Generating my own living-theory:
An interim report

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Abstract

This paper offers an account of my on-going learning and educational development as a living-theorist development-economist. In it I clarify my understanding and meaning of educational development starting from my values and my living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996). I shed light on what being a living-theorist development-economist means to me and to the people I work for in developing countries. Thus my writing is developing together with my ideas and my practical experiences.

I focus on my practice as a development practitioner having worked in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Georgia and currently Albania. The emphasis on my original contribution to knowledge is on the explanatory principles I use to describe my educational development and the living standards of judgment I use to judge the validity of this contribution to knowledge. My practice involves sharing and collaborating, as I try to create peace and peaceful spaces where people feel at ease and secure, able to foster their own capabilities, inspire and learn from each other, and work for a fairer world in which resources are equally shared. The project I am working on in Albania represents an evidence-based example of how my practical work evolves, together with my embodied and developmental values. I show how these aspects of my humanity can influence the people and the social formations I work with and how these have an influence on my daily work in the developing world and on myself.

Keywords: **Living Theory; Sustainable Development; Educational Development; Human development; Development Economy.**

Introduction

This paper offers an account of a process that is developing together with my ideas, my values and my living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996) and with my practice. My practice is influencing my growing values and my standards of judgment that are changing over time: my practice evolves and so they evolve as well and offer me a way of engaging in my own educational development. By educational development I mean the process of honing my metacognitive skills in terms of what I am doing in my professional life so that I can educate myself and come closer to my humanity. The scope is to help other people to embrace their humanity, which might lead them to realize that we are all part of a bigger picture in which the quality of sharing and collaborating represents the foundation for the building of a fairer world. The following represents an interim view of what I am doing in my life and how my values are related to each other:

> Human life, by its very nature has to be dedicated to something, an enterprise glorious or humble, a destiny illustrious or trivial. We are faced with a condition, strange but inexorable, involved in our very existence. On the one hand, to live is something, which each one does of himself and for himself. On the other hand, if that life of mine, which only concerns myself, is not directed by me towards something, it will be disjointed, lacking in tension and in 'form'… if I decide to walk alone inside my own experience, egoistically, I make no progress. I arrive nowhere. I keep turning around and round in the one spot. This is the labyrinth, the road that leads nowhere, which loses itself, through being a mere turning round within itself. (Ortega y Gasset, 1957 pp. 141-142)

My Values and my Profession

More than ten years ago I made the personal and professional choice to work exclusively in developing countries as a development practitioner where I attempt to support people in their daily struggle for existence. As a development economist who manages development initiatives around the world, I attempt to contribute to both economic growth and to the establishment of human capabilities that encourage innovative forms of personal and social evolution, rooted in peace and freedom, leading eventually as well to economic freedom. By doing this I am living in the direction of the development of my own capabilities, happiness and fulfillment. I believe that sustainable development is in place once people are capable of contributing to the building of a society in which inclusion, gender-equality, cultural cohesion, equity, educational development, respect for diversities and the natural environment are recognized as fundamental values. My life and profession are about carrying these values into my work as a living-theorist development-economist with the remit of turning them into practice and thus supporting people in building a society where the most vulnerable are included in their social, political and economic dimensions.

In this narrative I prefer not to engage in the intricate debate about the meaning of the words 'development' and 'sustainability', but it feels appropriate to define my own meaning of the above terms. I echo the simple, but very powerful words of Chambers (2005)

for whom development is 'a good change' whose objective is to empower individuals and build their capacities (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2005, p. 18). And to describe what 'sustainable' means for me I would like to use the wisdom of a first nation American person who said, 'We have not inherited the earth from our fathers, we are borrowing it from our children[1]'.

My profession is about doing the right thing (ibid., p. 19). Being a development practitioner means that I have been engaged in development work in practice ever since I've lived development from its embryonic stage and witnessed the various and complex scope of development and its impact on people's daily lives in developing countries. It's about sharing and collaborating. It's about creating peace and peaceful spaces where people feel at ease and secure and foster their own capabilities. It's about inspiring and learning from each other; it's about caring, listening and being listened to. It's about seeing the broader picture and working for the building of a fairer world in which resources are equally shared. It's about commencing a journey alongside people from different cultures, some of which are alien to the socio-historical context I've been born and raised in. The journey is about building trust with my fellow travelers and with the people I meet along the way. This trust is based on a mutual exchange of practical experience, wishing to do no harm and bearing in mind the one and only imperative common goal: working together for the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989).

The only way I have found to tell the story of my journey (which is the story of both my professional and personal lives) is through Living Educational Theory research. Living Theory research provides me with a space where my experiences, values, practice, feelings are respected and my voice is heard. In this space I feel free from social hindrances since as a self-study researcher I can express myself using various research techniques. By this I am meaning my methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Hart, 2001, p. 169). This helps me in exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' (Whitehead, 1989) using various research methods such as auto-ethnography (Ellis, Adams and Bocher, 2011, p. 273). It also helps me to research, analyze and explain my personal experience in order to understand social formations based on cultures different from mine, and my creativity. Living Theory research brings people and their different practice together with the scope of learning, inspiring and influencing each other. It's a place where critique has no negative connotation, but instead it's perceived as a valuable way of improving one's own practice. Due to Living Theory research I am now able to research my profession as a development practitioner/development economist, active in developing countries such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Georgia and Albania. I have the opportunity not only to improve what I am doing (Whitehead, 1989) but also to share it with all those who have embarked on a similar journey and are occupied with making the world a fairer place. Hence, Living Theory research allows me to seek answers to the following questions: 'How do I contribute to the empowerment of individuals and support them in building their human capacities?' 'How can I turn the living contradictions I have experienced

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[1]   This frequently used quotation cannot be traced back to anyone with certainty.

into learning how to become a person whose mind is free to question and find solutions in line with her values and to live them fully?'

