

Push or Pull

the podcast where we say „conflict is ok!“

transcriptions

'Push or Pull', the podcast where we say 'conflict is ok!'

As a follow-up to our Summer 2019 activity in Belgrade, Serbia 'Listen Up! Building capacities of youth mediators,' we produced a short series of podcasts to widely share some thoughtful pieces inspired by the activity's content.

The participants and trainers from the activity shared thoughts on conflict mediation before and after the training, which are captured in the 1st and 5th episodes. We also interviewed someone who had been through a successful conflict mediation process, a member of a collective that mediates conflicts within the social justice movement, and an author of a set of community guidelines based on transformative justice principles. Together, this podcast series shares some of the most important elements of conflict mediation, as seen through the lens of young activists from social justice and climate justice movements in Europe.

Conflicts are inherent to social relationships, and especially grassroots youth groups find themselves at the forefront of community conflicts due to their interaction with different multi-layered patterns of social organisation. In EYFA's history of coaching and providing trainings to the groups in our network, the topic of how to cope with conflicts is a recurring one. Our in-cooperation-with Seeds for Change published brochure "Working with Conflicts in our Groups" is one of our most highly requested resources that we've produced. The reality is that not all crises in youth activism are external. Sometimes social justice work comes to a standstill because big or small disagreements are tearing apart the very interpersonal relationships that should be holding them together. To strengthen our movements, we certainly need young people who can identify and understand structural discrimination, but we also need to be simultaneously skilled up in creating consensus and building trust, and, most of all, committed to intercultural dialogue.

Methodologically, it is of great importance to see conflict as an opportunity to grow together as a resilient community, rather than to be torn apart. As a first step we have to develop an understanding of conflict and

how to deal with it, developing a healthy approach towards it and working with the ways conflicts can change our interpersonal relationships by altering communication patterns and patterns of social organisation. Acknowledging and transforming conflict in communities leads to both the empowerment of each and every member as well as improved mutual understanding among them. We have to collaborate with each other to challenge oppression/structural discrimination and find a way share and learn together.

We invite you to read the transcripts of all 5 episodes in this booklet. We further invite you to take part in the discussion online utilising the hashtag #conflictisOK or to contact us via email at eyfa@eyfa.org with your comments, critiques, or suggestions for further content.

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We would like to express gratitude to the European Youth Foundation and The Haëlla Foundation for their generous support.



Additional thanks to Zdrada Pałki for the exceptional music, check bandcamp to download the digital album Nowe Kawałki. And to all the trainers, participants and other network members who shared their input - thank you.

You can listen to the podcast here: https://archive.org/details/pushORpull_ep1

Transcription episode 1

Hello and welcome to our podcast series 'Push or Pull! Conflict is OK. This is a series of podcast where we will talk about conflict resolution and mediation as well as touch on conflict transformation processes. In each episode we will delve into different aspects of the topic, we will listen to, share and talk about different stories and perspectives and experiences with conflict. Maybe some of you may ask yourselves what is conflict resolution and mediation and why did we want to make a podcast series about this. Perhaps some of you already know what we are talking about, but just in case, we reached out to a good friend of ours who has experience working as a facilitator, a mediator and a trainer to tell us a little bit about their experience and some of the basics about what we can understand when we say conflict resolution, conflict mediation and conflict transformation.

F: So I'm a facilitator working with youth, mostly youth and adults, and I mostly work on the topics of conflict and conflict transformation and mediation. Most of my work happens in international settings and the workshops I do range from very different things. I do workshops specifically on mediation or workshops specifically on conflict, how to approach conflict, how to work with conflict, what is conflict. I also do workshops on facilitation and general group dynamics support.

Q: In your experience, what are some of the most common problems that people face in grassroots groups when it comes to conflict?

F: The most common problems people face in grassroots groups and in activism in generally...that's a really good question because I think we often encounter many frustrations and they come from different things. They come from meetings culture and how ineffective our meetings are, they come from a general, broader culture of 'we need to get things done because there is so much to do and there is a climate emergency and always things to do', and also we are just socialized into capitalist efficiency model and so overworking ourselves all the time and not paying attention to relationships, not paying attention to ourselves and our feelings. Other common problems might be the power relations and how we work with power in the groups.

This is a very big one, a really difficult one. And that's linked with structural hierarchies and how do you work with hierarchies, how are hierarchies being formed and all the frustration that is there. And those hierarchies are also systems of oppressions that sneak into our groups and how broader structure/culture we are brought up in influences are groups and how difficult it is to undo it and create different realities inside our groups.

I think one big one that I see a lot as well is just lack of celebration and not acknowledging that we have successes as movements and we have successes as groups. And not celebrating those and just focusing on what else there is to be done, or what else there is to be transformed, what else is there to be changed. And just thinking about the list of all those things, that's like quite a lot of frustration, it's quite a lot high expectations that we have for ourselves and our groups.

Q: why do a podcast about this topic? Well, it's something that comes up in our work quite frequently and many many people send us requests for conflict resolution and mediation workshops, trainings, and resources. We also published a zine on 'Conflict in our Groups,' which continues to be a much utilized resources. So it seems to be a present topic, but is conflict something that we should avoid? Why do we fight and with whom? What are the challenges of working together for social change? Can we positively learn from our differences, transform our collaborations, continue to build strong collectives and movements? Conflict should not mean the end of a group, a initiative, or a movement. Sometimes it is like this and it might be completely necessary, but we want to discuss how we can work through conflict without completely and totally blowing everything off right from the beginning. Could we learn to assess a conflict situation and identify if mediation might be necessary. And if so, can we figure out together which style of mediation would be beneficial to move forward constructively and consciously together. Before we delve into these questions more deeply throughout the podcast, we reached out to our friend once again since they recently participated as a trainer in a workshop on conflict mediation and transformation and we asked them to tell a little bit about the programme of this workshop.

F: So the training on mediation that I'm just going to facilitate now, we are just starting it now. It's going to be again mostly about conflict transformation and mediation,

but there are different parts to it. So what's in the programme? We're gonna start with a block on communication because that's the basic thing underneath anything if we are about to talk about conflict or mediation. So in the communication block we are going to look at things like how to communicate so that others can understand us. So we are going to look at I statements and understanding our own needs and wants and being able to communicate needs and wants so that they can come across to the other person, be understood by the other person. We are going to spend a lot of time on exploring listening because listening is just the basics of communication.

It's more important that speaking, just having the ability to really be able to present with what the other person is saying, to really hear what they are saying, and to be able to stop our own mental processes for a moment and just be present with the other person. We are going to look at techniques like active listening. We are going to look at feedback as well, so how to give and receive feedback in a way that's helpful and transformative. So the topic of the evening is going to be why we don't understand each other and we are going to explore how the misunderstandings happen and what are the common causes of misunderstandings, what are own reactions to misunderstandings as well, and what the process that underlay that. We are going to have the whole day dedicated to conflict only, so we are going to explore what are the typical approaches to conflict and what are the stereotypes around conflict.

