political reality have to be translated into science information and the output of the science system has to be transformed for applied politics (Habermas 1997, p. 126).

To overcome this lack of communication, the two systems need a mediator or translator who understands both languages. However (s)he needs not to be an expert in the two fields, meaning the mediator is neither an political expert nor scientist. The system in which (s)he operates is called an advisory system based on the duty to give advise.

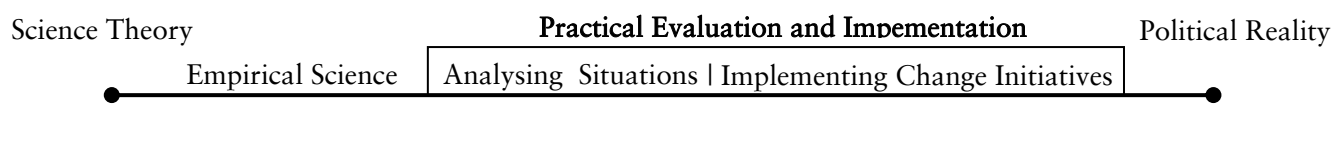
3 Political Process Advising

Following Cassel it is useful to distinguish between scientific advising and advising politicians (Casell 2003, p.7). Furthermore, there is a necessity to draw a third distinction which is advising on the process. Scientific advising has the intention to inform the citizen about which policies are the most effective according to their interests, therefore supporting collective decision-making. Advising politicians, on the other hand, is intended to guarantee the preservation of power that is re-election. A politician would decide on a policy, if his re-election were enhanced as a result. However, the politician cannot fully disregard the interests of the electorate. Hence, (s)he will try to ascertain the potential impact of certain policy options by establishing how they correspondend with his/her personal goals and the preferences of the electorate (Cassel 2003; p.10). The last category is process advising. To be successful in mediating/translating between the political and science system a mediator has to be responsible for the communication. He needs to speak both languages and be sensitive to both system logics. However he is only responsible for the process and structure not the content. The content, in form of fact-based knowledge, is delivered by political practitioners or scientific experts. A political process advisor could be the person to bridge the communication gap between political practise and science. The next section will exemplify how such a process might look and how political process advising in practise is possible.

4 The Architecture: Between Theory and Political Reality

If we construct a continuum having on one pole science theory and on the other pole political reality the aim is to find ways to combine both sides. Using science based methodologies and models and make them applicable in political reality. That is what we call practical evaluation and implementation. We identify two levels of application. The two can be included in the continuum either raging more into the science or the political reality direction.

Figure 1: Continuum between Theory and Political Reality



Specific models and tools are used to explain certain situations. The chosen ones are going to be just examples and one could think of many other tools and applications. The tools have been chosen because we have considerably experience with them. However the scientific community is continuously providing more models and approaches. The tools are presented separately nonetheless, the transitions are fluent and it makes absolutely sense to combine them. Starting with an evaluation by analysing a situation and choosing a tool according to the results in order to implement a change initiative. We will come back to the combination of designs later. Now starting with the design that is closest to empirical science we call it analysing situations.

4.1 Analysing Situations

This section will start with the theoretical bases of the used model closing with an explanation why process advisors are the right persons to apply them. Analysing situations is strongly correlated to empirical research. That is research that bases its findings on direct or indirect observation as its test of reality. However in our practical case the primary aim is not to develop or further develop a science theory, but to explain real world situations and hence generate options for (strategic) action. The idea is to analyse political situations not just by senior experience or commonsense knowledge, but by using a scientific proven framework. Therefore a model is used to structure real life conditions and direct the attention to certain interconnections more than to others. According to the situation we want to analyse we have to choose a model that is adequate to explain this situation. As example we will here analyse the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from 2000 to 2002 by using the policy-window model (Kingdon 1995) and its further developments. We will use the model under the focus of timing. The question we pursue is: when is the right time for action. Although this analysis is retrospective, the idea is to use this model also prospectively and therefore have an instrument that indicates when timing for action is right. The first part will explain the model on a theoretical basis in detail. In the second part we will apply the model to the Israeli-Palestinian situation from 2000 to 2002.