My Living Theory Doctoral Research

My doctoral research uses a Living Theory methodology, in other words it is organic because it is about people and it evolves alongside other people. It is concerned with the holistic development of the people I work with (i.e. emotional, psychological, spiritual, economic, etc.). It is about their human development and it is about my human development as well. Living Theory is the philosophy of life that I embrace and it has taken my professional development a step forward by helping to smooth out the living contradictions (Whitehead, 1989) I encounter along the way. The most evident of these is the apparent discord between the terms 'economics' and 'human development', which in me are capable of co-habiting peacefully. Indeed these constitute my identity as well as my professional profile and make me a living- theorist development-economist. Being a living- theorist development-economist means to be able to live my values fully, which are social justice, equity, ethics, educational development, inclusion (Universal declaration of human rights). It means to be able to transfer them to my professional life coherently. Living Theory research is also helping me face the living contradictions (Whitehead, 1989) my life generates and to learn how to minimize the negative impact they have on my life in the form of frustration and a sense of helplessness. Furthermore my values, that are embedded in my ontology and reach out to my professional commitment, are interwoven with each other and above all with a value that I label the genesis of human development, namely peace.

The following serves as an example of what I am meaning by peace:

This is the story of a king in ancient India who became curious about peace. The king called upon many teachers and philosophers within his kingdom to explain its nature. None could give him a satisfactory answer. Then one day a wandering sage stopped at the king's palace to pay him homage. In reply to the king's question the philosopher answered, "there is a wise man who lives just outside your kingdom, he alone can show you the nature of peace." The next morning the king called upon the old recluse, who when he heard the king's question went into his kitchen and returned with a grain of wheat. Placing the grain of wheat on the king's outstretched palm he said: "look here for your answer".

Too proud to admit that he was baffled, the king clutched the grain in his fist and hastily returned to the palace. There he found a little gold box and placed the grain of wheat in it. Each morning he would ritualistically open the box and look at the grain, but he found no answers there to his questions. Weeks passed and the king become increasingly disheartened. At last the wandering sage came again to visit the king, who promptly brought out the gold box and asked him to explain.

"It's quite simple sire. As long as you keep this grain of wheat in the gold box locked up in your safe, nothing will happen. Eventually it will rot and perish. However if you let the grain interact with all of the elements – air, water, sunlight – it will grow and multiply and soon you will have a field of wheat. It's the same with peace. If we keep the peace we have discovered in life

locked up in our hearts, it will perish. But if it interacts with all the elements and all people, it will spread. And someday it will be peace throughout the world". (Mahatma Gandhi)

The above helps me in my attempts at understanding the meaning of (my) life and thus the meaning of my profession as a living-theorist development-economist. The values of social justice, equity, ethics, educational development, inclusion, and the protection of human rights interact with the value of peace, which together can make human relationships blossom. I am interested to understanding where human development and freedom (Sen, 1999) merge with economics.

Due to my academic background I acquired some technical skills in the field of economics. Today I have come to the understanding that how I apply those skills in my daily life and the usage of them is being influenced by my values. In my Ph.D. study I am beginning to see how my values of social justice, equity, ethics, educational development, inclusion and the protection of human rights interact developmentally with peace in such a way that they are all being transformed. At this stage in my research I am not yet at a point when I can crystalize all of these qualities, but it is in the nature of Living Theory that values develop as the practice and theorising develop. In that sense this paper is very much at an interim stage of development in terms of locating precisely where I am now. In this living-theory account I want to communicate the quality that is my ontology and embodies my identity, my experiences, my values, my living standards of judgment (Laidlaw, 1996), which all together clarify the theory of my life. Living Theory is the methodology I use to enquire into my life, and provide me with possible solutions to the conundrums I am faced with in a lifetime. Hence, Living Theory research has the beneficial effect of sharpening my technical skills as a development-economist by helping me to include my values in my professional life and living them fully. This all together becomes an instrument for my human development, which might be influential in other people's human development.

Sometimes I have been puzzled by my own incapacity to write about certain things, so I started looking for the reasons why it feels so difficult to describe in words what appears to be already clear in my mind and what I can demonstrate in practice. I have come to the realization that the limits I encounter are the result of my attempt to conceptualize emotions, feeling, instinct, empathy and an understanding of my values. The limit arises when my cognitive intelligence wants to prevail over my emotional intelligence in a sphere, which belongs to my emotional-self and not to my rational-self. I struggle to be authentic and to translate in words what perhaps can't be translated using a means of communication (the written language), which is not appropriate. So this piece of paper turns to be neither authentic nor genuinely communicative. Hence, in order to grasp the essence of what I am trying to express I move away from a disciplined reflection and get closer to my 'flows of consciousness' (Whitehead, 2015), where I become conscious of my emotional side and I allow it to flow. The following quote about ironic validity by Lather expresses this concept cogently:

> First the practical problem: Today there is as much variation among qualitative researchers as there is between qualitative and quantitatively orientated scholars. Anyone doubting this claim need only compare Miles and Huberman's (1994) relatively traditional conception of validity. 'The meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their

sturdiness, their 'confirmability' – that is, their validity' (p.11) with Lather's discussion of ironic validity: 'Contrary to dominant validity practices where the rhetorical nature of scientific claims is masked with methodological assurances, a strategy of ironic validity proliferates forms, recognizing that they are rhetorical and without foundation, postepistemic, lacking in epistemological support. The text is resituated as a representation of its 'failure to represent what it points toward but can never reach…. (Lather, 1994, p. 40-41)'. (Donmoyer,1996, p.21)

Because I am not able, as I said, to express this in words, I must therefore try to capture it using visual techniques such as recorded conversations between myself and my supervisors, or my colleagues, the beneficiaries of my projects, etc. as these forms of representation come closer to depicting what it is I really seek to communicate.