That's going to be a very important part of the day. When we talk about conflict it's really important to just deconstruct those stereotypes and deconstruct those fears we have around conflict and how we are socialized to see conflict as something negative, as something scary. Often socialization pushes us to negate our anger or negate our feelings. So we are going to work with all of that, like staying with our feelings, understanding that conflict is just a natural part of working with other people and it just always happens and it's ok. And trying to change our approach into seeing conflict as an opportunity, as an opportunity for growth for the group, or for ourselves or for our movement. This is a very important part of starting to work with conflict, starting to approach the topic.

The second huge topic we're gonna look at is mediation, so actual practical skills what do we do when the conflict is there. So on the conflict day, we're gonna deconstruct stereotypes, we are gonna look at how the conflict happens, we are gonna look at way that we can spot the conflict in an early stage to address it, to transform it.

But mediation is also a very important topic, so what to do when we actually find ourselves in a conflict already, a heated situation. So again we are gonna look at what are associations with mediation, what to do, what is not very helpful.

The main aim of that would be change people's thinking around mediation, that mediation is something that can only be done by professionals, and that you need to train for years to become a professional mediator normally then you're fully equipped to be able to do mediations. And we're gonna offer practical skills for people to just feel more comfortable to step into mediation roles because it is perfectly possible to do it with a certain set of tools. So these are the three most important block of our programme.

Q: We also talked to a few of the participants and asked them if they could share any experiences of conflict within their groups that they may have as well as any experiences in conflict resolution and mediation that they may have. And we asked them as well if they had any expectations going into this training. So here's what they had to say:

Q: I wonder if you wanna share with us something about your collective?

P1: Right, so I'm in this collective that is called Really Free Market, which provides

an alternative to the system of distribution of goods in our society. So what we do is just create some space once in a while for a day where people can just come and for free just exchange things they don't need anymore and just take for free things that somebody else has brought. And we have this collective that has existed for more than 5 years now. It's a grassroots collective, we try to take decisions based on consensus. Once there was, I would say we are quite unanimous in most of our decisions, but at some point there was a conflict. I don't remember, it was kinda policy based.

We probably discussed some censorship issues, or self-censorship. How far should we go? Can we actually do something in non-free spaces and stuff like this. So it kinda didn't go in line with the principle of the initiative. And I think at that moment something bad happened. It was between two people. It became kinda scandalous, but I also I think it was not because they were open to conflict but it was because they were actually a couple before. They split but they stayed in collective. Actually in real life they would never talk, but when they would be in the collective meetings they would kinda have to cooperate. And then because of this conflict, or because of this discussion, one of them decided to leave. And we kinda called her back and the other one already wanted to leave and stuff like this. We didn't have actually any tools to deal with it because we kinda didn't want to get too deep in private matters because we understood those as roots for this problem. While at the same time, we wanted to keep both of the collective members. Basically we didn't solve it. Only a few people new about the actual problem in the personal relations, so she went to talk with both of them and tried to kinda figure out way or conditions under which they could both stay in the collective. But in the end, one person still left. Basically until now we haven't dealt with it, we didn't have a meeting on that because it was very weird to speak about private matters.

This is only one example, but all of the political organising is full of small or bigger conflict. We are very interested in the mediation tactics because I don't know much. I know it looks like more of an expert person that is like very neutral and stuff. For now I'm not sure if it's gonna be something that would be helpful in the collective, where I am not a neutral side. I'm kinda excited and open to new tools, but I'm also a bit sceptical.

Q: Would you like to start by telling me a bit about your collective?

P2: I'm a member of the collective that is based in Warsaw and it's main goal is to give platform to other activist groups and people who would like to teach in the classroom. For example, share skills with other people. We operate for a few years now and the structure is growing so I'm also quite excited about it. But also I've been active in many groups over the past few years and my main experience for also leaving or distancing myself from those groups were personal conflicts and how those conflicts were being solve in a way. So basically the reason for those conflicts were different all the time. There were political differences that couldn't be solved in a healthy way. There were interpersonal struggles that were projecting into the collective life and organising.

So it was really really frustrating also to see that all of the groups were lacking the tools of how to solve it properly. So it often ended up with some dramas or like completely suspending the groups activities, or a big part of the collective leaving because of the conflict. It never felt like a good solution to me to do it this way, obviously. I always knew that there were some mediation techniques that are present, that they exist.

I tried to organise something once and I asked a person to do it, but finally they couldn't come and the whole situation went back to the previous state and we couldn't deal with it properly. That's why I decided to come to this meeting also, to maybe get to more about some techniques and methods that I could implement in this collective process.

Q: Can you start by telling me a bit about your collective.

P3: It's a rather new initiative. We do refugee and migrant solidarity. There is a small kitchen and cafeteria where people are provided meals. There's a library and education space and some sort of information providing, reception sort of thing. Me, I'm part of the educational project.

Q: And have you had any conflicts would you say in the past?

P3: Recently, but like 6 months ago, there were some tensions between different people at some point, but nothing really major. I hope. For now, it's going pretty well, but I know from other people that there's been some really difficult moments in some other collectives and initiatives. I was interested in seeing how to prevent this maybe.

Q: If you hear the word mediation do you have any associations or experiences with conflict mediation?

P3: Personally, not really. Now yes I see, but to resolve the conflict in a non-violent way, to take some time and solve the conflict in some way that it doesn't explode or yeah, this kind of things. I'm not sure.

Q: Can you say something about your work if you're a member of any collectives or groups? If you have any experience with conflict or conflict mediation? Just tell us a little bit about your experience and maybe why you came to this training?

P4: Besides being a student of sociology, I'm also a part of several groups in Berlin. I facilitate workshops and forums in different grassroots youth groups that are mostly involved in education and empowerment projects.

I've had several years of experience with mediation because definitely within these groups I've come across tense situations. It's also very common to find people in the same side of a struggle but with differing or strong opinions about how the activist activities should be carried out. So as a facilitator, one needs to have the ability to be able to broaden their perspectives on certain issues and also to be impartial in these kinds of settings when you need to intervene in a conflict, for example.

But even with my experience, I've been meaning to deepen my knowledge and also to have an exchange with people who are doing the same work that I am doing, but in various contexts, which is why I came for the training.

Q: Welcome back. So we just heard from 5 people who attended a training on conflict mediation and transformation, all with different levels of experience and knowledge when it comes to mediation and transformation of conflicts. We hope that you've enjoyed these experiences that we've shared with you so far, however, some of our earlier questions are still unanswered, don't you think? For this we want to go into more detail in the following episodes of our podcast where we will continue to explore different ways in which groups or organizations have chosen to deal with conflict: be that by calling an external mediator and facilitator, be that by handling it on their own internally and coming up with codes of conduct for organisations or for future members of organisations.

We will discuss and hear more stories and perspectives about how we can deal with conflict differently. And we will talk about the pros and cons, positives and negatives, of all these different ways of dealing with conflict. We hope you've enjoyed this first episode which is just a little teaser, something to get the imagination going, and we hope that you stay with us for the next episodes.



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You can listen to the podcast here: https://archive.org/details/pushORpull_ep2

Transcription episode 2

Hello dear listeners, welcome to the second episode of 'Push or Pull', the podcast where we say 'conflict is ok!'

