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Dialogue for peace: the production of knowledge and norms between international practices and local ownership in Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

This article scrutinises an attempt by Ukrainian dialogue practitioners to produce a set of norms guiding the conduct and funding of dialogue initiatives as a means of peacebuilding in post-2014 Ukraine. Drawing on critical constructivist approaches to the study of norm creation and transfer, the article uncovers the interplay between local and international actors behind this attempt, traces the processes of knowledge and norm production, and examines the extent to which the norms advocated for by dialogue practitioners were appropriated by the affected stakeholders. The study challenges the conception of local actors as receivers of internationally promoted norms and showcases the agency of Ukrainian dialogue practitioners in norm initiation. Simultaneously, it nuances the complex interconnectedness between the multiplicity of domestic and international actors involved in this process and thus adds to the literature questioning the oversimplification embedded in the dichotomy of the local vs. the international in peace research.

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Introduction

In the context of the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine, the need for dialogue has been recurrently voiced by various international actors.¹ Yet, what kind of dialogue is needed, and which dialogue approaches could work in a country experiencing foreign invasion? These questions are not new for Ukraine. They dominated peacebuilding-centred discourses of dialogue professionals in the country in the first years after Russia's annexation of Crimea and its intervention in Eastern Ukraine in 2014.² These discourses largely concentrated on what is known as 'Track 2' and 'Track 3' dialogue processes, that is dialogue efforts that go beyond high-level

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¹National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy – Mediation and Dialogue Research Center, 'Seven Points on the War and Dialogue in Ukraine', https://md.ukma.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Public_Statement_War_and_Dialogue_Ukraine_ENG.pdf.

²Tatiana Kyselova, 'Understanding Dialogue in Ukraine: A Survey-Based Study', Analytical Report, 2018, <https://md.ukma.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Understanding-Dialogue-Report-2018-eng.pdf> (last modified 2018), 22.

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diplomacy and involve policymakers, experts, non-governmental groups and, in the case of 'Track 3', private citizens.³

Prior to the large-scale invasion by Russia on 24 February 2022, these forms of dialogue as tools of conflict transformation and peacebuilding were seen by many international donors as endeavours worth aiding. Hence, a lot of international funding went into promoting dialogue initiatives at different levels of engagement, including the National Dialogue attempted by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), dialogues with the participation of Ukrainian and international experts and civil society actors, as well as smaller community-level dialogue projects supported by various international agencies.⁴ However, there was no common understanding or definition of dialogue or how it should be conducted among the various actors involved in the implementation and support of the dialogue initiatives. While the field of peace mediation had produced a number of guidelines for mediation practices within the international and European frameworks,⁵ dialogue practices remained largely unregulated.⁶

In response to the multiplicity of interpretations, competing approaches, and recurrent misuse of the term 'dialogue', a group of Ukrainian dialogue practitioners came together in 2018 to produce a document entitled 'Dialogue Standards: Definition and Principles'.⁷ The document was intended to provide a common vision of what dialogue should entail as well as a set of principles to be followed by those implementing and funding dialogue initiatives in Ukraine. The production of commonly shared definitions and norms aimed to improve existing dialogue practices and – similar to international frameworks concerning mediation—'increase the prospects for a successful process, minimise the potential for [...] error and help generate an environment more conducive to [dialogue]'.⁸ Furthermore, defining dialogue and its principles in this particular context had important practical implications in the peacebuilding field, because it was intended to create clarity among the international donor community as to which projects could expect to be funded under the label of dialogue in Ukraine.

Against the background of studies on norm emergence and transfer – largely focused on the adoption, adaptation, or contestation of internationally promoted norms by local actors⁹—the Ukrainian dialogue practitioners' initiative was a remarkable attempt at

³Jennifer Staats, Johnny Walsh and Rosarie Tucci, 'A Primer on Multi-track Diplomacy: How Does it Work?', United States Institute of Peace, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/07/primer-multi-track-diplomacy-how-does-it-work> (accessed July 31, 2019).

⁴Kyselova, 'Understanding Dialogue in Ukraine'.

⁵United Nations Peacemaker, 'United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation', 2012, <https://peacemaker.un.org/guidance-effective-mediation>; Council of the European Union, 'Concept on EU Peace Mediation', 2020, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/st13951.en20.pdf>.

⁶Amanda E. Feller and Kelly K. Ryan, 'Definition, Necessity, and Nansen: Efficacy of Dialogue in Peacebuilding', *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2012): 351–380.

⁷Institute for Peace and Common Ground, 'Dialogue Standards: Definition and Principles', 2018, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JN3QRE8EXU5D1FvY3Go1H19ZvRNHNxAo/view> (last modified September 2018).

⁸United Nations Peacemaker, 'Guidance for Effective Mediation', 2012, 3.

⁹e.g., Vera Axyonova ed., *European Engagement under Review: Exporting Values, Rules, and Practices to the Post-Soviet Space* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2016); Aron Buzogány, 'Selective Adoption of EU Environmental Norms in Ukraine. Convergence à la Carte', *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 4 (2013): 609–630, doi: 10.1080/09668136.2013.766039; Assem Dandashly and Gergana Noutcheva, 'Conceptualizing Norm Diffusion and Norm Contestation in the European Neighbourhood: Introduction to the Special Issue', *Democratization* (2021), doi: 10.1080/13510347.2021.2012161; Irina Mützelburg, 'The Role of EU and International Organizations Strategies and Interdependencies in the Transfer of International Norms: The Case of Ukrainian Asylum Law', in *Policy Transfer and Norm Circulation: Towards an Interdisciplinary and Comparative Approach*, ed. Laure Delcour and Elsa Tulmets (Oxon & NY: Routledge, 2019), 162–181.

locally driven norm creation in the context of extensive external engagement. This attempt showcased the agency of local actors in norm initiation, thus challenging the conventional scholarly understanding of such actors as receivers (or contesters) in the process of international norm transfer. But how did this initiative become possible, and did this experiment in pooling practitioners' knowledge result in the constitution of dialogue norms in Ukraine?

In this article, we tackle these questions. We uncover the interplay between the domestic and external actors behind this attempt, trace the processes of knowledge production and the renegotiation of existing practices, and examine whether and to what extent the 'Dialogue Standards' have been embraced as a common set of norms by local dialogue practitioners and international donors active in Ukraine. The case study draws on document analysis and participant observation, the latter by one of the article's authors who observed the above processes as an independent consultant. The author was present at all meetings of the working group that developed the 'Dialogue Standards', documented their proceedings, and participated in the subsequent dissemination of the document. These experiences provided first-hand insights into the processes examined in this article.