The Theoretical Model

As mentioned before, for practitioners in international relations, time is one of the most crucial factors. On the one hand, time is restricted, continuous change occurs and decisions have to be fast, ambiguity is the general background condition. Therefore analytical frameworks and models can support practitioners in rapid and valid analysing. On the other hand, timing is important, time slots occur and prepared proposals should be available and ready for action. A window describes an opportunity in time, a special momentum for action. “Predictable or unpredictable, open windows are small and scarce. Opportunities come, but they also pass. Windows do not stay open long.” (Kingdon 1995: 204)

The design of multiple streams goes back to Cohen, March and Olson (1972) who developed the garbage can model of organisational choice to analyse decision-making

in organisations. The principle idea is that decisions “rather than being programmed or predictable (...) are the result of the serendipitous confluence of opportunities, individuals and ideas.” (Peters 2002: 7) Originally, the model was used to analyse the decision making in universities, what the authors termed “organized anarchies”. However, it turned out that the model is applicable to much broader decision situations. To fully understand and assess this analytical model, we must discharge the idea of standardised problem solving. Problem orientated solutions neglect the problem causing conditions.

The premises for applying the model are: *problematic preferences, unclear technology, fluid participation*. The world in international relations is commonly described as anarchic. However there is no doubt that it shows signs of organisation (Walz 1979, Art/Jervis 1986, Axelrod 1984, Keohane 1984). Unclear technology is one of the most crucial factors of uncertainty in international relations. Members of organised anarchies know their duties and goals of their organisation. What they don't know is the logic or technology of the process as it develops. Also unclear is their role design within the process. Fluid participation signals that there are fluid boundaries between organisations and the ever changing environment. This characterisation accounts for nation states on domestic (Kingdon 1995: 83ff) as on international level.

Kingdon (1984, 1995) adopted the garbage can model to explain the process of agenda setting and alternative specification within the political system of the United States. Therefore, he reduced the originally four streams (problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities) to three: problems, policies, and politics by incorporating the participants and choice opportunities into the politics stream. Further he added the concepts of policy windows and policy entrepreneurs.

Zahariadis (1992, 1999) developed the model further and made it applicable to political systems other than that of the United States. His major extension was that he used multiple streams to explain the entire policy formation process adding decision making not only agenda setting.

Most recently Lipson (2004) adapted the model to explain decision making in international organisations – on United Nations peacekeeping. Therefore he transformed the politics stream by actors, interests and ideas on three levels: “(1) the multilateral setting; (2) politics within UN member states (i.e., support or hostility toward UN peacekeeping, and willingness to pay dues); and (3) politics and organizational culture within the UN.” (Lipson 2004: 17)

In the following section we will introduce the reader into this concept of multiple streams in policy making. The basic idea of the framework as we will use it, depends on Kingdon's model of three relatively independent streams: problems, policy and politics which are coupling and therefore open a window of opportunity in time.

The *problem stream* contains all problems that occur in the field of politics and are at a certain point addressed by the policymakers. The question that arises is why policymakers do pay attention to some problems and not to others? Kingdon identifies three conditions. The first condition depends on indicators, “problems come to the attention of governmental decisions makers not through some sort of political pressure or perceptual slight of hand but because some more or less systematic indicator simply shows that there is a problem out there” (Kingdon 1995: 90). The indicators are socially, economically or politically driven. Examples could be: disease rates, immunisation rates, costs of a programme, consumer prices, mortality rates,

acts of terrorism, and many more. (Kingdon 1995: 90ff) The second are dramatic events or crisis which put the spotlight on specific problems. As happened in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001. International terrorism, flight security, immigration rules were topics that became significantly of importance. (Kingdon 1995: 95ff) The third are feedbacks from existing programmes which had been implemented and were successful or unsuccessful. (Kingdon 1995: 100ff)

The *policy stream* is characterised by all kinds of proposals and ideas developed by communities of specialists in form of papers, drafts, white papers, debates or speeches. Specialists could be researchers, academics, consultants, lobbyists, administrative staff, career bureaucrats and more. Kingdon termed this stream “the policy primeval soup” (Kingdon 1995: 116ff) where ideas flow around and are patched, combined and changed with a number of other concepts and ideas.