We talk about conflict resolution and mediation as well as touch on conflict transformation processes. In each episode we will delve into different aspects of the topic, we will listen to, share and talk with young activists from social justice and climate justices movements in Europe about their different perspectives and experiences of conflict.

What's the real question that's somehow at the root of what we're about here in this podcast series: Why do we fight and with whom? What are the particular challenges of working together for a social change?

S: I think, like especially if you fight for social change, you will always have to work with different people, with a diverse group of people, with people who have different backgrounds, because if we wanna change things, we wanna become more people. And then you cannot always choose who to fight with and it cannot always be the person you click with most. So you have to be very flexible, or able to acknowledge the different backgrounds. And conflict can arise from working with diverse groups. I think that mediation can be a good tool to help us growing stronger in movements and not splitting up again, not being able to overcome conflicts. Or especially if you do voluntary work, if you work with volunteers, you won't choose who you work with. It's the people who a bit randomly are interested in the cause who come together and are suddenly a group and have to deal with each other and get stuff done. That's a very high level thing. Especially in a society where people are not used to working in groups, where people are individualized, they don't learn to be team players.

The discussion on this topic is as wide as it is deep. Some argue that human nature is to be in conflict, other's brought in some theoretical concepts like that of Agonism from political theory, but mostly participants brought to the discussion their experiences with conflicts. We don't want to draw any clear conclusions from those examples, but we do want to share with you an interview with someone who went through a successful conflict mediation.

During this episode, we'll hear from Sandra who will share her experiences with conflict from the perspective of a working in a small Austrian NGO dealing with social justice topics.

We will start with a description of the problem that initiated the need for mediation, then we'll talk about how the conflicting parties found the right mediator for their context and what the phases of the mediation were and how it developed and eventually ended.

C: What we're interested in, as you're someone whose gone through a mediation process, is you talking us through that: what it looked like, how it felt for you, and what you learned from it. But we can start with: what was the problem or what got you to the point where you ended up in mediation?

S: The problem that I had was at my workplace and actually I didn't even realize it myself that we had some tensions going on with my colleague. It was more our other colleague who pointed it out during an office meeting. We had flat hierarchies at that moment so it was really intense working together. He realized that we had some tensions going on and was like 'ok, we need to work it through.' Then I didn't know actually what was going on. I also felt there were some tensions, but I was more thinking, 'oh we just have bad vibrations and we don't somehow fit together very well.' I didn't think that there was an actual problem that I might not know. It was my other colleague who was involved in the conflict, who proposed 'hey, maybe I would like to talk about it, but I would like to do a mediation.'

C: So it was clear from that point that you would seek professional mediation? Or how did the idea come and how did you find the right mediator for the situation?

S: It was clear from that point. Actually maybe it was a bit unusual because I think normally people would first try to talk about, then not being able to talk about seek a mediation. We directly went into that because it was a wish of my colleague. There was a collective and they offer mediation so we contacted them. It was a recommendation from a friend. We contacted them and made an appointment once a month where we would talk about our problems or actually where these tensions comes from.

For me it was really useful because it kind of worked to keep on working together. Because we knew we would have this moment where we could talk about what's going on. Also I had no clue what was going on so it was pretty helpful.

C: Do you remember if there were particular phases in the mediation? Were there a few months of just naming the problem and then it was solution oriented? Do you remember?

S: Yeah, there was the phase of naming the problem. Also one person would talk and the other would listen and repeat; practising active listening and repeat what they would hear. That was very good because I felt like the tension from my side came from 'hey, I feel the person doesn't trust me in my work and somehow is always controlling me.' I felt really annoyed about it because I felt I was doing a good job and I didn't understand where this mistrust came from. Then it came out that it came from me not being super careful about things, like stuff, a USB stick or the printer.

I'm not very good at taking care of things, so I might be a person who loses something. I'm also not the quickest at replacing stuff. I know that about myself, but at that time I didn't know that it was a bit the trigger of the tension. My colleague felt that I was not a responsible person because for him it was a super important thing to be careful about collective infrastructure and felt like I'm not showing respect somehow to the things that we own collectively. Which also came from us being raised differently and it was really nice to talk about it. To talk about him being punished a lot when he would lose something and I grew up in a super chaotic household. Yeah, it's true that I'm careless and for me it was also hard to talk about it because it's something that I feel ashamed of.

So it was a nice process to be able to talk through that and I feel it wouldn't have been possible without the space that the person was holding, to be able to be emotional and say things where you might be like 'oh my god, i'm close to cry!' And it was ok in that space. Then it was also totally ok to not talk about it during the rest of the week.

C: So you felt comfortable with this person, the mediator? Like right from the beginning?

A: Yeah, I was super comfortable. Also I think it was because it was a recommendation, so I directly felt... and it was also a female mediator so I felt also more trust. I don't know how I would have felt with a cis-male mediating. I felt good with them.

C: How did it end? Or did you decide both of you it was time or the mediator make the suggestion to stop?

S: Actually that's a good question because I can't really remember. I think we had like once a month a session. I think we did four or five sessions, not even so many, because we very quickly got to this point where I was like 'oh, ok, it's about that! And that makes you think I am not trustable in other things as well!' And then him also acknowledging that I'm doing my best to be careful with things, but I still might, especially when I'm stressed, it might be the first thing that I lose control of - taking care of stuff. So it was a pretty quick process actually.

C: So you felt like it was time for it to stop?

S: Yeah, also we were paying for it, so maybe it's something where you won't spend months and months talking through things. I think it really changed our dynamic in doing projects together.

In this next part of the interview, I ask Sandra to review different aspects of the mediation process to get at how it's possible to learn through a mediation process different skills or lessons that help us to manage other conflict situations. Also, while we share here a rather successful story, we speculate on why mediation is not such a common solution to conflict situations and where the resistance to seek out the support of a mediator might come from.

C: Would you do it again?

S: Yes, for sure. I think if I would have a conflict with somebody, especially in something like a workplace. I feel like you spend so much time together. We did project work and it was also intense time and sometimes stressful time. I feel it's super necessary to use this method or this thing to go through things. Or I could also imagine in a shared flat to do that or if I would have a conflict with a flatmate where I would feel like 'it's not possible to talk about things.' I think also in partnership or in friendships it can be super useful, to use it. I haven't tried. It was the only moment where I tried it. I think I also learned through it how to manage better my other conflicts I might have. For example, this active listening or I also try to use methods that I learned by seeing what is she actually doing. I feel that also helped me to deal with other things and then maybe not needing a mediation any more because I'm a better listener or I know a bit more what triggers people and how to see it.

C: Where do you think that resistance comes from when people are like 'no, why would we do that? let's just sort out our stuff on our own.' Is it just about the money?

S: I mean it's also scary somehow because you might not want to say everything you think about somebody. I think probably a mediation could also make things worse if you're emotionally very close with the person and you have a space where you can open up and be like super honest. It's a very vulnerable space. This could be a reason why people don't want it, because they are scared. Also thinking 'I can deal myself with it and I don't need a professional person.' Or also thinking it's just a hopeless conflict. I think a lot of people are like 'I just can't deal with that person. I don't like them. I just have bad vibes.'