Providing a rich ethnographic account, this article contributes to the literature on norm creation by shifting the gaze to the role of local actors in the process of initiating and constituting regulatory norms.¹⁰ Simultaneously, we reveal complex relationships between the multiplicity of domestic and international actors involved in knowledge production about dialogue as a means of peacebuilding. Thus, we join academic voices questioning the oversimplified conception of 'the local vs. the international' in peace research.¹¹ Relying on original empirical data, we add to the critical peace scholarship impugning this binary conception by nuancing domestic-international interactions in knowledge and norm creation.¹² Finally, while this article focuses on the period preceding Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the empirical findings are highly relevant for the understanding of international and locally driven peacebuilding efforts in the country, including their limitations and lessons (not) learned. The relevance of these findings will become even more apparent after the end of the full-fledged war in Ukraine, when we can expect international donors to resume their push for multi-track dialogue, likely overlooking local actors' attempts to shape this process.

In the subsequent section, we first locate our study within the literature on norm creation and change and specify our arguments. The subsequent empirical part proceeds in three steps. First, we examine the situation that preceded the dialogue practitioners'

¹⁰For an overview of the norms literature, see Antje Wiener, 'Contested Meanings of Norms: A Research Framework', *Comparative European Politics* 5, no. 1 (2007): 1–17; Antje Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms in Global International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

¹¹e.g., Roger Mac Ginty, 'Hybrid Peace: The Interaction Between Top-Down and Bottom-Up Peace', *Security Dialogue* 41, no. 4 (2010): 391–412; Oliver P. Richmond and Audra Mitchell, *Hybrid Forms of Peace from Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Björkdahl et al., *Peacebuilding and Friction: Global and Local Encounters in Post Conflict Societies* (London: Routledge, 2016); Shahar Hameiri and Lee Jones, 'Beyond Hybridity to the Politics of Scale: International Intervention and "Local" politics', *Development and Change* 48, no. 1 (2017): 54–77; Gearoid Millar, 'Toward a trans-scalar peace system: Challenging complex global conflict systems', *Peacebuilding* 8, no. 3 (2020): 261–278.

¹²Sara Hellmüller, *The Interaction between Local and International Peacebuilding Actors: Partners for Peace*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Lisbeth Zimmermann, 'More for Less: The Interactive Translation of Global Norms in Postconflict Guatemala', *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (2017): 774–785.

attempt at norm creation, uncovering the motivation behind this attempt and the interconnectedness between ‘the international’ and ‘the local’. With an emphasis on local ownership, we then detail the processes of knowledge production and norm initiation as well as their immediate outcomes, i.e. the emergence of the ‘Dialogue Standards’. Finally, we concentrate on the cleavages between various groups of actors involved in norm negotiation and implementation that became apparent on the way to the ‘Dialogue Standards’ and which in the end explain their non-appropriation by the broader stakeholder community. The conclusion zooms out to our main findings.

Analytical framework and main arguments

This article feeds into critical constructivist studies in norm creation, interpretation, and change.¹³ In contrast to early constructivist approaches to norm emergence and diffusion, which held the content and meaning of norms as static,¹⁴ later critical constructivist scholarship accounts for the possibility of norm alteration or adaptation in the process of cross-border norm transfer.¹⁵ However, even the later studies are dominated by analyses of how internationally accepted and externally promoted norms are appropriated, interpreted, contested, or rejected by local actors.¹⁶ The role of the latter is thus often reduced to one of a receiver or contestor of norms that have been formulated elsewhere. Rooted in colonial legacies of academic knowledge production in international relations,¹⁷ this trend is prevalent in the studies of norm transfer and change in the context of the Global South as well as Eastern Europe.

In this article, we seek to reverse this trend by examining how local actors have attempted to become norm creators in their own right. Being aware of ambiguity of the term ‘local’ and often blurred boundaries between the domestic and the external in transnational norm advocacy and peacebuilding networks,¹⁸ we focus on the local being

¹³ Amitav Acharya, ‘How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism’, *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (2004): 239–257; Wayne Sandholtz and Kendall W. Stiles, *International Norms and Cycles of Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Antje Wiener, ‘Enacting Meaning-In-Use: Qualitative Research on Norms and International Relations’, *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 1 (2009): 175–193; Mona Lena Krook and Jacqui True, ‘Rethinking the Life Cycles of International Norms: The United Nations and the Global Promotion of Gender Equality’, *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 1 (2012): 103–127; Matthias Hofferberth and Christian Weber, ‘Lost in Translation: A Critique of Constructivist Norm Research’, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 18, no. 1 (2015): 75–103.

¹⁴ e.g., Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, ‘International Norm Dynamics and Political Change’, *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887–917; Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998); Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁵ For an overview, see Sara Hellmüller, ‘Meaning-Making in Peace-Making: The Inclusion Norm at the Interplay between the United Nations and Civil Society in the Syrian Peace Process’, *Swiss Political Science Review* 26, no. 4 (2020): 407–428.

¹⁶ Keiko Hirata, ‘Beached Whales: Examining Japan’s Rejection of an International Norm’, *Social Science Japan Journal* 7, no. 2 (2004): 177–197; Nicola P. Contessi, ‘Multilateralism, Intervention and Norm Contestation: China’s Stance on Darfur in the UN Security Council’, *Security Dialogue* 41, no. 3 (2010): 323–344; Nicole Deitelhoff and Lisbeth Zimmermann, ‘Things We Lost in the Fire: How Different Types of Contestation Affect the Robustness of International Norms’, *International Studies Review* 54, no. 3 (2018): 51–76.

¹⁷ Jasmine K. Gani and Jenna Marshall, ‘The Impact of Colonialism on Policy and Knowledge Production in International Relations’, *International Affairs* 98, no. 1 (2022): 5–22.

¹⁸ Stefanie Kappler, ‘The Dynamic Local: Delocalisation and (Re-)localisation in the Search for Peacebuilding Identity’, *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015): 875–889; Roland Kostić, ‘Shadow Peacebuilders and Diplomatic Counterinsurgencies: Informal Networks, Knowledge Production and the Art of Policy-shaping’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11, no. 1 (2017): 120–139; Diane Stone, ‘Transnational Policy Entrepreneurs and the Cultivation of Influence: Individuals, Organizations and Their Networks’, *Globalizations* 16, no. 7 (2019): 1128–1144.

manifested in civil society organisations and individuals affiliated with them, who explicitly and consistently positioned themselves as insiders to Ukraine and whose epistemic stances and activities were grounded domestically.¹⁹ When using the terms ‘international’ or ‘external’ actors, we refer to intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, donor agencies and private initiatives originating from outside Ukraine, acting on behalf of ‘the international community’, and bringing in extrinsic (to the Ukrainian context) knowledge, norms and practices.²⁰

In developing our argument, we follow the postulate by Antje Wiener that ‘a norm lies in the practice, and practice is always norm-generative’.²¹ In turn, practices are defined here in line with Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot as ‘socially meaningful patterns of action which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world’.²² If practices are norm-generative, in the context where multiple actors are involved in performing and promoting competing patterns of action, the question of whose practices are more socially meaningful becomes highly relevant.²³ In the absence of commonly accepted rules of conduct, the competition of practices may result in the creation of new norms from the patterns of action that are seen as more socially meaningful by the affected stakeholders. Yet, the latter may not only act as validators of the social meaningfulness of practices – they may also become norm entrepreneurs by pooling together practice-related knowledge and mobilising ideational and material support from other actors involved to prompt norm creation.²⁴

We argue that precisely this mechanism is at work in the case of the Ukrainian dialogue practitioners’ attempt to create ‘Dialogue Standards’. In search of suitable dialogue approaches pertaining to their local needs, Ukrainian practitioners questioned and renegotiated the competing international practices brought in by external actors. In doing so, they produced both conceptual knowledge to advance a commonly accepted meaning of dialogue as well as instrumental knowledge to put forward regulatory norms of dialogue conduct for those implementing the dialogue initiatives and – most notably – for those funding them.²⁵ However, these processes of knowledge production, practice (re)negotiation, and norm initiation did not guarantee the appropriation of the newly emerged norms by the broader stakeholder communities (including donors and dialogue project implementors).