In video 1 with Moira Laidlaw and Jack Whitehead about my project in Albania, I am expressing my relational and ontological values related to my meaning of 'dialectical peaceful space'. More importantly however I am expressing the energy that flows from me when I start talking about the process that is generating my understanding and values of peace. At 10:50 minutes it emerges how I come to realize that peace is a fundamental value informing my professional practice. This has triggered the flow of my life-affirming values that emerge as the exploration of my enquiry evolves. This process leads me to new understanding of my living-theory based research and practice.

Video 1. Moira Laidlaw, Jack Whitehead and Arianna Briganti talking about the value of peace (Whitehead, 2015)

My Experience in Albania

My experience in Albania, where I currently work as a development practitioner for an international non-governmental organization (NGO) labeled Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB), is an attempt to draw some light on the meanings and correlation between

human development and sustainable development. It situates the two concepts (in my eyes inseparable) in the context of Living Theory research, glued together by my values.

Some 20 years ago CHwB started engaging in the Balkan region with the aim of protecting cultural heritage affected by conflict and human or natural disasters. About eight years ago the branch-office in Albania organized the first **Regional Restoration Camps** (RRC) where young professionals and students in the field of restoration, urban planning and architecture came together from all over the Balkans and worked on restoring the cultural heritage of this region. The Camps are held twice in a year in Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The rationale behind the RRC is to use monuments and their restoration as a stimulus for debate and for initiating intercultural dialogue. The motto of CHwB is, 'we restore and build relations'. I would add to this that in my eyes the ultimate aim of CHwB is to build a peaceful society where the *grain* (peace) interacts with all of the elements - social justice, equity, ethics, educational development, inclusion, and human rights protection - and grow and multiply.

As a Living Theorist I believe that I can not separate the individual from the social formation so I develop as a person and a professional together with my values and standard of judgments (Laidlaw, 1996), but also as part of a whole. I cannot exist independently, nor can I exist without the fundamental values that underpin all my actions. I would like to develop towards a holistic self, which is why I need to live my values fully. However, living my values fully does not suffice. They have to connect with other people's values and multiply (in Gandhi's words). This is in brief what CHwB is attempting to do: interacting with different parties by communicating the value of peace that eventually will reach out to many more people hopefully bringing them closer to their humanity and to each other in full respect of their diversities. I believe that our position at CHwB is dialectical in Socratic terms, highlighting the art of holding the One and the Many together by living the value of peace. The dialectic goes beyond simple language and the linear exchange of notions between individuals. The dialectic is an open space, within which 'they' and 'we' are together, and develop together.

I would like to support CHwB in creating that very open room and inviting people to join in. The challenge is posed by the fact that the parties traumatized by war and genocide are filled with anger. However I echo what Gandhi said namely that 'anger can be used to create peaceful solutions that would affect the world in a far more positive way' (Gandhi, 2003, p. 18). This peaceful solution is for CHwB the restoration works done on the various monuments in collaboration with people from different ethnic groups. In other words cultural heritage, which represents a testimony of our humanity, history and cultural identity, is the trigger for restoring relations and bringing people closer to their own humanity. In order to enable the communities I work with to develop socially and economically I start from the premise that my duty is to help them in re-discovering that very place where every one of us is just human and where 'we' equates to 'they'. This is my contribution to human development. It is time to define my meaning of human development and for that I would like to refer to Goethe's wisdom and the following verse:

Eigentum:

Ich weiß dass mir nichts angehört

Als der Gedanke, der ungestört

Aus meiner Seele will fließen,

und jeder günstige Augenblick,

Den mich ein liebendes Geschickt

Von Grund aus lässt genießen[2]

(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

I concur with Goethe who urges us to concentrate on the quality of being rather than on the quality of having (Fromm, 1976). Indeed in my eyes moving towards a society centred on people and not on man-made material goods *is* human development, and that is the path I travel. Paraphrasing CHwB's slogan I would say that particularly within traumatized societies the aim is to restore people's humanity first, by offering a peaceful and spiritual environment where peace can interact with other values such as inclusion, gender-equality, cultural cohesion, equity, educational development and respect for diversities. This is how I envision the construction of a sane society in which the wealth of the society itself corresponds to the actual needs of all its members (Fromm, 1955, p. 85). As Fromm points out, such a society has never existed in human history with the exception of a few primitive societies (ibid.). However, although it seems Utopian, this does not prevent me from pursuing a society in which 'being' prevails over 'having'; where developing and strengthening human capabilities bring more satisfaction and happiness than striving for radical hedonism (the maximum of pleasure and the fulfilment of every desire) and egotism (the selfishness and greed of people) (ibid.).

The RRC seems to me to be development –in- practice since it offers a concrete way of aspiring to a fairer world, and helping people get closer to their own humanity and eventually to each other's humanity. The words of the humanitarian worker and Nobel Prize Laureate Albert Schweitzer resonate with my understanding of humanity. He describes the man 'as a superman, but the more his power grows and the more he becomes a poor man, in fact the more we grow and become supermen' he added 'the more we become inhuman'. Greed and peace are mutually exclusive (Fromm, 1976). This is why the RRC activities function as a means of promoting peace building in societies that have endured conflict in part due to the spaces where they take place. These spaces are nearly as important as the encounters themselves because they invoke another key component of peace-building: 'a transformation of the political geography of areas designated as "conflicted" into what are seen as 'peaceful spaces' ' (Mitchell and Kelly, 2011, p. 307). In such a space differences, that often frighten and divide people and generate distance and misunderstanding, are no longer perceived as a

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[2]   Possess: I know that I possess nothing except the thoughts, which undisturbed want to flow from my soul and at each favourable moment, a loving fate lets me enjoy profoundly

negative by-product of the distinctive features of various social groups. The stated objectives of the RRC are 'to use cultural heritage to build relations among young professionals, creating conditions for reconciliation as a prerequisite for peace and democracy, and to preserve traditional crafts and techniques' (CHwB, 2015). It has been achieved by using heritage to create peaceful relationships among the participants as well as a 'neutral' space where they could feel at ease in their identity.