That was for me interesting to see how I thought, or at that time I didn't feel like 'oh I just cannot stand that person,' but I felt a bit like 'we are just not on a wavelength and that's it.' And it's ok for me and I can work, but still this tension would come up again and again. And then it was very good to see that maybe sometimes it's not about some good vibes you have with people, but more 'are you able to talk honestly about what are your triggers in conflicts, what are the things that drive you crazy because, I don't know, your mother always did it or whatever?' It's very good to know that about yourself and others that you work close together with.

C: It's hard to say, it's kinda hypothetical, but: Do you think it was because this person was a paid professional? Do you think that made it easier? Or could you also imagine an informal type of other third-party facilitating something like this? Or would that have brought in additional challenges?

S: I think it would have brought additional challenges if it's somebody from your context that you know or one person might know better or not. I really like that it was a person that I never saw before and I knew that maybe I would meet her on the street by accident, but it was not somebody who I would see again. So I think that's creating confidentiality. I think it can work in an informal way, but only if people are not befriended.

Don't worry, there's still more to hear from the interview! Before wrapping up, we discuss if conflicts really are 'OK' and try to come up with a recommended mindset or tips for people going into a mediation process.

C: If you think about this process of working through a conflict with a mediation and how it felt at the end, this outcome that you had, do you feel that conflicts are always a bad thing? Or do you feel like this conflict in particular or conflicts in general can be productive?

S: I think they can be productive. In that case for example, we could have not had that conflict or just ignored the tensions. Yeah, it was good because we learned stuff about each other and we were able to work better together and be stronger as a team afterwards. So I think it was good that this conflict came up. I think if groups are also able to manage their conflicts they can grow stronger and get closer. It can be productive.

C: If somebody found themselves in a similar situation, where a friend recommended they start a mediation or they talk to someone about a conflict they have and maybe they didn't even know they had it, like in your case, what would you recommend to that person? What kind of mindset should they have going in? Or any tips that they could maybe keep in mind when trying to start that?

S: I mean I don't really know why it worked so well to really use that space, to be honest and also vulnerable, and then being able to be totally normal in our daily.... It was actually the person I saw most, if I think of it: 4 day a week, 8 hours, so it's a person I see all the time. I think to go into that mindset that you can talk about your problems in this specific time and then not having to argue or talk about it all the time when you work together is helpful. Use it really as a chance to be as honest as possible because it's a very cool space that you get offered. It's a chance to get to know yourself better and the other person. Maybe some people need more than once a month talk about it, if you're in a super close relationship you need to talk every day one hour. It can be different.

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We're really grateful to this interview guest for sharing their story!
If you have other stories about seeking out conflict mediation and wanna share them with us, reach out on Twitter with the hashtag [#conflictisOK](#)
Tune into our next episode of the podcast series Push or Pull, coming out next week!

You can listen to the podcast here: https://archive.org/details/pushORpull_ep3

Transcription episode 3

Hello dear listeners, welcome to the third episode of 'Push or Pull', the podcast where we say 'conflict is ok!'

We talk about conflict resolution and mediation as well as touch on conflict transformation processes. In each episode we will delve into different aspects of the topic, we will listen to, share and talk with young activists from social justice and climate justices movements in Europe about their different perspectives and experiences of conflict.

For this episode we would like to share with you a conversation that we had with a young activist whose involvement in conflict mediation and transformation processes we admire. Agnes sat down with us to share from her experiences mediating grassroots groups that are working for social and environmental justice.

C: The topic of the day or the topic of this podcast being “Mediation: does impartiality exist? The do’s and don’t’s of conflict mediation.” And under that umbrella we’ve invited you here today to share with us from your personal experiences. I thought maybe you would start by describing your experiences with conflict mediation.

A: I’ve been working with grassroots organisations that are working for social and environmental justice. Often being asked to come in and give a workshop for two hours on facilitation or something. And then discovering that actually there is a pretty live conflict in the group. And sometimes my collective is asked to mediate conflict specifically. But very often it’s conflicts that are under the surface.

I have experience both as a conflict mediator but also as a facilitator and trainer working with grassroots social and environmental justice collectives. We find that quite often my collective is asked to come to give a workshop but very often there’s a live conflict in the group that kinda needs to be worked with before people feel able to learn. And sometimes we are also asked specifically to come in and do conflict mediation or some kind of conflict facilitation, which might look a bit different to a formal mediation process. But involves a lot of the same skills and processes around supporting people to really hear each other and to find solutions or ways forward that work for everyone involved.

C: Wow, so that wasn’t even your intention when you started out with this collective or when you started out offering trainings for facilitation with groups. It wasn’t ‘we’re gonna help people work through their conflicts’?

A: It wasn’t really in the original plan. But we realized both through our involvement in that kind of organising and through the training work that we were doing with people that actually conflict is kind of a big part of the work. And I think that it’s pretty inevitable that wherever you have people, you’re gonna have conflict.

But I think particularly within this kind of grassroots social justice organising context, there’s so much at stake and people are so invested in what they are doing. And people have this real strong desire to create a different world and relate to each other differently. But of course we’re all socialised in the existing world that we are currently in and so power imbalances and systems of oppression and the time pressure that I certainly feel in doing this work can all add up to mean that people are sometimes having different strategies or wanting to go about things in different ways and also just striving to relate to each other in different ways but having all of this kind of socialisation that means that conflict happen quite frequently I would say.

C: I really appreciate that you answered that question, but it’s a question that I asked in an earlier podcast as well: Why do we fight and with whom? And I think it’s really cool if everybody shares their perspective on that. It’s hard to really pinpoint because there are so many different factors.

A: And it’s different for every group. What’s your experience with that?

C: Why do we fight and with whom? I don’t know if I have as much experience as you on that side of mediator. I feel I have more experience being in the conflicts. (A: I’ve got plenty of that too!) I feel like... I don’t know if it’s the root of the conflicts, but one of the things that makes them really scary and makes them really difficult to be transformative, right, because I think conflicts are just rooted in difference, which is fine as beings inhabiting this planet. It’s probably good if we’re different.

But where I see that it can’t flip to be this transformative ‘oh great, now we learned so much about each other’ moment has a lot to do with scarcity or perception of scarcity.

So I'm really afraid that if the other side is heard more than me, I will lose housing or I will lose friends and I will lose respect and love, all kinds of intangible things, but also real tangible things. Like the threat of homelessness I think is a big thing for groups that live together or people who live together.

Where this conflict could just emerge from difference, ok, and we don't have to be afraid and we can work on it. But there's so much fear because of perceived scarcity.

A: Absolutely, and sometimes real scarcity, right? We're existing in this capitalist system where if I give you a pound, then I have one less pound. And this internalisation of the idea that if I give you what you need, then I'm somehow gonna have less.

I think that's really embedded, in my psyche anyway, that there is scarcity and there's a risk if I'm not able to meet my own needs, then no one else is gonna do that. There's a kind of emphasis on everyone should just be out for themselves in this individualistic way. And actually transformative conflict processes really require us to be super collaborative and that's really demanding. Especially when we're not as many as we would want to be in terms of people who are doing this kind of work. So it can be super painful and really really hard for people when relationships break down and you don't feel that solidarity with people you organise with.