Following Kingdon (1995: 145ff) the *politics stream* contains three elements: national mood, pressure group campaigns, and administrative or legislative turnover. National mood sums up a larger number of individual think along common lines and this is recognised by politicians who act according to that. If interest groups and other organised political forces provide an impetus into a certain direction, then this is termed pressure group campaigns. Another strong impetus in the politics stream is the turnover of key personnel or elections that bring new constellations in government. As mentioned before, Zahariadis refined this stream by combining these three variables into one he calls “the ideology of governing parties”. “This amalgamation makes sense in countries with relatively centralized political systems and strong political parties. The ideology of the governing party (coalition) shapes the kinds of issues that will rise to the agenda and demarcates the solutions available for adoption.” (Zahariadis 1998: 79f)

What we could learn from this adoption is that depending on which nation and political systems we want to analyse, this stream has to be adjusted and respectively interpreted.

The confluence of three independent streams can occur at critical times. In this case a policy solution is attached to problem and political opportunity and signals the right time for a policy change. The possibility of coupling streams is best when such a policy window opens. As said before, a policy window is an opportunity in time, because of certain circumstances the timing is right. Now issues are put on the governmental agenda according to Kingdon and government pays serious attention to a certain topic. When the window opens ‘participants dump their conceptions of problems, their proposals, and political forces into the choice opportunity, and the outcomes depend on the mix of elements present and how the various elements are coupled.’ (Kingdon 1995: 166) This does not mean a decision is ultimately made but it is just the right time and the opportunity for a launch. A window can be opened by an urging problem or in the politics stream. Therefore Kingdon (1995: 175) differentiates between problem windows and political windows. The emergence of a pressing problem forces the government to address this issue, then the window opens in the problem stream. If a change of administration – e.g. “a new administration comes to town, and they ask, ‘What should we do first?’...” provides an impetus the window opens in the politics stream. (Kingdon 1995: 176)

“The problem window and the political windows are related. When a window opens because a problem is pressing, the alternatives generated as solutions to the problem fare better if they also meet the tests of political acceptability. (...) Similarly, when a

political event opens a window, participants try to find a problem to which the proposed solution can be attached.” (Kingdon 1995: 175) Only if all three streams are coupled, the issue will get to the decision agenda and is forwarded to authoritative legislation.

If the opportunity is there because a window is opened either in the problem or politics stream the coupling of the stream is strongly depended on policy entrepreneurs. *Entrepreneurs* are people that invest time, energy, reputation, money and resources to develop a policy concept in bringing together their pet proposal and with it the streams. The role of entrepreneurs strengthens the influence of individuals as persons who take advantage of the opportunity (Kingdon 1995: 182).

The Practical Application: Israeli-Palestinian conflict from 2000-2002

To show the applicability of the approach we will now analyze the Israeli Palestinian conflict beginning in 2000. This case study has been chosen because it perfectly describes the opening and the closing of a window even though a decision in form of a peace treaty did not come into force.

The window opening was initiated in the problem stream as Israel and its neighbours were in continuous conflict. This conflict was associated with territorial discrepancies, in the Westbank and Gazastrip between Palestine and Israel and about the Golan-Heights between Syria and Israel. From December 1999 till the end of March 2000, Israel and Syria negotiated under the mediation of the United States for a deal of the conflictual territories. After the parties failed to find any agreements the Agenda shifted to the next most pressing problem “floating around” (Kingdon 1995). After years of conflict and bashing between Israel and Palestine the parties came together by huge efforts of former US president Bill Clinton. He decided to mobilize all resources to solve this conflict as the last international action of his presidency. Therefore the Clinton Administration can be seen as a policy entrepreneur trying to couple the streams. A partial coupling can be identified between problem and politics stream. In Israeli parliamentary election were shortly coming up. The prime minister, Ehud Barak known as a “dove”¹ had to prove achievements of his government to be re-elected. For Ehud Barak the thing that could happen would be to overcome the long lasting conflict or present a lasting peace deal. However his space for manoeuvring was restricted and tight.