Based on our empirical observations, we suggest that the constitution of new norms largely depends on a mismatch between the content of norms and prior practices. If an

¹⁹Cf. Oliver P. Richmond, ‘Beyond Local Ownership in the Architecture of International Peacebuilding’, *Ethnopolitics* 11, no. 4 (2012): 354–375.

²⁰On the use of the term ‘The International Community’, see Berit Bliesemann de Guevara and Florian P. Kühn, ‘“The International Community Needs to Act”: Loose Use and Empty Signalling of a Hackneyed Concept’, *International Peacekeeping* 18, no. 2, (2011): 135–151.

²¹Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms*, 1.

²²Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, ‘Introduction and framework’, in *International Practices*, ed. Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3–35.

²³Cf. Wiener, *Contestation and Constitution of Norms*, 1.

²⁴Cass R. Sunstein, ‘Social Norms and Social Roles’, *Columbia Law Review* 96, no. 4 (1996): 903–968.

²⁵Here, the distinction between conceptual and instrumental knowledge is based on a literature review by Isabel Walter, Sandra Nutley, and Huw Davies, who separate conceptual use of research, ‘which brings about changes in levels of understanding’ from instrumental use of knowledge, ‘which results in changes in practice’. See Isabel Walter, Sandra Nutley, and Huw Davies, ‘Research Impact: A Cross Sector Literature Review’, in *Research Unit for Research Utilisation* (St. Andrews: University of St. Andrews, 2003), 11.

attempt at norm creation is driven by ideational motives (e.g. search for an optimal approach to conduct dialogue as a means of peacebuilding), the emerging norms have a chance to take root. Yet, they may not reflect the stakeholder rationales behind previously established practices. Facing cleavages between different groups of actors involved and in the absence of follow-through mechanisms, the stakeholders may stick with the old patterns instead of embracing the new norms, because the latter requires more effort and resources. Thus, if norm initiation relies solely on voluntary commitments and is not accompanied by mechanisms promoting the newly created norms, it may not translate into norm appropriation by the affected stakeholders.

In what follows, we demonstrate that this is exactly what happened in the case of the Ukrainian practitioners' attempt to create 'Dialogue Standards'. Simultaneously, we show that the cleavages that emerged along the way were not necessarily *between* the local and international stakeholder communities but also *among* members of each group, depending on their professional identities and issues at stake. While the production of knowledge about dialogue in the process of norm initiation was characterised by complex interconnectedness of local practitioner knowledge and conceptions of dialogue brought in by external actors, the later stages of norm negotiation and eventual non-appropriation were marked by frictions along the local-international divide as well as between divergent 'communities of practice'.²⁶ By showcasing these nuances, this article adds to the critical scholarship that argues for the need to account for local ownership in peacebuilding processes and simultaneously questions a strictly binary approach of 'the local vs. the international' in peace research.²⁷ Beyond the norms literature, we thus also seek to contribute to the knowledge-focused explorations of conflicts and interventions.²⁸

The multiplicity of the meanings of dialogue amid extensive international engagement in Ukraine

Practical knowledge about dialogue as a tool of conflict transformation and peacebuilding penetrated Ukraine after 2014 via three distinct channels. Two of them were marked by institutional competition between the OSCE Project Co-ordinator's office in Ukraine (OSCE PCU), and the United Nations (UN), specifically the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Both international organisations were keen to support dialogue in the early days of the conflict and interacted with the same group of local mediators and dialogue facilitators.

The OSCE began convening dialogue platforms at national and sub-national levels at a very early stage of the conflict. The organisation's long-term field presence, the OSCE PCU, established in 1999, was particularly instrumental to this end. Through the PCU,

²⁶Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning, and identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁷Ole Jacob Sending, 'Why Peacebuilders Fail to Secure Ownership and be Sensitive to Context', *Security in Practice* 1st ed. (NUPI Working Paper, 2009), 75; Annika Björkdahl and Kristine Höglund, 'Precarious Peacebuilding: Friction in Global – Local Encounters', *Peacebuilding* 1, no. 3 (2013): 289–299; Roger Mac Ginty, 'Where Is the Local? Critical Localism and Peacebuilding', *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015): 840–856; Sara Hellmüller, *Partners for Peace: The Interaction between Local and International Peacebuilding Actors* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

²⁸Berit Bliesemann de Guevara and Roland Kostić, 'Knowledge Production In/About Conflict and Intervention: Finding "Facts", Telling "Truth"', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11, no. 1 (2017): 1–20.

the OSCE attempted to convene a National Dialogue between the Ukrainian government, Donetsk and Luhansk regional leaders, and other stakeholders in March 2014. When this attempt failed to prevent conflict escalation, the PCU 're-branded and reinvigorated' the initiative 'by means of supporting a variety of smaller scale, but more solid dialogue and mediation formats', resulting in what became known as 'a precursor to a future National Dialogue'.²⁹ The initial idea of a national dialogue promoted by the OSCE was thus transformed into a comprehensive multi-year initiative called the 'National Dialogue for Reforms, Justice and Development' (2015–2016), and later the 'Dialogue for Reform and Social Cohesion' (2016–2017). These projects offered major support for Ukrainian dialogue practitioners in developing their professional identities and practices of dialogues.

The OSCE PCU was also the first to provide methodological guidance about dialogue to Ukrainian mediators. In December 2014, the first-ever conference on dialogue in Ukraine was convened by the OSCE PCU and Odesa Regional Group of Mediation, bringing dialogue practitioners from the Balkans, Israel, Germany, and Norway to Odesa. Following the conference, the experts from the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue in Lillehammer promoted the Nansen model of dialogue in Ukraine,³⁰ emphasising such dialogue characteristics as coexistence, movement, encountering the 'other', creativity and flexibility, and multigenerational (i.e. taking place for decades) processes.³¹

In parallel to the OSCE's efforts, the UNDP funded a Dialogue Support Platform for Ukraine that was implemented by a Brussels-based international non-governmental organisation (INGO), MediatEUR, in 2015. Together with the office of the UN Peace and Development Advisor, MediatEUR developed a web platform to map dialogue-related projects in the country and supported the capacity-building of local mediators and dialogue facilitators. Essentially, the platform targeted the same group of Ukrainian facilitators as were already involved in the OSCE PCU's dialogue activities. The goal of the UNDP platform was to 'help Ukrainian dialogue actors to connect with each other, explore their needs, and communicate with national actors and the international community, utilising interactive, modern dialogue technologies'.³² In terms of dialogue expertise, MediatEUR brought in a more pragmatic approach to dialogue than that of the Nansen Center mentioned above and disseminated knowledge about peace infrastructure and participatory dialogue.³³

Apart from the OSCE and the UN, who during 2015–2018 invested in the capacity-building of the local dialogue facilitators, there was another notable private initiative that brought the ideas of non-violent communication (NVC) to Ukraine. In autumn 2014, NVC trainer Duk Durscherer gave a series of workshops to several groups of local activists and mediators.³⁴ Since then, the book by the NVC founder, Marshall Rosenberg, has been translated into Ukrainian,³⁵ and many NVC trainers have come

²⁹Natalia Mirimanova, 'National Dialogue in Ukraine: You Must Spoil before You Spin', *Security and Human Rights* 27, no. 3–4 (2016): 358–380.