I think that can also add to this feeling of scarcity, that there aren't enough of us and even when you do feel like there's a strong movement, there's always gonna be pockets of conflict and difficulty. But I like to try to think of conflict not necessarily as a bad thing. Actually it can be a sign or indicator that something is trying to change or something needs to change. And that can be a really powerful thing for groups, if they are able to embrace it.

C: I think an important way to address it is to reframe conflict as a way that can indicate maybe we need to make a change or maybe we need to learn something new about ourselves or the work we wanna do. And yeah, we touched on a few layers of it already, but I wanted to ask if you noticed some of the most common problems that groups are facing that are the themes of their conflict. You've probably seen quite a few. But maybe there are some overarching categories.

A: That's an interesting idea. I think that there probably are overarching categories, even though it's always so different how these things manifest in different groups and different contexts. I would say very often the conflicts that I am working with are either around power differences, people experiencing ends of systemic oppression or around accountability within collectives and difficulties around roles and responsibilities and a lack of clarity around being accountable for what you take on. I think quite often the conflicts that we see are also very entangled with difficulties around sustainability, a sort of tension between people who might be more task focused and people who might be more group maintenance focused. People have just different approaches to the work that they do together.

And I think very often groups don't really have a very clearly articulated shared purpose and that can lead to conflict further down the line when people realise that maybe they're working towards slightly different vision or a different way of seeing how they want things to be in the future. And then they suddenly realise that and there's a kind of break down of communication around that.

C: I was gonna ask you if you thought that was actually also a myth. This 'if we really have a shared aim, we can overcome anything together' kind of thing, which is maybe true to a certain extent. Sometimes people make a lot of assumptions, 'we all want a better community' and it's kind of vague, but once we get down to the nitty-gritty or the process towards something, we don't agree on it.

A: It feels kinda gross actually, this idea that if we just have a shared aim, then it's all fine. It doesn't really work like that, but I do think that sometimes, particularly in grass-roots groups, there's a real lack of clarity or communication around shared values or shared purpose. What are you even trying to do?

And I do think that that does contribute to tension and difficult dynamics in groups. I am not necessarily saying that people need to have this shared purpose very clearly identified, though I have seen that that sometimes helps, but I think that there at least needs to be dialogue about what different people think or feel about both the vision and the process around how to get there.

C: I agree. I think it's also sometimes a timing issue though, right? Because I also have noticed in my experience that if we're talking about that our relationship or our collaboration as a collective is under existential threat because I'm just not getting along with you. And then somebody is like 'why don't you just talk about your shared vision?' So you can't really have all of these things simultaneously. It's almost like this work needs to be put in before the conflict bursts above the surface. And that's a bit tricky.

A: Totally. And it's a bit like catching the rising tension before it explodes. It's really tricky. And it can be culturally inflected or influenced. Like what is ok for one person in terms of communication styles might be threatening or difficult for someone else. And also sometimes there can be a real silencing around conflict and difference because people feel like they don't know how to talk about it.

All of these things can make it much harder to allow space for conflict and to build systems in anticipation of conflict happening. And I think that that is really important work because there can be this really strong culture of fire fighting – like trying to just get through an internal crisis or get through the demands of active engagement with the world in its pretty messed up state. That can mean that people struggle to make the space and time for putting systems in place to be able to deal with conflict when it happens.

C: Maybe it seems like boring work or work that is not getting your feet on the ground and really moving your political agenda or whatever your collective is there to do. It's like 'let's not be so self-indulgent to sit around a hypothetically think about' Yeah, even in a more recent collective of mine, we've received lots of feedback about how it's probably good to talk about an exit strategy, like if someone would leave, because we're sharing finances. And it's like, 'oh we'll get to that.' How can you procrastinate, given all the advice with experiences in this field?

A: But there will always be something more important to do! It's interesting that there's this, what I think is a bit of a false distinction, between talking about the process or your relationships or conflict and building systems around that and the work that you're there to do. Because in some respects, some of the most important work that we might choose to do is to figure out how on earth to begin relating to each other in a different way.

And from my perspective conflict and how conflicts are navigated are so much part of that – like building different ways of relating to each other. It feels so essential to me that we find ways to do that in ways that build power and build strong movement that are connected and well-resourced and nourished in terms of the relationships that make those movement happen.

C: What are the things that you notice about the way people react during this intervention or mediation that you're engaging in with groups? What's a common response?

A: I think very often people are surprised by the power of listening and being heard, which just kinda sounds totally simple, but a huge amount of mediation and conflict facilitation is really about creating the space where people have that experience, are heard, kind of received often at the level of needs or what is most important to them. And I think that for me that is an unusual experience in the world and it can be quite transformative when that happens.

And there's also something about the reciprocity of that within a mediation process or conflict facilitation because the mediator or facilitator's role is to try to hold space for people to hear each other. That as well can build collaboration and be quite powerful for people, especially when conflict involves power differences. I think conflict always involves something around people's experiences of systemic oppression, but when that's maybe the main issue of a conflict, quite often there are moments of shame and guilt that have to be worked through. If someone is able to hear what the impact of their behaviour has been, if they have more power in some form than the other person. That can be quite difficult to work with and sometimes takes a long time. I sometimes see conflict as a bit of a spectrum from conflicts that involve a lot of relational harm and deep emotional pain through to conflicts that are more about people having different positions in a decision making process. I don't see it as a clear spectrum, but I think that there is some sort of difference between those two types of conflict.

C: What is it that we are trying to transform in the first place? Because you said that these conflicts can be a necessary source of impulse for change or growth, they shape us. We are being shaped by them no matter what we do.

And then how do we wanna use that to transform our collaboration, our movements, what we are and what we are doing. I think you were saying that there's something way deeper. Not all conflicts, but a lot of them, from this place of 'I've experienced harm and trauma and there's no space for that.' That's something that we are trying to transform or should be transformed.

A: I really hope so. It feels so fundamental for me that we find ways to allow pain. In my experience in my organising and also working with other groups, so often there is this idea 'just pull yourself up again and you'll be fine. Just get on with it. we've got so much to do. we've gotta go go go.'

Actually it's a total cognitive dissonance because I feel that there is so much wounding and there's so much pain. I think a lot of people have their own experiences of conflict in their lives, in their upbringings, in their interpersonal relationships, inform how they respond in conflicts within their collectives or their organising. And I really long for spaces where we can be full people, you know, and receive each other as full people.

C: Yeah, I think that the factors or the things we wanna transform are on different levels simultaneously. They're structural, personal, interpersonal, maybe more layers. So that's why it's all a bit messy if we wanna say 'ok let's talk about prevention,' 'ok, then let's undermine the existing structure that makes you get paid for me.' That's something totally different than our disagreement at the water cooler yesterday.