Over the course of two weeks, participants follow a rigorous schedule that combines theory, through lectures and presentations, with hands-on restoration work on historic monuments in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo or Serbia (Eaton and Hadžić, in press). CHwB canalizes the negative feelings of anger and mistrust of the RRC participants into a collective goal, namely the effort of building something together (ibid.). This process has, in my opinion, a transformative quality of turning the negative energy and the sense of isolation into a positive one.

> We know how 'energetically' a person can act when positively motivated, we know that the meaningfulness of a project lends additional strength to the people engaged in it, but we have very little idea of how to link up into one whole the physiological theory of activation, the psychology of motivation, and the ideas of energy which have been elaborated mainly in the field of physics. (Vasilyuk, 1991, pp. 63-64)

When people come together to focus on a concrete task, such as re-plastering a wall or rebuilding an entrance gate, they can for a moment forget their differences (Eaton and Hadžić, in press) and enjoy a newly energized and peaceful sense of being with themselves and in connection with the others. This is the effect of what I call the 'human developmental prism' where the negative energy passing through the prism is transformed into positive energy, thus becoming a positive influence that spreads. Are the RRC participants starting to empathise with the 'enemy' (Krznaric, 2010)?

For Gandhi, one of the great empathic adventurers of the twentieth century, empathy is both an individual moral guide and a route towards social change (ibid.). I can't claim at this point whether or not the RRC participants have begun to empathize with their peers, but according to the past experience of CHwB the RRC process fosters relationships among the young professionals.

> Along with the physical restoration of historic buildings, they conceive together a process of interpreting them, linking cultural heritage to real people, with real stories, and lives which, though different, face many of the same challenges. (Eaton and Hadžić, in press).

According to my experience this sense of relatability (Bassey, 1992) is often therapeutic because it reinforces the sense of belonging to a group of professionals who pursue a common goal.

Britta Olofsson, former Head of Development Cooperation at the Swedish Embassy in Tirana, Albania saw this in action at the RRC in Gjirokastra:

It was truly encouraging to see young professionals from all over the war torn Balkans not only rebuilding houses but building bridges between cultures and ethnic groups when working and learning together. To me it seemed as if the camps are a unique method of changing the mind-set of young people, as friendship and respect was replacing ignorance and fears. (Olofsson, 2011)

However, this sense of collaboration among the practitioners that the RRC has brought about is at odds with the many incidents that have arisen during the various camps, especially in Stolac (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Mitrovica (Kosovo) where ethnic tensions are still palpable. Hence, the broader and sustainable impact of the RRC model needs a deeper evaluation. My colleagues and I keep asking ourselves whether CHwB is really restoring relations among the ethnic groups living in the Balkans? We are also considering to what extent we have been successful so far in supporting the people we work for in opening up and starting identifying themselves with other people's feelings, experiences, needs, and perspectives (Dadds, 2008).

And why as a living-theorist development-economist do I find the process of peace building so important for the fulfillment of my job? I believe that peace is *condition sine qua non* for human development to prosper. I believe a holistic development embracing the individual's emotional, psychological, and spiritual evolution is what is needed to foster a sustainable and regenerative economic prosperity. So what I attempt to do as a living- theorist development-economist is to offer that dialectical peaceful space in which resolution can outweigh dissolution; where conflict can start being resolved; where the distance between 'us' and 'them' is shortened; where the quality of humanity is introduced into economics, which thus distances itself from radical hedonism and moves towards a dimension where wealth is equally distributed. What makes the space CHwB and me want to create a 'dialectical peaceful space'? In my eyes, fear constitutes the opposite of a space in which peace is both the way and the goal. Peace is the absence of fear (Franklin, 1987) and hatred is the daughter of fear as Tertullian says in the Apologeticus (Lubjona, 2004). Thus it's fundamentally important for human development to continue and society to prosper to create a space where fear does not reign. Only a space where the hypothesis can be confounded by discussing openly - in the absence of fear and hatred - their contradictory nature (Vegetti, 1999, p.41) can be 'dialectical':

It is only dialectic that 'destroys the hypothesis ' and reaches the stage of giving an account of each thing, rather than being satisfied with getting consistent results from unexamined premises (533c) everything about dialectic is disputable (Annas, 1981, p. 276).

In this space 'contradictions' should not be perceived as being at odds with 'peace', since the space itself creates an environment whose goal is to hold the One and the Many together so that contradictions (or hypotheses) are disputed openly and constructively. Contradictions assume the quality of something that can be both 'One and Many' (Whitehead, 2010) and stimulate people in generating positive knowledge. This also defines development in practice, without dogmatism. Instead it derives from people and people's lives, thus from living matters. Therefore it is concerned exclusively with building peace among people for the sake of human development.

Development in Practice

RRC is a good example of how development works in practice. People from different ethnicities identify with their societal groups ('we'), but at the same time within the dialectical peaceful space start perceiving themselves closer to other societal groups ('they') as well. Thus the art of RRC is comparable to the Socratic art of the dialectician holding the One and the Many together in the same space. So far this space is in a vacuum since CHwB has constructed it on purpose in order to help the various parties in initiating dialogue. However, I ask myself whether this is itself sustainable. I wonder what they carry over from the practical experience of the RRC once the participants go back to their own countries and daily lives.