³⁰Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue, 'Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue Activities in Ukraine 2014–2016', 2017, <https://nansen.peace.no/download/ncpd-activities-ukraine-2014-2016/> (last modified August 10, 2021).

³¹Feller and Ryan, 'Definition, Necessity, and Nansen', 351–380.

³²mediateur and UNDP, 'Building a Dialogue Support Platform in Ukraine: Challenges and Opportunities', 2015, https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/DSPU_July%202015%20_Report_EN%20%281%29.pdf (last modified July 1, 2015), 5.

³³United Nations, *Participatory Dialogue: Towards a Stable, Safe and Just Society for All*, 2007, [https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/publications/prtcprty_dlg\(full_version\).pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/publications/prtcprty_dlg(full_version).pdf).

to advocate for such non-violent conflict transformation. In 2019, a local NGO launched the School of Peace Engineers to promote dialogue training in the NVC tradition.³⁶

The three entry points for dialogue in Ukraine – the OSCE, UN, and private NVC initiatives – have brought a wealth of practical dialogue techniques and a strong value basis emphasising the role of empathy and listening in dialogue, respect of other people's views and diversity, need to nurture trust and understanding between people, and an overall culture of dialogue. Yet, this engagement also created conceptual confusion among dialogue practitioners. In the context of the intensified international presence in Ukraine, it became clear that there was no common understanding of what dialogue was or how it was to be conducted among the various actors involved in the implementation and support of the dialogue initiatives.³⁷

In their first report, the UNDP Dialogue Support Platform summarised the related debate of local practitioners as follows:

To some, dialogue is 'the ability to talk and listen in a safe place' and 'empathic interaction between people who are capable of listening and speaking to each other properly'; yet to others, it may be 'to help with strategic planning, understanding community barriers, [...] and] joint action-planning'.³⁸

The multitude of approaches became further evident in a survey-based study of dialogue initiatives prepared by Tatiana Kyselova in 2018, which identified 66 organisations that had conducted 157 facilitated dialogues between 2014 and 2018.³⁹ The dialogues received financial and/or technical support from the OSCE PCU, the UNDP, the European Union (EU), the national development agencies of several European countries, and a number of INGOs. In addition to these dialogue initiatives, there were hundreds of one-time events held by Ukrainian and international organisations, which were labelled and promoted as dialogues but in fact resembled roundtables or conferences rather than professionally facilitated dialogue processes.

Searching for guidance regarding what to consider appropriate dialogue for the Ukrainian context, Ukrainian dialogue practitioners turned to the OSCE. In response, OSCE experts from the Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna suggested a definition from the OSCE's 'Reference Guide on Mediation and Dialogue Facilitation'. However, this definition basically equates dialogue with mediation:

The key features of dialogue facilitation are the same as for mediation. However, dialogue facilitation represents a distinct approach insofar as it is a more open-ended communication process between conflict parties in order to foster mutual understanding, recognition, empathy and trust.⁴⁰

³⁴National Dialogue, 'The International Center for Nonviolent Communication (in Ukrainian)', 2015, <http://ndialog.org.ua/spysok-dialogovykh-initsiatyv/mizhnarodnyy-tsentr-z-nenasylnoytskoyi-komunikatsiyi-ssha> (last modified January 22, 2024).

³⁵Marshall Rosenberg, *Non-Violent Communication*, trans. into Ukrainian (Kharkiv: Ranok, 2020), <https://www.yakaboo.ua/nenasil-nic-ke-spilkuvannja-mova-zhittja.html>.

³⁶Dignity Space, 'Peace Engineers School', 2019, <https://peaceengineers.com/en/> (last modified January 22, 2024).

³⁷mediateur and UNDP, 'Building a Dialogue Support Platform'.

³⁸mediateur and UNDP, 'Building a Dialogue Support Platform', 9.

³⁹Kyselova, 'Understanding Dialogue in Ukraine', 22.

⁴⁰OSCE, *Mediation and Dialogue Facilitation in the OSCE: Reference Guide* (Vienna: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2014), <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/0/126646.pdf>, 10.

This definition was seen as not suitable for the Ukrainian context wherein mediation was still in its formative stage and could not serve as a threshold for defining dialogue. Similarly, the UN's approaches could not satisfy the demand for conceptual clarity. Indeed, the UNDP intended to include all public and semi-public events bearing the name 'dialogue' in its Dialogue Support Platform's mapping exercise, which was strongly opposed by professional dialogue facilitators. However, the latter also could not come to an immediate consensus as to what dialogue is and is not. Amid the multitude of competing approaches, the lack of a conceptual mainstream created uncertainties both for local practitioners and international donors providing funds for dialogue projects. This in turn translated into the need for a more concrete delineation of the concept of dialogue, thus preparing the ground for norm initiation.

An attempt at norm creation: local actors in the driving seat

Given the inability of international experts and donors to provide a satisfactory conceptual framework for dialogue, local practitioners took the task into their own hands. In 2018, a Ukrainian NGO, the Institute for Peace and Common Ground (IPCG), drafted the first document that aimed to define what constitutes dialogue. The document was entitled 'Dialogue Standards of Practice and Memorandum of Understanding'.⁴¹ The document gave a long description of dialogue as 'an exchange of senses, managed communication, transformative process aimed at understanding and acceptance, balance of intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual elements, opportunities for self-reflection and learning about self, empathy, strengthening of social fabric, improved communication skills, joint conflict analysis and joint actions'. The document also listed the conditions for successful dialogue, types of dialogue and recommendations as to design, organisation, and facilitation of dialogue. The attached Memorandum called for dialogue practitioners and funding organisations to sign the document and to adhere to provisions enshrined therein. When the IPCG revealed the document to other organisations and dialogue facilitators, it was seen by many practitioners as too academic, too vague and too long to be feasibly adopted by consensus of the professional community as common standards. Yet, the idea took root and the IPCG secured modest financial support from the OSCE PCU to launch a new process of drafting the 'Dialogue Standards', which included practitioners from NGOs following different dialogue traditions.