If we're talking about activists, sometimes we have a heightened awareness of the structural factors. What it does, I think, is make us feel pressured to politicise our emotions, which blurs all the layers again together. Which I'm not saying is an incorrect thing to do, I think I have a lot of political emotions and you probably do to. But to feel pressure to make them be recognised by saying 'I want you to acknowledge that this is structural and I want everyone here to acknowledge that this is a political thing' can be really empowering, but I don't know that that's the only way to frame your experience in a conflict. And I think some people feel like it is the only way. I would like to transform that. Transform that there's a hierarchy there and that our emotions are only valid if they are political.

A: Yeah, and also this idea that maybe the only way to get support is to stay at that structural level because if it becomes about personal pain and trauma then very often people are pushed to the sides of groups or marginalised or outcast. So I think I often see people having to politicise their emotions or articulating their experiences mostly at a systemic level rather than a personal and interpersonal level because that's the way to get support from their communities. But I think it all deserves support.

C: We could even say, because these categories are a bit arbitrary, so we could say 'perceived personal' because it's all political, but there are people who can articulate something more as political and those are the people who maybe get access to certain care.

How do you prepare people for jumping into this conflict mediation setting? Because we can't lie to them and say 'there are absolutely no barriers to empathy. you're walking into this session and everyone is always going to listen to everything that you say.' You can't lie to them but you also want to encourage them. How do you go about doing that?

A: Usually I would do a one-to-one meeting with anyone involved in a conflict that I might facilitate or mediate. To be honest, most of what I do in that is listen. I hope that through that process they have one positive experience of being listened to empathically and that that might support people to feel more confident to step in to meeting with the person or people that they are in conflict with. And in those initial meetings, I would explain the process so that people aren't walking into something totally unknown, they have a sense of the different stages that it might go through and also what is invited from them and what might be offered to them, in terms of listening and hearing the other person or people involved.

I quite often in those initial meetings will hear people's fears as well about the process. And quite often people will say, 'I feel this this and this. I feel super angry about something and really sad about this, this, and this, but I'm never gonna say that because the other person never listens to me.' And quite often at that point I will say 'well, how about saying THAT?' those things that are about the dynamic or about the relationship, that haven't had an opportunity to be aired or spoken to.

Because I think that if people are able to do that in a mediated process where someone else is there to witness and hear it, then that often very fundamental layer of difficulty in the relationship can be acknowledged and identified, which means that it's less likely to happen in the room when those joint meetings happen or it's less likely to continue because it's been named. There's something about naming the dynamic that can be quite helpful for people to then be able to go down to the next level of difficulty in the relationship.

C: We're really happy to share that in these podcasts, to try to talk about mediation as something that should be in all of our toolkits, something that we should think about. Maybe that mediation as a tool is something that is not only for some professional elite or not only for some problematic people who can't manage on their own, but it's more a tool in our toolkit.

A: I think you're right. There's probably 2 main things that I do in conflict processes: and that's reflecting back what I hear with empathy and asking the people in conflict to reflect back what they hear of the other people.

And of course it takes a lot of emotional labour and work, but I also think that everyone has the capacity to feel empathy for other people. It's of course eroded through struggles with power differences and systems of oppression and capitalism and everything

else. But I think it's something we can all cultivate.

C: You've already said, at least to me, in mediation impartiality doesn't exist. I wonder if that's something that people have said to you in some of these initial meetings or in group settings, that you get this accusation and how you deal with it in that case. Or how you deal with it in general, because it's something that you admit and recognise.

A: I think it's a myth that any facilitator or mediator can be impartial. Like what does that mean? I definitely have judgements about people I work with, all the time. And to pretend otherwise would be totally disingenuous. It just doesn't make any sense to pretend that I don't have those judgements.

So I think what's important for me is to acknowledge the judgements and to be as conscious as I can be about the ways in which they might influence how I choose to go about the process, or the decisions that I make about how I respond when someone is speaking. And also I think I find a more useful term or concept, I find 'multipartiality' a more useful idea than 'impartiality' because I think my role as a mediator is to be on everyone's side at the same time. And that can be really hard and often involves me doing a bunch of work around finding empathy for people whose behaviour I might find totally objectionable in loads of ways, but I also deeply believe in people's capacity to change. I think if I lost that, then I wouldn't do this work.

I don't believe in systems of punishment for people causing each other harm. I believe in more transformative processes that enable people to address harm rather than just being ostracised and being pushed to the edges and excluded. So multipartiality as an idea is super important to me and I think more useful than this myth of impartiality, although it can take a lot of work to be able to stay multipartial.

C: Yeah, it sounds like a really bold task to try to undertake, especially in some polemic situations. I wonder if anyone has asked you this before; what can those of us do who are coming to someone like you for mediation to make this multipartiality less of a burden or to make ourselves more engaged in the process? I think you said maybe recognise that it takes us some time to prepare, but I don't know if you have any other tips. This would be a good opportunity to...

A: I don't want to put anything more on people who are experiencing loads of pain. Maybe that is my job to do, it's my work to be resourced, to make good use of my own support systems. And I guess if people are in conflicts, I would encourage them to identify their own support systems because I think it can be pretty intense going through a mediation process. A lot can come up, and sometimes unexpected things can come up. And having support beyond the process itself and beyond the mediator, can be really really helpful.

C: I think it's sometimes hard to know, especially if the conflict is kind of overlapping with the people that you care about, right? Because then you're like 'I don't know where to look for this support.' That can be really hard.

A: That's a super isolating experience I think. And of course I don't think that should necessarily be the responsibility of someone whose potentially experienced a lot of pain and harm, which is why I think we also... I mean you can't just do conflict mediation and everything will be fine. It's like we have to build collective care infrastructure.

C: I'm really glad that you joined me today. And I really appreciate you taking the time to share with me and with our listeners from the breadth of experience that you've had with a lot of different conflict. I think we all have at least some stressful, if not painful,

experiences with conflict and the way you speak about it with such empathy and with such nuance and compassion I think can be really also empowering for the listeners and for myself. So thank you!

L: Thank you so much. I really enjoyed talking with you and also hearing from your many diverse experiences as well. Thank you.

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If you like what you heard, check bandcamp to download the digital album *nowe kawałki* and to all the trainers and participants and other network members who shared their input.

We're really grateful to this interview guest for sharing their story!

If you have other stories about seeking out conflict mediation and wanna share them with us, reach out on Twitter with the hashtag #conflictisOK
Tune into our next episode of the podcast series Push or Pull, coming out next week!

You can listen to the podcast here: https://archive.org/details/pushORpull_ep4

Transcription episode 4

Hello dear listeners, welcome to the fourth episode of 'Push or Pull', the podcast where we say 'conflict is ok!'

We talk about conflict resolution and mediation as well as touch on conflict transformation processes. In each episode we will delve into different aspects of the topic, we will listen to, share and talk with young activists from social justice and climate justices movements in Europe about their different perspectives and experiences of conflict.

Musical interlude

Here we are ready to dig even deeper into why we fight and with whom and we're also going to discuss self-organised tools used to keep our communities accountable and make the most out of the transformative potential of conflicts. While individuals are certainly shaped by their experiences of conflict, what we want to get at with the notion of conflict transformation is structural transformation, structural change. The transformative potential of a conflict is largely shaped by how well we manage to put the lessons learned into action in our community before the next conflict emerges.