Notwithstanding its vast practical experience and many encouraging success stories, CHwB has yet to generate its dialectical and a living-theory (Whitehead, 2010) to explain the impact of the RRC project on its almost 700 participants in the past eight years and how/if it will influence the future attendees. My duty as a development practitioner in Albania is twofold: on the one hand it is to support local people in finding ways of living in the absence of fear by developing their capabilities for the sake, overall, of human development. On the other hand it is also to assist the CHwB team in developing its own capabilities. Since Living Theory research, due to its very nature, does not separate the individual from the social formation, this will help me greatly in shedding some light on my own dialectical and living-theory. Moreover I am also seeing myself in the process of holding the One (myself) and the Many (namely CHwB and the broader society of which both the team and I are parts) together in order to generate positive knowledge and sense of collaboration.

The powerful pedagogical use of simulations and growth-mindset exercises is providing CHwB with a practical way of deepening our understanding of whether the RRC project is really helping people to feel at ease with exposing and disputing their ideas around their sense of identity and the 'other' sense of identity within a peaceful environment. Moreover it is pointing out whether RRC is really perceived as fostering intercultural dialogue, peace-building and collaboration:

> The need for a sense of identity is so vital and imperative that man could not remain sane if he did not find some way of satisfying it. […] What could be more obvious than the fact that people are willing to risk their lives, to give up their love, to surrender their freedom, to sacrifice their own thoughts, for the sake of being one of the herd, of conforming, and thus of acquiring a sense of identity, even though it's an illusory one. (Fromm, 1956, pp. 60-61)

Based on Dweck's research on how behaviours are affected by beliefs, in particular beliefs about capacity for change (Mcclure, 2011), CHwB will employ the work on Growth Mindset's propensity to stimulate people's ability to change themselves. The aim is to get initial experience and results that are indicative of the feasibility, relevance, and possible ways of employing these tools as an integrated part of CHwB development work in practice. Moreover we aspire to clarify the organization's transformational role within the social groups it's operating in. In an interview Dweck argued:

We decided to visit the mother of all conflicts […] and that's the Middle East. Most conflict resolution strategies require you to bring the two groups together, but just attempting this in an incendiary conflict can cause people to react negatively […]. We never mentioned their adversary—just groups in general—and yet we found in every case that learning a growth mindset changed their opinions toward their adversary—Jews toward Palestinians, and Palestinians toward Jews—and created significantly greater willingness to make these compromises for the sake of peace. (Hoffman, 2011)

I am interested in finding out whether in the dialectic peaceful space the participants have really felt peaceful. And were they able, with CHwB support, to create qualitative relationships and stimulate the sense of collaboration needed to initiate the peace-building process?

On May 18th 2015 in the city of Gjirokastra (southern Albania) my colleague Per Jensen engaged the participants to the RRC 2015 in various simulations exercises. The twenty participants were originally from Kosovo, Macedonia, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia& Herzegovina, Greek, Romania, Albania. The following comments have arisen during the de-briefing subsequent to the simulation called 'the river' (recorded). Per Jensen asked the participants (who remain anonymous in this paper) what had happened during the simulation and here are some example of their responses:

We are used to work as individuals, we are not used to co-operate for a common aim.

During the camp we have to learn about interpretation and we had to do an interpretation of a monument for the Roma community. We met some Roma and I felt very selfish because it was the first time I was communicating with them, because I had my interest in doing so. Because I wanted to know them so that I could do my interpretation task. This helped me to recognize that I was very selfish and I was doing nothing to help this community. But there are a lot of people in the same situation, we are thinking about African people who don't have water to drink for example and we have all this luxury.

The most important thing is collaboration, in fact the other person is as important as I am.

After the completion of the RRC, the organization has circulated a simulation assessment to the participants to grasp more about the impact it had on them. These are the first comments that CHwB has received so far via email from some participants whose name is not being mentioned in order to respect their privacy:

As for the simulation exercise, I have quite enjoyed it. During and after the exercise I kept thinking about the relations of the games to the real life. Maybe I needed some time to digest the whole experience during the time it was lasting, but afterwards it made a lot more sense. (CHwB email communication, May, 2015)

I really liked the general idea of the simulation. The exercises we did were very good (ok, not all of them) and the outcome is really helpful. I liked the idea of thinking afterwards what I did during the exercise and then comparing the actions and results with real life issues. (CHwB email communication, May, 2015)

I really liked last day with simulation workshop. But, I think that it will be better to have this workshop earlier. Not at beginning but somewhere in the middle of the camp. It has social benefits, with playing games and connecting colleagues. I didn't understand this exercise as LEARNING method, but very interesting social, relaxing, and somehow inspiring me for self development. (CHwB email communication, May, 2015)

Fighters Without Violence

The night before I presented an early stage account of this paper to some PhD students and academics at the University of Cumbria in Lancaster, I happened to read in the 'the Guardian' newspaper an article on the 20th anniversary of the worst massacre on European soil since the Third Reich (Hartmann and Vulliamy, 2015). On July 12th, 1995 the Bosnian Serb death squads murdered in Srebrenica more than 8,000 men and boys in a few days. The massacre happened under the noses of United Nations troops who had the mandate to protect civilians (ibid.). Twenty years later only fourteen of the murderers have been convicted at the war crimes tribunal in The Hague. A survey revealed that the fall of Srebrenica formed part of a policy by the three 'great powers' – Britain, France and the US – and by the UN leadership, in pursuit of peace at any price at the terrible expense of more than 8000 people (ibid.) who lost their lives and their family members. In the light of the above, my job with CHwB suddenly appeared to me as a drop in the ocean of injustice, impunity, brutality and structural violence (Hanlon, 2005, p. 16).