During August – November 2018, the IPCG set up a working group consisting of 13 dialogue facilitators and convened four meetings to develop the new document. Based on the previous experience, the working group decided to keep the document as short as possible, including only the absolutely essential points – definitions and the major principles of dialogue.

Facing the absence of universal approaches to dialogue and commonly acceptable definitions in existing international dialogue practices, Ukrainian practitioners involved in the formulation of the 'Dialogue Standards' strongly relied on their own experiences of conducting dialogue in the country.⁴² Yet, it would be incorrect to say that international

⁴¹Institute for Peace and Common Ground, 'Dialogue Standards of Practice and Memorandum of Understanding' (draft, on file with the authors, 2017).

practices did not influence the outcome. The structure of the ‘Dialogue Standards’ was inspired by the approach of the UN ‘Guidance for Effective Mediation’ – an international document that had also been developed by professional mediators who represented NGOs from many countries coming together as a coalition of the Mediation Support Network.⁴³ The content of the norms on neutrality and impartiality, as well as inclusiveness in dialogue, were also strongly influenced by the UN’s ‘Guidance’. Furthermore, early drafts of the ‘Dialogue Standards’ also expressly stated that the document relied on a number of non-Ukrainian academic sources, notably *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* by Lederach⁴⁴ and *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects* by Lisa Schirch and David Camp.⁴⁵ Thus, the understanding of dialogue put forward in the ‘Dialogue Standards’ was crystallised in a continuous exchange of ideas between local and international practitioners through trainings and personal communication, as well as the inflow of English-language books, training manuals, and other publications. The meaning of ‘Ukrainian dialogue’ evolved in recurrent discussions between local and international practitioners at various public and closed fora established by the OSCE, UN agencies, EU, and a dozen mediation and peacebuilding INGOs active in Ukraine.

Ultimately, the new document, entitled ‘Dialogue Standards: Definitions and Principles’, was officially presented to wider professional circles of mediators and dialogue facilitators at the 2018 OSCE Dialogue Conference. The document defines dialogue as ‘a specially prepared group process that takes place with the help of a facilitator, aims to improve the understanding/relationships between participants, and may also have the goal of making decisions about common actions or the resolution of a conflict in a way that provides equal opportunities for the participants of the meeting to express their opinions’.⁴⁶

The document further lists and explains eleven principles to be followed in a facilitated dialogue, which can be grouped around four norms regulating the conduct of any dialogue process. We summarise these principles and norms in Table 1.

Thus, the idea of the ‘Dialogue Standards’ was not only to find a commonly accepted understanding of what dialogue is but also to establish guiding principles for conducting and funding dialogue. Hence, local actors, who were the driving force behind this process, went beyond a mere attempt at producing common conceptual knowledge. Their aim was to put this knowledge to work and create norms to be followed in practice by domestic dialogue practitioners and international donors aiding dialogue projects.

From norm initiation to norm (non-)appropriation: main cleavages between and among actor groups

The ‘Dialogue Standards’ were meant by the drafters to be a ‘living document’, requiring constant adaptation and improvement. As the document was never seen as an end-point but rather as an ongoing process, it was not possible to secure unanimous support and

⁴²Working group discussion notes (on file with the authors, 2018).

⁴³Mediation Support Network, ‘Mediation Support Network: About Us’, <https://mediationsupportnetwork.net/>.

⁴⁴John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation: Clear Articulation of the Guiding Principles by A Pioneer In the Field* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003).

⁴⁵Lisa Schirch and David Camp, *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects: A Practical Hands-On Guide* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2007).

⁴⁶Institute for Peace and Common Ground, ‘Dialogue Standards’, 5.

Table 1. ‘Dialogue standards’: norms and principles of dialogue conduct.

Regulatory norms	Principles listed in the ‘Dialogue Standards’
Dialogue is an open, egalitarian process that offers a safe place for a diversity of opinions	Voluntary participation of both participants and facilitator(s) Self-determination of dialogue participants Equal opportunities for each dialogue participant to have their say Participant communication during the dialogue process Relative balance of power in the dialogue process Confidentiality of the dialogue process The key role of the facilitator in guiding the dialogue process
Dialogue is facilitated by a trained professional	Inclusiveness of the dialogue process
Dialogue includes all interested stakeholders and marginalised groups	The role of the dialogue organisers/convenors Awareness and responsibility of the organisers and facilitators
Dialogue aims to produce impact	Ensuring systemic and structured dialogue processes

Authors’ compilation based on the ‘Dialogue Standards: Definitions and Principles’.

signatures for the document from all representatives of the community of professional facilitators. Nevertheless, despite the need for improvement, facilitators decided to make the document public, and it became a reference point for further developments in this area including research projects and programmatic planning.⁴⁷

Some propositions of the ‘Standards’ were readily embraced by dialogue practitioners and the broader community of stakeholders – both local and international. First, this included the definition of dialogue put forward in the document, which – in addition to dialogues oriented towards relationships and values (or ‘existential’ matters) – introduced problem-solving dialogues (or those focusing on ‘technical’ matters). Similarly, the regulatory norm of dialogue as an open egalitarian process offering a safe place for a diversity of opinions was welcomed by local and international actors alike. The positive reception of these propositions by the stakeholder community can be explained by their connectedness to the practices that were already widespread in Ukraine. For instance, the suggested definition of dialogue legitimised the problem-solving orientation of the majority of dialogue projects conducted in Ukraine during that period. During 2014–2018, 90% of dialogues were intra-Ukrainian dialogues (with participants solely from the territories controlled by the Ukrainian government) that focused on solving community problems, implementing reforms, and involving civil society in governmental decision-making, as well as issues of human rights and inclusivity, among others.⁴⁸ Only a minor part of the dialogues (so-called ‘existential’ dialogues) dealt with issues that did not require any specific outcomes or agreements – different narratives of the past and future of Ukraine, different political opinions, inter-religious dialogue, geopolitical approaches to the current war, etc.

⁴⁷Academic research since then has relied on the definition of dialogue provided in the ‘Dialogue Standards’; see, for example, Anne Holper and Tetiana Kyselova, ‘Inclusion Dilemmas in Peacebuilding and Dialogues in Ukraine’, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 27, no. 3 (2021): 475. Also, the approaches to dialogue crystallised in the ‘Dialogue Standards’ were presented at the internal strategic planning meetings of the OSCE PCU, Kurve Wustrow Foundation, and GiZ CPS and were further used to guide their programmes in Ukraine.

⁴⁸Kyselova, ‘Understanding Dialogue in Ukraine’.

Despite the overall positive reception of the document, some norms promoted in the ‘Dialogue Standards’ did not find an easy consensus and provoked tensions between various groups of actors involved. These particularly concerned the three latter regulatory norms – professional facilitation, inclusiveness, and impact-orientation. In what follows, we illuminate the cleavages that emerged among the different stakeholder groups during the processes of norm formulation and implementation. Notably, these cleavages did not always follow the local vs. the international divide. Instead, frictions emerged also *among* members of each group, depending on their professional identities and issues at stake (see Figure 1).