We invited a friend from the decentralized open-source tech scene, who has taken part in the collaborative authoring of community guidelines, or a code of conduct, for CryptoParty. I'll give a brief description of what cryptoparties are, quoting the website, which you can check for more info: cryptoparty.in

"CryptoParty is a decentralized movement with events happening all over the world. The goal is to pass on knowledge about protecting yourself in the digital space. This can include encrypted communication, preventing being tracked while browsing the web, and general security advice regarding computers and smartphones."

So there's a bit of context, but where we likely need to start is what is a Code of Conduct? And maybe we can already start looking at what is often missing from them.

F: I started looking into them when they were not that common, but in the last year or two I've seen them pop up everywhere. And there's lots of discourse around it because, of course, you can kind of put out a code of conduct, but in the end when you have conflict it's always also about people actually wanting to resolve it.

You have many communities where when there's a conflict a person might just be thrown out or if the problematic behaviour comes from a person who's already kind of in the community and it's an event where other people come in, then the other people might just never come back after that happened. What do you do with it?

All the nice intentions, but if I'm from a marginalized group and I go to this event and something happens and there's a code of conduct, what do I get from it? Just because it's written down that people may not be discriminated against on these or that factors, assholes usually don't care about that. They will do it anyway and then what can I do with it?

Then I say, well, these people who argue that way they often feel that we live in a perfect society where everybody is on the same page what is acceptable and what is unacceptable behaviour. In practice, I have often found that is not the case. Even within, I would say, generally not asshole people, like people who try to be considerate, they have different standards on different things, they come from different backgrounds.

Different behaviours can be also triggering to people, like you might have an asshole with specific personality traits that are not problematic in themselves, but they hurt other people and then these other traits kind of also become triggering for people who are affected by their behaviour. So you have all these different things.

A code of conduct can help establish, also within the group, first of all just talking about what is expected behaviour and what is still within the tolerances of the group. If you have a super open group to the public, I would say you'll have to have a bit more of a tolerance in behavioural terms, just because it wouldn't work otherwise. You cannot create a safe space in totally open meeting setting, but then also at what point do you step in?

Also, how to do it. Just giving people tools to engage in stuff like that is very important, I think. Which also many codes of conduct miss. They just say this is good behaviour and that is bad behaviour and then not so much.

When I wrote the code of conduct for CryptoParty I tried to put in as much stuff empowering parts into it as possible because I know it's a super decentralized movement. There is not much structure per say, so I tried to put as many pointers into it so people can kind of help themselves redeem situations.

C: But why are we even talking about codes of conduct? What can they do?

F: You know you can be, if you're cool with this, come join us. And if you're not cool with this you know there is so much space where you can do whatever work elsewhere.

So this is more where this freedom comes from, you that you can be more like 'ok, I see you. you're a bit too far away from me to do much about it, but do your thing over there and don't do them here. That is kind of like a thing.

C:

Ok, so they can help put people on the same page before they even start to collaborate with each other as a group. Amazing!

The process of creating a code of conduct sounds like an interesting one for an activist group to get into, in that they have to make space for discussing what kind of behaviour they want to encourage interpersonally amongst themselves, what kind of

culture they want to have around conflict as a group. Also, as far as I understand it, the Code of Conduct is a living document, that is continuously amended collectively. I'm interested in who shapes it and how a Code of Conduct comes about?

F: I think usually with Codes of Conduct many are written by one person or a very small team of people and then reviewed by their peers. And then made available to the public and then you also often see people copy them, and some copy them verbatim but some make adjustments to their local and specific circumstances and needs. Then other people might take re-inspiration: like the people who originally wrote it, for example, or these changed version might meander through the world and then come out even further developed on the other side and then be readopted by the people who wrote it in the first place.

You can see it, for example, in the very peculiar part of many of Codes of Conduct is this list of factors that people may not be discriminated against. It's always a bit different, like how some biologists research the history of genes. I think this list of specific things that people may not be discriminated against is a very particular gene that you could trace back where Codes of Conducts originated from or what assumptions people make.

One very specific thing that is in some Codes of Conduct is 'political belief'. I would be in the group of people who think that that should not be there because it kind of protects nazis, which very easily conflicts with other forms of discrimination. But usually it's written by maybe one or a few people and then reviewed by others. That's how I went about it. And I built on other Codes of Conduct, so it's a larger group of people just by the inspiration you take from.

C: Let's get into some of the details of our particular case study, which is the Code of Conduct for the CryptoParty. It is meant to approach the topic of safer spaces, right?

F: It started with what was called guiding principles. The people who started the movement put out some general things that they want to or not want to be CryptoParty. For example, that it's not politically or commercially aligned, and stuff like that. That was very very sparse in its definition. I mean, it's still an event in the tech space that is super discriminatory in itself, so we try to make it more of a safe space and communicate it like that at first.

But if you don't have a safe space and you call it a safe space, that is worse than calling it nothing because expectation management is super important. It's an open meeting so anyone can come, so you always have the chance that a random asshole will show up. Just making sure that people who go have the right set of expectations, that it's not per say a safe space.

Every CryptoParty chapter around the world is different, but we kinda want to make sure that it's as safe as possible and that problematic behaviour or conflict is dealt with. We don't have hard walls against society, so it lives in this same space, so we have to deal with the same shit that you have to deal with when you go to the supermarket or something. There is shit happening everywhere and then just taking care of the shit is what makes life better.

In the broader spectrum of conflict resolution, my experience is that abusers will usually test the waters. So usually you can catch them at very minor transgressions that are not super harmful for people. So if you catch them early, you might prevent more long-term and more severe abuse. Usually the first shot is kind of free for me, but I'm talking about the small ones that can be an accident. You talk about why that might be problematic or not and afterwards it's always kinda deliberate because now you know that they know some forms and phrases. Like when people are dissociated or have

other things on their mind, they might slip up, but then if they don't catch themselves they should be very aware that that is not behaviour that is cool in that space. And also to defend against that especially like...

I put a rather particular part in the CryptoParty Code of Conduct where it's about expected behaviour. It's called Be Considerate. I'll just read it aloud:

People who participate in CryptoParties come from a diversity of backgrounds. Even if they speak the same language, they may have vastly different vocabularies. If in doubt, expect people to not know a word and explain it or ask if further explanation is needed. And then also there's also differing perception of offensiveness of language. And if you think your words may be perceived as offensive, don't use them if you can. And if you don't have another way of expressing yourself, ask others to help you find better words.

There's also this kind of classism that sometimes people who come from tough schools, they have very different languages as those who went to high class schools. Usually different forms of discrimination express themselves differently. There usually more quiet the more privilege people have, to kind of account for that. We can allow for people who have super offensive vocabulary and how they mean things. Usually if they are nice people, they will change their vocabulary very very quickly.

That's also a thing I see often. Abusers will be like 'oh, that's how I say things always or whatever. I cannot change my ways.' On the other hand, you can have people who are caring about other people and they come from whatever social background where whatever vocabulary is allowed. And if they get the feedback that these words are not cool here, they will cut them out very very very quickly. And they might slip up every now and then, but the change of behaviour in people who are considerate of the environment is always very very noticeable.