I felt an all-encompassing sense of fragmentation, hopelessness and impossibility to react against what seem to be values that serve particular sets of interests ahead of others such as peace, and compassion for humanity. Those values consist in the deliberate maintenance of a global system based on fundamental and self-reinforcing inequity (ibid.). I felt so impotent and depressed that I thought I should not dare to talk about identity issues, peace building and reconciliation in the Balkan context where people are understandably still in mourning and waiting for justice. My reasoning and my writings on these topics and even my experience with CHwB, as I attempted to bring people closer to their humanity, appeared utopian. I even felt naive in believing the RRC project could have a stake in such an intricate peace building process among people in the Balkans still deeply traumatized.

The words of Jose 'Pepe' Mujica, the former president of Uruguay encouraged me and lit up my soul again. During an interview, which recently became a book titled 'La felicità al potere' (happiness in power) Mujica recalls the history of his country and the struggle to liberate it from oppression and inequality. He was answering the following question: 'where do we get the hope and the strength for fighting [against oppression]?' He replied, 'you never

fight looking backward, you always fight looking forward. You never fight for the past, always for the future'[3] (Guarnieri and Sgroi, 2014).

I am not responsible for what happened in Srebrenica, neither is the new Balkan generation. However I can contribute to build a fairer world by choosing the side of compassion and humanity and help people in overcoming hatred and differences. In fact this is my personal and professional choice, namely by paraphrasing Ortega y Gasset (1957) I decided not to walk alone, otherwise I feel fragmented and isolated. I gain strength by sharing my values and by joining forces with other non-violent fighters.

The following video (video 2) with Lejla Hadžić team leader of CHwB Albania reveals something very interesting when from minute 3:43 to 5:29 she recalls how the project started and the desire of the participants 'to do it right'. Lejla pinpoints that for the first time after the war people were working on something that's the product of what they have done together, despite the hatred.

Video 2. Lejla Hadžić and Arianna Briganti on RRC (Briganti, 2015)

These brought me back to the roots of my profession, and why I became committed to it in the first place. As I said earlier, it's also about doing the right thing (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2005, p. 19) and by this I mean to fight oppression and injustice by taking the side of the people and helping them – as in the case of the Balkans – in the peace-building process. When Lejla starts recalling her memories from 2005, when the idea of the RRC was triggered by the necessity to help people traumatized by the recent war in reconciling, my memories went back to that time. I wondered what was I doing then in 2005 and why? While Lejla was fighting for the right of people in Bosnia to have a dignified life after the war and reconnect

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[3]   The book is in Italian and the original answer of Mujica, which I have translated into English is, 'non si lotta mai guardando indietro, si lotta sempre guardando in avanti. Non si combatte mai per il passato, sempre per il futuro'.

with their identity through their cultural heritage, I was in Ethiopia as a junior development worker. I worked for a health-project aimed at providing disadvantaged people access to health-care, thus prolonging their life-expectancy.

Now we're both in Albania trying to so something *together* we both believe to be the right thing; or paraphrasing an Amnesty International slogan: we are doing the human right thing! Although our socio-historical and educational backgrounds are different, we are very similar in the way we decided to dedicate our lives to the protection of human rights. We are fighters, but without violence, whose efforts converge, whether we realise it or not, in supporting a global social movement of people that peacefully fight for a fairer world (I realise while writing and pondering on my practical work that the concept of peace is recurrent in both my thinking and my practice).

I have chosen to use the word 'fighter' instead of some other words that might carry a less aggressive connotation, when I read the idea by Banksy, 'there's nothing more dangerous than someone who wants to make the world a better place.' The way I interpret this is that even a non-violent fighter can be dangerous due to her/his full commitment to eradicate oppression and inequality against all odds. I know the world is full of unknown non-violent fighters. People from all ages, culture, backgrounds, and skin-colour whose efforts converge, whether we realise it or not, in supporting a global social movement made of individuals that peacefully fight for a fairer world. This sounds dangerous because we are not going to be stopped.

I felt vindicated when in a Skype conversation (video 3) with my validation group Jack Whitehead introduced the notion of Living Theory research as a global social movement. The following video highlights some interesting reflections being made by my peer researchers during our conversation on the meaning of social movement. The nature of our relationship and our values as Living Theorists are at the key of the discussion and how we influence not only ourselves as researchers, but also those we work and live with (at minutes 8:15, 18:50 and 20:40). My colleague Tammy Nicholls, at minutes 22:48 and 28:30, gives an account on her view of the global movement being at grassroots level and involving everyday individuals who might not even know that they are being influential by spreading their values such as love, compassion, freedom and justice in the world. Tammy adds, 'if I can do it, everyone else can do it. I am not special'. This resonates with what I claimed earlier: that non-violent fighters are everywhere, sometimes their paths cross, sometimes they don't. However there is no sense of isolation in me as I claim at minutes 21:38 I believe I have understood I am not alone in trying to build a better world. Per Jensen is saying this as well at 24:55 as he speaks about his work at RRC together with Lejla Hadžić and myself. He says that by working in Albania and supporting RCC in creating peaceful spaces he feels invited into those spaces by the people he attempts to support. Again the sense of togetherness emerges strongly in the words of the Living Theorists who have joined the conversation and transcended the academic sphere, since our values have an impact on people's daily lives (at minutes 27:13).

Video 3. Living Theory research support group (Whitehead, 2015)

Fragmentation vs. Multi-facetism

While this narrative was still a draft, I was asked for clarity about what is the most important matter my writing aims to convey. I have been challenged to chose a focus and exemplify my living-theory. Thus I want to clarify some of the concepts that represent the foundation of my own living-theory that the personal journey (partially narrated by this account) is helping me to generate. My aim is to make my ideas and my writing more coherent to someone not familiar with my profession and myself. Moreover I'd like to avoid creating a sense of fragmentation in the reader who might ask for a clearer path to follow or even for a choice to be made. I have to admit that I've often felt fragmented while performing my tasks. This is due to the complicated circumstances I sometimes contend with, which pull me in all sorts of directions. As a matter of fact what I deem to be most important in my personal and professional life has never changed over the years. Whenever I asked myself what do I care for the most, the answer was – and still is – always the same: it's about contributing to human development, hence supporting people in reaching their own potential, for a fairer world and the flourishing of humanity (Whitehead, 1989). In the attempt of finding a coherent way of doing so at the best of my capacities I feel sometimes pulled apart.