Professional facilitation – cleavages between trained dialogue facilitators and non-trained dialogue practitioners

In April 2016, the OSCE Mediation Support Team of the Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna organised a Brainstorming session on dialogue in Ukraine, inviting renowned international experts, local dialogue facilitators, civil society actors in Eastern Ukraine, and academics, including one of the authors of this article.⁴⁹ During discussions of emerging professionalised dialogue facilitation practices on the ground, two representatives of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission working in Ukraine objected to the need for the professional facilitation of dialogue and suggested that there were thousands of dialogues along the line of contact happening without any third-party involvement. This

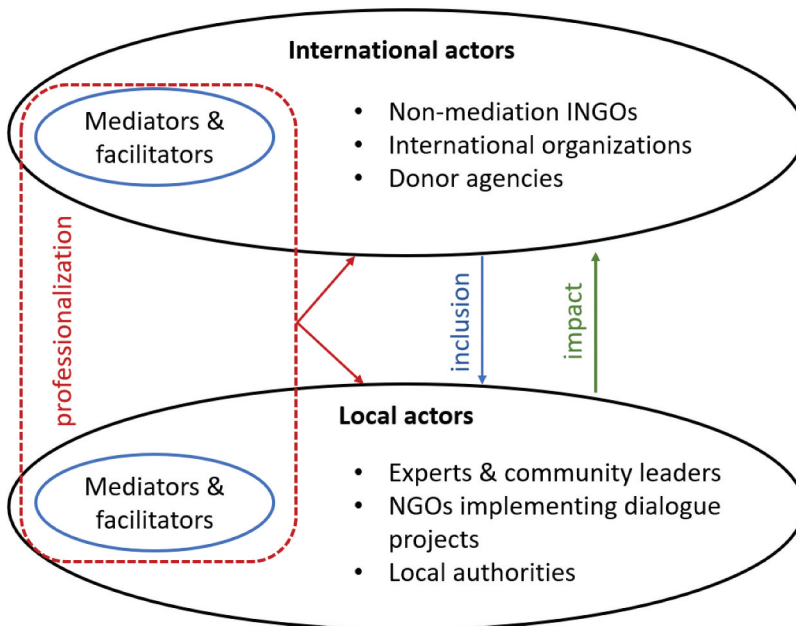


Figure 1. Cleavages in the dialogue stakeholder community. Authors’ compilation.

⁴⁹OSCE, ‘OSCE documents and publications on mediation’, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/125143?page=1>.

anecdote illustrates the professional/lay divide regarding dialogue and mediation inside international multilateral organisations.⁵⁰

The quest for professionalisation in dialogue has also remained ambiguous in research. For example, some definitions of dialogue refer to a 'facilitated process',⁵¹ yet many others ignore such a characteristic.⁵² Similarly, while the normative framework as to peace mediation clearly states that mediation is a specialised and professionalised activity,⁵³ there are no normative frameworks requiring the professional facilitation of dialogues.

The Ukrainian landscape has mirrored the above ambiguities. In the first years of the war, most international donors active in Ukraine lacked experts in armed conflict and mediation, and it took them several years to properly staff their Ukrainian offices; moreover, the inflow of professionalised expertise remained uneven. This prompted the question of whether to require professional training for local implementers or to allow any civil society activist to do the job of an implementer. Consequently, many actors did not differentiate facilitated dialogue from other formats of public encounters, such as conferences, meetings, debates, talk-shows, and unfacilitated online conversations.

Similar tensions were observed among Ukrainian actors. In response to the donors' calls for more dialogues since 2014, many Ukrainian NGOs applied for grants in this field without having professional expertise in dialogue facilitation. They challenged dialogue facilitators for allegedly monopolising the field and becoming the ultimate judges about 'which dialogue is the correct one' or 'whose dialogue is more dialogical'.

In an effort to protect an emerging professional identity, Ukrainian dialogue facilitators relied on their links to international organisations. In 2017, they cooperated with Ambassador Vaidotas Verba, then the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine, who published an article entitled 'Why You Need a Professional Facilitation for a Productive Dialogue' in a leading national media outlet.⁵⁴ Drawing on the prior experiences of dialogues on decentralisation and other reforms with the PCU's financial support, Ukrainian dialogue facilitators developed a manual on dialogues, as well as several online educational courses. All these activities were meant to increase the quality of dialogues and to convey the image of dialogue as a professional activity.

In the drafting process for the 'Dialogue Standards', Ukrainian facilitators were unanimous in their desire to highlight the professional nature of facilitation and to enhance their professional status. The 'Dialogue Standards' included the need for third-party facilitation in the definition of dialogue and thus delegitimised unfacilitated

⁵⁰Marko Lehti, *The Era of Private Peacemakers: A New Dialogic Approach to Mediation* (Springer, 2018); Anne Holper and Lars Kirchhoff, 'Rethinking the Professionalization of Peace Mediation', *Rethinking Peace Mediation: Challenges of Contemporary Peacemaking Practice* (2021): 355.

⁵¹For example, USIP in its definition of dialogue stressed that it is a facilitated conflict-intervention process, see Jack Froude and Michael Zanchelli, 'What Works in Facilitated Dialogue Projects?', USIP Special Report 407, 2017, <https://communitiesintransition.com/sites/default/files/17.07.21%20USIP%20-%20what%20works%20in%20facilitated%20dialogue%20projects.pdf> (last modified June 2017), 2.

⁵²Feller and Ryan, 'Definition, Necessity, and Nansen', 351–380.

⁵³United Nations Peacemaker, *Guidance for Effective Mediation*, 2012, 4.

⁵⁴Vaidotas Verba, 'Why You Need a Professional Facilitation for a Productive Dialogue', *Ukrainska Pravda*: Jittia, <http://life.pravda.com.ua/columns/2017/10/24/227093/>, (accessed October 24, 2017).

processes. Furthermore, the ‘Standards’ offered a separate definition of the facilitator⁵⁵ and explained her role as expressly requiring specialised training and a sophisticated set of skills including conflict analysis, group facilitation, conflict-sensitivity, and Do-No-Harm analysis.⁵⁶

The reception of the move towards the professionalisation of dialogue was not very warm within Ukrainian civil society however, as it rendered many ‘dialogue projects’ improper. Therefore, some NGOs continued their projects without professional dialogue facilitators, whereas others began hiring professional facilitators as contractors to facilitate dialogues while retaining overall ownership of the projects under the name of the NGO.

The reception of the professionalisation norm by the international community working in Ukraine was also ambiguous. Those international actors who themselves were professional mediators or facilitators supported it. Others, who had only distant understanding of professional dialogue and mediation issues (diplomats, managers of international projects, administrative staff of donor agencies) remained silent. For them, implementing the professionalisation norm required certain financial investments to change the existing approaches – for example, hiring professional local facilitators and treating them as counterparts; supporting dialogue training, mentoring, and the supervision of trained professionals; and ultimately paying them as professionals of a higher rank. Hence, the appropriation of the professionalisation norm initiated by Ukrainian facilitators in the ‘Dialogue Standards’ depended upon the professional identity of the actors rather than the local/international dimension of their identities.