On 11 July 2000 President Clinton invited the Israeli and Palestinian delegations to a summit on peace talks in Camp David. It was the aim of the United States to bring Ehud Barak the Israeli prime minister and Yasser Arafat the chairmen of the Palestinian (PA) together on one table. After one week of protracted negotiations and no moving by any of the parties, Barak finally made a huge concession into the Palestinian’s direction by offering them sovereignty over half of Jerusalem. However the critical issue that mattered most to Arafat was the sovereignty over the Harram al Sharif the holy place in the old city. Concerning this territory the sovereignty would still be in Israeli hands. Without having sovereignty over the Temple Mountain Arafat had to reject the offer, as Mohammed Rashid the Economic advisor to Arafat quoted him: ‘If they offered me what I need on Jerusalem I could be flexible on other matters.

¹ In comparison to Hawks, for more details see (Schultz 2005: 1-38)

But if I give away what belongs to the whole Islamic world I will be assassinated!¹
The talks collapsed.

On 31 July 2000, shortly after the summit Barak was heavily attacked for his negotiation behaviour by Israeli politicians. 'Testing the waters of cooperation is politically risky for doves, especially, but not exclusively, when the other side responds aggressively' (Schulz 2005: 24). Barak's strongest opposition leader, Ariel Sharon said in a television announcement: 'One man, the prime minister without discussing the issue with the cabinet, without bringing it to the government, without bringing it to the Knesset, without asking anyone of the Jewish leaders around the world decided to hand over the holiest place of the Jewish people. That's something that no one can understand.'² As part of his election campaign and as an act of patriotism Sharon addressed his desire to visit the Temple Mountain.

The window started slightly to close. However Barak and Arafat tried to rescue the situation. On 25 September 2000, Barak invited Arafat privately to his house for dinner. There they started a talk without any advisors or translators and got quite confident that a solution is coming into reach shortly. Arafat got quoted by Gilhead Sher an Israeli advisor: 'God willing, we'll sign an agreement in a week.'³ But the sword of Damocles - Sharon's visit to the Temple Mountain - was hanging over the meeting. And as if knowing Arafat said to Barak: 'Please, please your Excellency don't allow Sharon to come to Haram al Sharif.'⁴

On 28 September 2000, Sharon visited the temple mountain with hundreds of police and security men. The situation escalated, this was the trigger for the coming al Aqsa intifada. Ariel Sharon became new prime minister after the elections. The window was closed.

The role of the political process advisor

To be prepared when a window of opportunity opens you have to carefully analyse the ongoing political situation. A holistic view is here crucial. Political practitioners often stuck in daily political questions and as mentioned before the increased time pressure rules the careful and grounded analysis out. A political process advisor on the other hand is not embedded in the continuous flux of political reality and can thereby easier maintain the kind of overview that is needed for a situational analysis. Whereas the scientist can contribute with a grounded analysis of the political reality, he doesn't keep the interest of the politician in mind. He is basing his work on the distinction truth/not truth. A language that doesn't correspond to politicians interest power gain/lose. The political process advisor makes use of the scientific knowledge but keeps the interest of the advised entity in mind. One should understand the restrictions and logics that arise by the election cycles. Further, diverging time frames of the two systems - the political on one hand and the scientific on the other calls for a mediator. In international relations it is of common interest that not only the limited time frames of election cycles are included in the situational analysis. The political process advisor, being the bridge to the scientific field can help integrate a broader perspective on international issues.