The reason is that the reality is messy, incoherent and often absurd. I need to remain very centred in my ontological I and grow stronger and wiser, not to feel disjointed (Ortega y Gasset, 1957 pp. 141-142) and fragmented myself. Since my interest is human development, my focus is very broad. However I can consciously affirm that I am not affected by egotism or by I-can-save-the-word syndrome. In fact saving the world is not my aspiration. Instead I aspire to give my contribution to the development of people's capabilities. But I've often wondered where I should start from.

I have learned always to keep an eye on the bigger picture, because there is often some little contribution I can make along the journey even if I am already committed to a certain project, people, country, or development intervention that require my full time and

my full energy. Keeping the broader picture in mind, in other words not narrowing down the focus and being receptive to sudden incidents that may change the landscape and juggling between topics, is a skill I *had* to learn when I was in Afghanistan. There my job was to lead a project labelled the 'Literacy and Vocational Education Project for the promotion of activities to generate revenue in favour of vulnerable Afghan women'. I was hired due to my background in economics and my main task was to provide Afghan women (the project's beneficiaries) with vocational training education and assist them in developing those skills needed to enter the labour-market and engage in income-generating activities such as entrepreneurship. The messy and fragmented realty of Afghanistan in 2005 was one of the incidents in my work-life that caused me to evolve and re-think myself differently. Suddenly I was confronted with problems much greater than economics such as post-war trauma-syndrome, marginalisation, structural violence, child-abuse, rape and death. I was definitely not mentally prepared to face all that and I had neither the academic background nor the experience to deal with people plagued by those horrific experiences. I started to fall to pieces not knowing where to start from, to build up anything coherent.

At the end of my business assignment, almost three years later, I was still shaken. (This is ongoing. It happens whenever I look back at my experience in Afghanistan and other similar circumstances where pain is part of people's daily life. Even now that I am writing about that I need to make an effort to avoid my feelings petrifying me). However, I am not fragmented anymore. I understood that the approach I had to use to help people overcoming their troubles was not a linear and straightforward one. The focus of my assignment became broader and broader and I could not choose between priorities; I could not have told the people I was trying to help that their problems lay outside my professional competences. Human development as a whole *was and still is* the priority. Thus, it appeared clear to me that the beneficiaries' human development (and eventually economic development) had first to go through the resolution of their main concerns and trauma. For the first time I encountered the value of peace, although it took me ten years to be able to consciously and profoundly understand its meanings. This happened in Albania at the beginning of 2015 while I began to reflect on my living-theory, as outlined at the beginning of this narrative.

My life in Afghanistan helped me in understanding how to live my values of social justice, equity, ethics, educational development and inclusion fully and how to bring them into my professional life. Eventually I discovered the *trait d'union* between human development and economics that leads to freedom (Sen, 1999), namely peace. Clearly, the circumstances I dealt with were extremely multi-faceted; and so *I* become multi-faceted and focused on the broader picture. The experience in Ethiopia and the encounter with our foster-daughters has sharpened the necessity to operate in a multi-faceted manner. However there is very little room is this narrative to deepen the story of my Ethiopian family.

My current life in Albania is another example on how I cannot narrow down the focus since my priority of dealing with human development requires me to cope with different topics at the same time. In my job-description is written that once again I am responsible for sustainable economic development. No mention of human rights, peace building, reconciliation is made. Nevertheless the beauty of my profession is that it's so multifaceted

that there is room for a genuinely holistic approach to development, not limited to mere economic development, which represents only a segment of the human development puzzle.

Providing the reader with a glimpse of my own personal and professional journey as well as my own human development is a way of unveiling how I attempt to tackle the broader picture by overcoming the sense of fragmentation and despair that overtakes me when the realty is too messy and absurd. I opt for a more coherent multi-faceted approach to human development. In my latest conversation with my Ph.D. supervisor Moira Laidlaw the idea of fragmentation vs. multi-facetism is being debated in this 2:39 minute extract where she describes, according to her understanding how I attempt to operate at the best of my capacities using a multi-faceted approach.
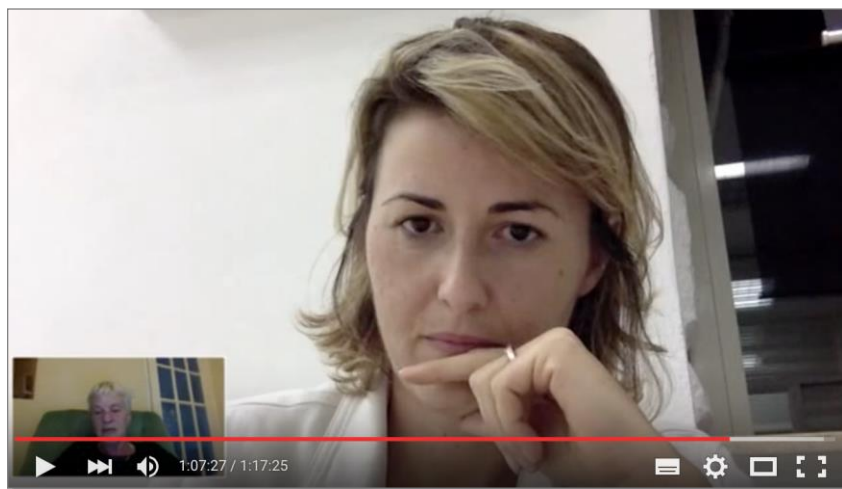
Video 4. Moira Laidlaw and Arianna Briganti on fragmentation vs. multi-facetism (Laidlaw,2015)

Conclusion

The nature of this work is an early-stage narrative of my on-going learning. Hence, I am aware that it's not appropriate to conclude a work, which is progressing and developing together with my professional development. However I feel that I have made some fundamental progress so far, due to the research on my values and on the nature of my living-theory. I would like to conclude this paper talking about authenticity and the realization of how important it is in the growth of my living-theory. I believe that claiming I hold certain values is not enough and that I have to demonstrate (mainly to myself) that I am living them fully. In other words I ask myself whether I am being authentic in claiming all the above. In my attempt to foster and spread peace and fight for the protection of human rights I ask whether my actions are matching my words. The following narrative provides an answer to this question.