Inclusiveness of dialogue – cleavages between international and local interpretations

Although there are no universally accepted international normative frameworks that guide dialogue processes, a specific format of dialogues – dialogues that connect to political negotiations or peace mediation at higher levels – have become a focus of regulation by the UN and other international organisations. Inclusiveness, as defined in the UN’s ‘Guidance for Effective Mediation’, is important both for mediation and dialogue in this context and ‘refers to the extent and manner in which the views and needs of conflict parties and other stakeholders are represented and integrated into the process and outcome of a mediation effort’.⁵⁷ The concept of inclusion in peacebuilding emerged as a response to ‘the realisation that the social, economic or political exclusion of large segments of society is a key driver of intra-state wars’, prompting the peacebuilding field ‘to search for the right formula to support inclusive and participatory conflict transformation mechanisms and post-

⁵⁵ A facilitator is a person (or several people) who enables constructive interaction between participants in the dialogue process (leads a dialogue process, offers certain ground rules and manages the consent of participants to these rules, gives the floor to participants, keeps track of time, contributes to the constructive management of challenging moments, etc.), which allows for an effective discussion of complex problems or controversial situations; Institute for Peace and Common Ground, ‘Dialogue Standards’, 6.

⁵⁶ Institute for Peace and Common Ground, ‘Dialogue Standards’, 8 (Principle 2.4).

⁵⁷ United Nations Peacemaker, *Guidance for Effective Mediation*, 2012, 11.

war state-society relations'.⁵⁸ Normative frameworks for inclusion have quickly been established.⁵⁹ According to Paffenholz and Zartman, 'the once neglected topic has become the fashion of our times – the "inclusion hype"'.⁶⁰

Both international and local dialogue facilitators in Ukraine agreed that dialogues should be inclusive. As stated in the 'Dialogue Standards', dialogues should include 'participants with a wide range of experiences representing different groups of the population, including the vulnerable and those experiencing discrimination, for example – minorities, women, minors, people with political views that are different from the mainstream, etc'.⁶¹ However, the differences were in the interpretation of the norm of inclusion. International donors never questioned inclusion as a straightforward internationally recognised norm, but Ukrainian dialogue facilitators voted for a more nuanced view of inclusion.

First, the working group convened to draft the 'Dialogue Standards' recognised that the full inclusion of everyone in dialogue is rarely practically achievable and instead inclusion represents a kind of continuum wherein the inclusion efforts of dialogue convenors and facilitators matter. In their 'Dialogue Standards', they acknowledged that 'if representation of a full spectrum of opinions on the subject of a particular dialogue is not possible, dialogue can take place with limited representation but its benefits will be significantly reduced. Such a scenario requires special skills of a facilitator allowing for the absent views and experiences to be included into the discussion'.⁶² Thereby, inclusion was not seen as a strict normative requirement but rather as a desirable characteristic of dialogue.

Second, all categories mentioned in the 'Dialogue Standards' as targets of inclusion were equally relevant in the eyes of international actors, but not all of them were equally treated by Ukrainian actors – both facilitation professionals and general civil society. The 'Standards' name minorities, women, minors, and people with political views that are different from the mainstream. The inclusion of minorities based on ethnic, religious, and sexual characteristics were not questioned by the Ukrainian facilitators. For example, they convened and facilitated several dialogue processes aimed at the inclusion of Hungarian⁶³ and Roma minorities into community life and nation-level policymaking. However, when it came to Ukrainian citizens with non-mainstream political views – in most cases, this meant people with pro-Russian political positions – it became difficult. According to previous studies, most dialogues convened in Ukraine between 2014 and 2018 did not include this category of people.⁶⁴

⁵⁸Veronique Dudouet and Stina Lundström, 'Post-War Political Settlements: From Participatory Transition Processes to Inclusive State-Building and Governance', Research Report, (Berlin: Bergh of Foundation, 2016), <https://berghof-foundation.org/library/post-war-political-settlements-from-participatory-transition-processes-to-inclusive-state-building-and-governance> (last modified 2016), 3.

⁵⁹Normative frameworks of inclusion in peace processes derive from the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 16, the UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the UNSC Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, the Prevention Agenda including the UN Sustaining Peace Resolutions, and other documents.

⁶⁰Thania Paffenholz and I. William Zartman, 'Inclusive Peace Negotiations – From a Neglected Topic to New Hype', *International Negotiation* 24, no. 1 (2019): 2.

⁶¹Institute for Peace and Common Ground, 'Dialogue Standards', 8 (Principle 2.3).

⁶²Institute for Peace and Common Ground, 'Dialogue Standards', 8 (Principle 2.3).

⁶³Institute for Peace and Common Ground, 'Dialogues in Local Communities: Recommendations for Local Government', 2018, <https://issuu.com/ipcg/docs/imip-dialogue-print> (last modified 2018), 17.

⁶⁴Anne Holper and Tetiana Kyselova, 'Inclusion Dilemmas in Peacebuilding and Dialogues in Ukraine', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 27, no. 3 (2021): 475–485.

The reasons for this non-inclusion were rooted in the complex and diverse ethnic and civic identities of Ukrainian citizens as well as caution related to the omnipresent threat of Russian propaganda that used the defence of Russian-speaking Ukrainians as a pretext for armed aggression against Ukraine.⁶⁵ Therefore, several Ukrainian dialogue facilitators opposed the inclusion of this group of people as participants in dialogues for the fear of them being manipulated by Russian propaganda or even being straightforward ‘Kremlin agents’.⁶⁶

Thus, the norm of inclusiveness was partly rejected by Ukrainian actors (both professional dialogue facilitators as well as dialogue project implementers) through a restricted interpretation and de facto exclusion of people with pro-Russian political views from dialogues in Ukraine. At the same time, international actors supported this norm with no exceptions, following the UN documents. This cleavage remained unresolved throughout 2014–2021 and is even more acute now, after the start of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine in February 2022.

Impact orientation – cleavages between declared aims and existing practices

The final cleavage in norm negotiation related to the practical issues of planning and implementing dialogue projects in Ukraine. Although international donors agreed on the need for a long-term comprehensive and holistic approach to dialogues with proper conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity inbuilt in every step,⁶⁷ the reality of project implementation on the ground was different. The field was dominated by short-term (often a maximum of six months) dialogue projects. In the case of longer-term initiatives, the funding often came late, and the reporting was requested to be completed earlier, which decreased the actual implementation period. Ukrainian dialogue facilitators and conflict experts were not involved in the planning of donor programmes, and as a result, the projects were often detached from the local context. Frequently, donors did not understand the importance of the preparatory phases of dialogues that required a lot of time, effort, and resources. Consequently, they did not include funding for preparatory phases in the dialogue processes. Similarly, many dialogue projects lacked post-dialogue support that made the idea of a dialogue’s impact on the wider socio-political environment illusive. Overall, the support for dialogues in Ukraine remained a piecemeal effort aided by various international donors that sometimes duplicated the same work in selected local communities in the East, did not coordinate with each other, and had limited impact.⁶⁸ Given these shortcomings, Ukrainian dialogue practitioners were keen on including the norm of impact-orientation in the ‘Dialogue Standards’.