¹ Interview of Mohammad Rashid in *Elusive Peace – Israel and the Arabs, Part 1*, DVD, PBS Home Video.

² Interview of Ariel Sharon in: *Elusive Peace – Israel and the Arabs, Part 1*, DVD, PBS Home Video.

³ Interview Gilhead Sher in: *ibid.*

⁴ Quote in an interview by Saeb Erekat, Chief Negotiator of the Palestinian Delegation in: *ibid.*

4.2 Implementing Change Initiatives

Of the two designs, implementing change initiatives is the closest to political reality. In fact it is the practical implementation of a social change. According to a specific purpose we can choose between several tools that are useful to implement a change initiative. It is very important that we have absolute clarity over the purpose of the change initiative. In this context it could also be of importance to be sure about the need and connect the need with the purpose. Only if need and especially purpose are crystal clear will the right tool be chosen. Furthermore for the success of a change initiative, it is crucial that the addressed people get involved. This accounts for social systems such as societies, organizations or individuals. For choosing the right tool it is also important to know how many people are to be addressed, as well as other context conditions such as complexity or conflict. In the following are going to presented some tools:

Future search is a tool to bring many people, “the whole system” into the room and together create a shared vision. Around eight stakeholder groups are identified and represented each by approximately eight participants. Together the 60-70 participants visualize the whole system and together look at the past, present and future through a task-focused agenda. The agenda works through the following steps: review of the past, explore the present, create ideal future scenarios, identify common ground, and make action plans. The workshop/conference ideally spans over three days.

Future search has been used for nation building in Bangladesh. Sponsored by the UNICEF it was very successful on topics such as fighting against child labor. It proved to be very popular subsequently spreading to other parts of South East Asia. (www.futuresearch.net)

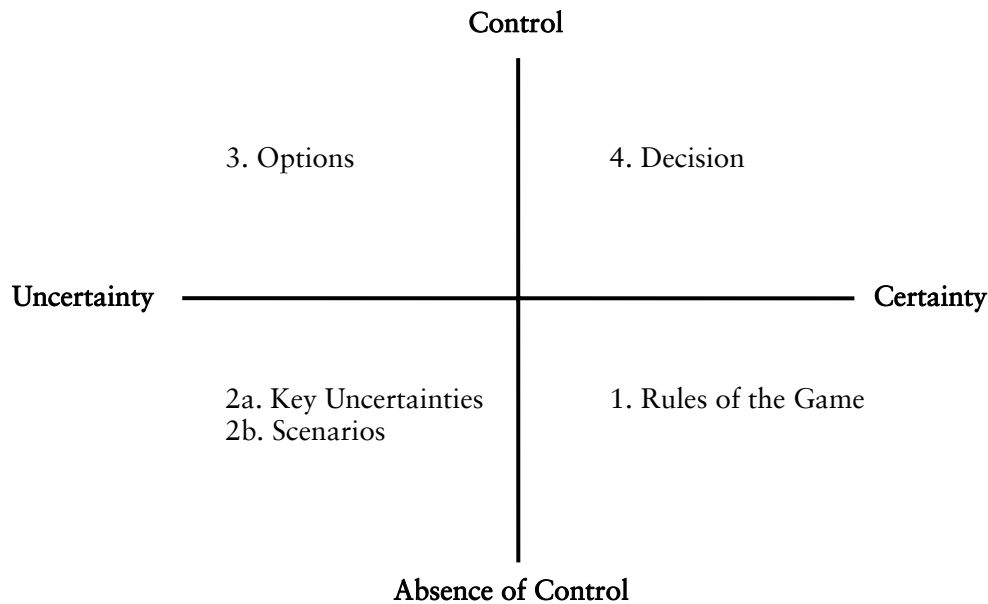
We¹ applied the tool for a future vision building of two geographical partner cities, one on German side and the other on Polish side. At the workshop all relevant stakeholders from business, civil society, regional government, science, etc. participated. The Workshop was sponsored by the mayors’ office of both cities.