In 2005 while I was working in Ethiopia, in Addis Ababa, I met four very young destitute girls (age four, six, nine and twelve) who were marginalised by the society, with no access to housing, education or sufficient food. Three of the girls were living with their mother in a slum-like area of the city's outskirts and all of them received support from the missionary nuns living nearby.

These three girls Semira, Salwa and Fozjia became my husband's and my foster-daughters while we have adopted the youngest Marta. More than ten years later in Italy, one of them Salwa (currently 19 years old) had a conversation with me recorded by my husband, about our family, her two sisters and mother, on how to protect vulnerable people and how life can change for the better if disadvantaged individuals are given a chance. The relationship with our four daughters and the values we exposed them to throughout the years such as inclusion, gender-equality, cultural cohesion, equity, educational development and respect for diversities, have become a crucial part of my living-theory. My living-theory here refers to my way of individually contributing to strengthen the global social movement, which aims at a fairer world.

Our conversation is divided into three short videos (video 5, video 6, video 7) in which we both express our values and how we are influencing each other. At minutes 1:15 of the first clip Salwa recalls when her sisters and herself were living in poverty and isolation. From minutes 3:05 to 6:57 she explains how education has changed her life and talks about her goals in life. Her goals are to complete her education and help poor people. From 7:00 to 9:25 Salwa is showing the impact that the help we provided her with has transformed in her into a desire to help other people in the same condition she used to inhabit. She is already helping underprivileged people living in her neighbourhood together with her classmates and teachers. In the second clip Salwa talks about what is she doing to fight for people's right. From minutes 2:28 to 9:00 the focus is on young girls being victims of female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual violence and early marriage. Her words resonate with the sense of togetherness I discussed with my peer researchers in the video above and show that she is being influenced and is influencing the people around her. Salwa claims that knowing that other young women are fighting for their rights give her strength. At minutes 8:47 she adds 'I can do it, even better'.

The experience with our daughters is providing my life with a deep sense of authenticity. In fact their lives represent a testimony to the nature and the quality of our relationship, gives me hope for the future and assure me that what I am doing is not fighting for the past, but for a brighter future, in which my girls will be protagonists. My living-theory starts at the grassroots-level, evolves into something that transcends the academic, and impacts on those I have the privilege to meet along the way.

Video 5. Salwa Ismail and Arianna Briganti- part 1(Briganti, 2015)

Video 6. Salwa Ismail and Arianna Briganti-part 2 (Briganti, 2015)

Video 7. Salwa Ismail and Arianna Briganti-part 3(Briganti, 2015)

My conversation with my PhD supervisor Moira Laidlaw offers feedback on the interaction between Salwa and myself and provides a form of triangulation. In the videos (video 8 and video 9) Moira speaks on how she has perceived my discussion with Salwa. She also senses this empathetic resonance between us and the life-affirming energy flowing from and to us (Whitehead, 2015, p. 250). My understanding of empathetic resonance echoes Whitehead's (ibid.) who defines it as 'the feeling of the immediate presence of the other in expressing the living values that the other experiences as giving meaning and purpose to their life'. Salwa's and my relational value emerges clearly in our conversation according to her response at minutes 1:48 to 4:33 and 10:29 to 11:30. When I look at the video again I believe that for both Salwa and myself the quality of our relationship emerges very visibly in the clip, unveils the dialectic peaceful space I am discussing in this narrative. I would argue that this shows a consistency between my espoused values and my lived values. Salwa and I have recreated that peaceful space and we inhabit it together.
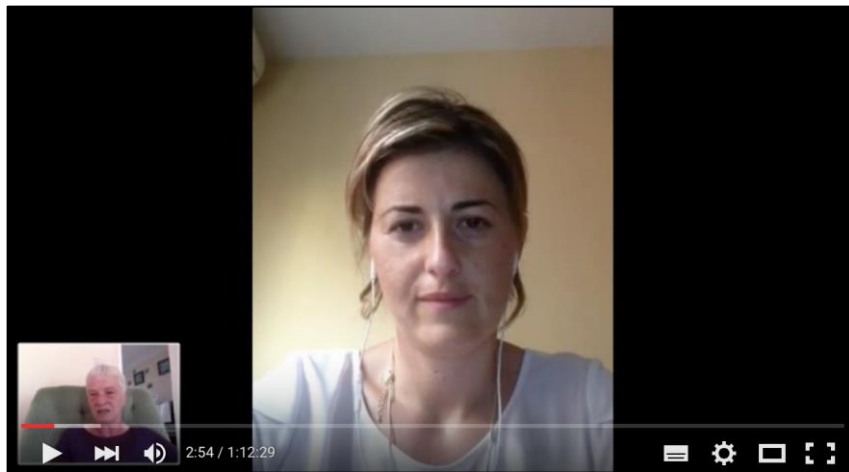
Video 8. Moira Laidlaw and Arianna Briganti on Moira's feedback-part 1 (Laidlaw,2015)

Video 9. Moira Laidlaw and Arianna Briganti on Moira's feedback-part 2 (Laidlaw,2015)

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