Hence, one of the formulated principles expressly identified dialogue organisers and convenors as separate from dialogue facilitators, explaining their role and stipulating

⁶⁵Holper and Kyselova, ‘Inclusion Dilemmas in Peacebuilding’, 475–485.

⁶⁶Author’s observation of the working group sessions, September 2017.

⁶⁷For example, the EU – UN – World Bank comprehensive document states that peacebuilding projects in Ukraine should be financed for at least three to five years. UN, EU, World Bank Ukraine, ‘Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment,’ Volumes 1 and 2, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/67d4b97c-70b8-5206-abd6-af10f9bedb8a>.

⁶⁸Tatiana Kyselova and Julia von Dobeneck, ‘Track III Dialogue in Ukraine: Major Patterns and Resulting Risks’, *Research-based Policy Paper* (Frankfurt (Oder): Center for Peace Mediation, 2017), <https://md.ukma.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Track-III-Dialogues-in-Ukraine-Policy-Paper-ENG-2017.pdf> (last modified 2017).

their responsibility to ‘provide proper resources for the dialogue process’ as well as ‘support for the implementation of initiatives that have been or will be developed during/after the dialogue’ (Principle 2.6).⁶⁹ In a related principle, entitled ‘Ensuring systemic and structured dialogue processes’, the authors of the ‘Dialogue Standards’ stated the requirements for facilitators as well as convenors and donors:

to think in advance about the process design so that it matches the preliminary analysis of the conflict/situation, the requests of the dialogue participants and/or the needs of the particular community. When dialogue is aimed at changes at the group or community level, dialogue meetings should be conducted regularly, systematically, and be accompanied by measures to support the implementation of initiatives that have been/will be developed during or after the dialogue (Principle 2.11).⁷⁰

Although the above principles were seen by Ukrainian dialogue facilitators as guidelines rather than requirements, they hoped that the document would be read by international donors, ultimately leading to a change in the existing practices of dialogue funding. Yet, while the necessity for a more long-term and systematic approach to dialogue processes was recognised by international actors, more impactful and meaningful dialogue support did not materialise as a result.

This became evident in the life cycle of the ‘Dialogue Standards’ themselves. Although this was a remarkable locally driven attempt at norm creation, in the long run, it became difficult to sustain local ownership in steering dialogue processes. As with many other knowledge production projects (and despite the intentions of the participating actors), the development of the ‘Dialogue Standards’ ended with the publication of the product. Resources provided by the OSCE PCU were foreseen neither for the dissemination nor for the advocacy of the developed knowledge among target audiences – international organisations and donor agencies, as well as Ukrainian civil society. Ukrainian dialogue facilitators also envisaged that they would further develop and amend the text of the document through reflective practices. However, this was not possible due to the lack of funding and limited internal capacities of the dialogue facilitator community.

Finally, although some informal advocacy of the ‘Standards’ was carried out sporadically by selected Ukrainian dialogue practitioners, this did not produce sustainable effects because of the high turnover of staff in the international organisations and donor offices active in Ukraine. The dissemination of knowledge about ‘Dialogue Standards’ among international actors relied on individuals, and with their relocation to other positions or world regions, this knowledge was rarely transferred to their successors. The COVID-19 pandemic made things even worse, as many personal contacts of Ukrainian dialogue facilitators with donor organisations vanished due to the restrictions of face-to-face meetings and networking. In 2020–2021, several new donor programmes with a focus on dialogues were set up without any idea that the local context had already developed its own vision and definition of dialogue. Some short-term dialogue projects were convened, conducted, evaluated, and vanished without such knowledge. Thus, the established practices and logics of the donor funding, local practitioners’ lack of resources for the practical implementation of the norms enshrined in the ‘Dialogue Standards’, as well as

⁶⁹Institute for Peace and Common Ground, ‘Dialogue Standards’, 9.

⁷⁰Institute for Peace and Common Ground, 11.

the limited dissemination, advocacy campaigns, and awareness raising about the document impeded the process of dialogue norm appropriation.

Conclusion: nuancing stakeholder interactions in knowledge and norm creation

Drawing on critical constructivist approaches to the study of norm emergence and transfer, in this article, we questioned the existing literature's trend to view local actors as mere receivers (or contesters) of knowledge and norms whose formation has taken place elsewhere. In the detailed account of Ukrainian dialogue practitioners' attempt at developing 'Dialogue Standards', we showcased the agency of local actors as producers of context-specific knowledge and norm creators in their own right. Simultaneously, we observed the complex interconnectedness between multiple domestic and international actors involved in knowledge production about dialogue in Ukraine. Thus, both the motivation of Ukrainian practitioners to create norms regulating the dialogue conduct in the country as well as the very process of norm formulation were strongly impacted by existing conceptions of dialogue and mediation brought to Ukraine by external groups.

Nevertheless, despite this interconnectedness, the domestic push for the 'Dialogue Standards' did not translate into norm appropriation by the affected stakeholders. The processes of norm negotiation and implementation were marked by frictions both along the local-international divide and between different communities of practice. Thus, in the case of the norm of professional dialogue facilitation, cleavages emerged based on the professional identity of the actors involved. Regardless of their origin and institutional affiliation, trained mediators and dialogue facilitators shared the understanding that the further development of dialogue as a means of peacebuilding in Ukraine requires professionalisation. They were opposed by their colleagues both at the international and local levels who were not trained in mediation or dialogue facilitation and did not see the need for the professionalisation of the field.

With regards to the norms of inclusiveness and impact orientation of dialogue, the norm negotiation process featured a local vs. international divide, which however played out in different ways. The norm of inclusiveness originated in international normative frameworks and was upheld by Ukrainian actors irrespective of their professional identities, but these actors disagreed on the interpretation of the norm in particular with regards to one specific category of dialogue participants, namely Ukrainian citizens with pro-Russian political opinions. By contrast, the norm requiring greater dialogue impact was pushed for by Ukrainian dialogue practitioners supported by other local actors. International donors agreed with this norm at the declaratory level, in their programmatic and policy documents. Yet, at the implementation level, the previously established donor practices of short-term project funding prevailed, eventually resulting in the non-appropriation of the 'Dialogue Standards' as a new set of norms regulating dialogue conduct in Ukraine.

Hence, this study demonstrated that the constitution of new norms largely depends on the compatibility of these norms with previously established stakeholder practices and the presence of follow-through mechanisms. If locally driven norm creation relies solely on voluntary commitments and is not accompanied by mechanisms promoting the new norms, there are few chances for norm

appropriation by the broader stakeholder community. In the case of Ukraine, the agency of local actors in norm creation was eventually undermined by their dependence on international donors' financial support for the processes of initiation, formulation, and raising awareness about the new norms. Despite the local ownership of the 'Dialogue Standards' and the interconnectedness of local and international knowledge about dialogue in the process of their formulation, this set of norms proved to be fragile without the sustainable financial assistance of international actors and their conscious efforts to promote and adhere to these norms.

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