Scenario Planning is a tool to support strategy and action planning as well as decision-making. It is a tool to deal with the inherent uncertainty of the world. Therefore the aim is not to predict the future, ‘but rather a process which challenges assumptions, values and mental models of various stakeholders about how uncertainties might affect their collective futures’ (Bojer/Knuth/Magner 2006, p. 54). Before starting the scenario process you need to clarify a few variables, such as purpose, players, importance of external environment, level of control, time horizon, etc. Then the process ideally works in four steps that can be measured on a continuum of two axes between certainty/uncertainty and control/absence of control (see figure 1).

The first step involves the written and unwritten rules of the context being examined and identified. The second step is twofold firstly, identifying the key uncertainties according to its predictability and potential impact. Secondly, describe the possible outcomes of these uncertainties, which are called scenarios. The third step is to identify options for future action. How would we react if the key uncertainties were true? The group works out a detailed picture of what is possible. In the forth and last step, decisions are made based on the scenarios and options.

¹ Systemic Excellence Group – Independent Think Tank for Leading Practise, Berlin.

Figure 2: scenario planning process (Bojer/Knuth/Magner 2006, p. 55)



Scenario technique is famous in organizations such as Shell and Anglo American, but is also applied in broader contexts. For example, Jamaica, South Africa, Botswana, and Kenya used it for country strategy mappings. (Bojer/Knuth/Magner 2006, p. 54-58)

The last tool here presented can be called **cultural diversity dialogue**. It has been invented by the Israeli-Palestinian School for Peace¹. Again for application we will come back to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The tool is set up to deal with conflict based on cultural diversity. The objective of the participating groups is to examine their own identity, including feelings and thoughts through an authentic and direct dialogue. The groups critically observe their habits and mental models that are ordinarily taken for granted. The idea is to create awareness on the contingency of the existing reality. Everything that is could be different. Therefore we could search for other options besides the status quo. The starting point is that you have groups of diverging cultural backgrounds that most likely also include language. In this case, it is important to have translators and give all participants the possibility to speak in their mother tongue. For simplification we will have just two diverging cultures (as in the case of Israel and Palestine), however one could also image many more cultures. The two culture groups should be equal in numbers. All participants are ideally divided into sub-groups of around 16 participants (8 of each culture). Additionally, each sub-group has two facilitators one from each culture. The facilitators are responsible to support the group in debating and exchanging. Facilitators are the process owners and should be neutral mirroring back what is going on in the group. Overall group meetings are held in a forum called bi-national encounter groups. That is members from all cultures participate. A second forum where also meetings are held is called uni-national group, in this forum the groups are separated according to their culture. Usually 75% of the time is spent in the mixed bi-national group and 25% of time in the uni-national group. In the beginning it seems that such a separation is

¹ <http://sfpeace.org>

against the purpose of bringing cultures closer together. This is also the case with the first impressions of the participants. 'They don't see its value given that they have come together in order to meet across cultures' (Bojer/Knuth/Magner 2006, p. 45). The reason for building the uni-national group is to give the participants a safe harbor and a possibility to back out. Experience shows that participants will also find diversities within their own cultural group; diversities that were hidden under the surface of the more prominent cultural difference. The founders call these inner group differences sub-identities.

The general idea is that if you really want to initiate a social change in such a conflict situation you have to change the mindsets of the people. This can only be accomplished by genuine, eye-to-eye contact and dialogue.

5 Conclusion

We have shown two designs with which a political process advisor could work. Although we separately introduced the two designs - analysing situations and implementing change initiatives - they could be used in a combined architecture. From preparing, planning to implementing and evaluating the consequences. One could easily imagine combining the model of multiple streams to indicate a window of opportunity and then initiate a process of scenario planning. Again the three levels cannot be strictly separated; it's rather a smooth transition, which is why they all can be placed on one continuum, where the process advisor is responsible for making the two poles meet.

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