These excuses of people not being able to change their ways is always a hard red flag for me.

C: I think it is cool in that sense that it's trying to articulate a lot of assumptions about what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. Because there are a lot of spaces where you would go and that stuff is unspoken.

To put it down on paper itself can be empowering to the people who might experience what we would call unacceptable behaviour. In general, that's against the group's assumption of what's not ok, but additionally it's also written down. That part I find empowering, but I wonder what other parts you meant were particularly empowering.

F: I'll elaborate on that a little bit. Many people who violate boundaries they might use excuses like 'oh, that was just a joke,' or 'oh, I didn't know about that.' Especially this 'I didn't know about that,' it becomes kind of a mute point because it's written down. If you put printed-out versions of the Code of Conduct at the event and you tell people about it, their room for excuses becomes much much smaller. I'm a bit of a person of one strike is 'now you have been noticed' and then there's not room for much other problematic behaviour. But, yeah, that totally reduces that evasion of accountability.

C: And this is one type of conflict so in a sense it's preventing this type of conflict and then if a conflict does occur, that means that somebody knew. And so now we know to address it like that.

F: I also realize if you're serious about these things, having a Code of Conduct, establishing these parameters drives away abusive people. In wider social circles, I've noticed some people and they tried to attach and I was just reminding everyone in the

room you know what goes and what doesn't. These people were never seen again. So it doesn't prevent everything, but empowering marginalized people helps a lot.

C: sounds perfect! But can we explain what are some of the limitations?
lack of resources

F: You always have the thing with the resources that are never enough in most contexts that I work in because we live in capitalism. We have this false, artificially-created sparsity of resources. There are some organisations that do it very well, I would say. You have Access Now, for example, who organise RightsConf and they have a dedicated Code of Conduct team who are paid for that.

They are really good, I think, in how they set up their Code of Conduct, which, as most Codes of Conduct, and CryptoParty's Code of Conduct too by the way, was established after conflict arose and could not be resolved in the best way possible. That is also a thing I find again and again. When I see a Code of Conduct, usually it was written after shit went down. People were sorry that they didn't think of these things before the thing.

They took that very seriously and they reviewed their processes. They set up new processes. And I think they are very well equipped to deal with these things and they can be something other people might copy or take inspiration from. And as far as I know, Internet Freedom Festival, for example, is also such a case. Especially Internet Freedom Festival, amongst internet freedom enthusiasts, is then also kind of criticized again because they take lots of money from Google.

There are all these things, but that also means they have the resources to pay people to take care of these things.

C: There are other critiques of this approach which revolve around how much a Code of Conduct can feel like policing. Some people wish for more freedom in their interpersonal relationships and their activism. Let's take a look at that critique and at an important response to it.

Maybe we could mention because maybe people might be thinking 'oh, all they wanna talk about is how they wanna police behaviour. They wanna police behaviour.' But the tyranny of the structurelessness. It's a thing.

F: It's a modern classic from the 1970s that was written by Jo Freeman and was about the 2nd wave feminist movement and how it was very structureless. In that form, they had a common goal, but by not reflecting the society they lived in, they implicitly created other oppressive structures within themselves.

C: I'm trying to react to some perceived criticism that we wanna police everyone and that's why we think Codes of Conduct are so cool. But what she wrote in the 1970s describing the movement was "we cannot decide whether or not to have a structured or structureless group, only whether or not to have a formally structured one." Because there are unspoken Codes of Conduct or there are unspoken leaders or whatever and how dangerous this can be because then you have this like 'oh, we're structureless, so don't try to police us.' But you can't even criticize the structure because people are denying that it exists. And that's the scary part because then you have no way of keeping anyone accountable to anything.

F: It's something that is very very obvious in the free, open-source software world, where gender bias is even harsher than in the IT world in general. And it's because

the misogyny is just ridiculous. And I know of many women in IT who'd rather go into corporate spaces because they know... even though those are also super misogynist, as corporate spaces are, they have at least some structure to work along. And they get paid. Depending on the company, both can be true. You either have an HR department that you can make use of, or you deal with the misogyny anyway, so you might as well get paid for it. They have not read the text, obviously.

And also maybe for the listeners, it's also good to mention that there's a response to the Tyranny of Structurelessness which is the Tyranny of Tyranny which is again contextualizing the essay. I think together they play very well.

C: At the start of this podcast, I mentioned briefly how Codes of Conduct, when they help promote the integration of lessons learned into structural changes in the way a group operates, are able to harness the transformative potential of conflicts.

Now I want to ask our guest talk about how can Codes of Conduct play a role in transformative justice or conflict transformation? How can they improve community structures and processes?

F: I would say that is actually something that distinguishes the CryptoParty Code of Conduct from others, that it tries to be as self-contained and it put transformative justice principles in there. And I think though you cannot start a complete transformative justice process, just being aware of it and being trained in it helps these things: that nobody is impartial, that you cannot have this moderator in the middle. In the space part, allowing people to be partial with the different parties is super important. Not being judgmental because the person hangs out rather with this or with the other person. Having a bit of people around the conflicting parties who are not directly in conflict and who can talk to each other is super important in my experience. So just having that in there.

This Code of Conduct encourages people to reach out to or look for people who they feel comfortable with in their vicinity. And if they don't find them there, then maybe reach out further over the internet and stuff like that.

It's kind of a brand, this CryptoParty thing, and it comes with some expectations, but they differ from region to region and so on and so forth. And I'm still also conflicted about that, because don't have a world police that makes all the CryptoParties in the world kind of the same experience.

C: It's a process, right? I think it's going to continue to be adapted. I like this part about conflict assessment.

F: I took that from transformative justice as well. These three parts: assessing the concern. If there has been harmful behaviour, how much was the damage and how likely would you say that will happen again. So it was concern, opportunities: how likely would you assess to be able to... or what are the mechanisms to deal with it and then also the resources to do these things. Often you see a person who just uses a word and they don't the slightest clue that it might be problematic.

For example, there's this image manipulation software and it's called GIMP. As not a native speaker, I was never aware that 'gimp' has any negative connotations, so for years I was recommending and using the software. Until someone told me that it's an actual word and it has meaning. So if would see then someone as myself being unaware using that word, I would look into it, but then my concern assessment would be... the opportunity would be or I would probably already have told that person 'hey, that word has also different meanings. It's not just an image manipulation program.' And then

that person is probably like, 'oh shit, I didn't know.' Then my assessment would be, my concern that that will happen again is very very low, so yeah, opportunity already done and resources almost none needed.

Then also if you have a person who's very low-key abusive and you don't see much behaviour like that, then it becomes a bit tricky how to deal with these things. Because sometimes you just have these people who don't things really wrong, but you have other people who are just not vibing with anyone in the group, but there still there anyway. And how to deal with them, I find that very very hard.

C: Yeah, but I also think that these steps are pretty useful, but they become also useful with more experience, right? So if you're a conflict avoidant person, maybe like myself, you don't build this experience of being able to be like, 'hmmm, what is the opportunity for resolving or preventing future offences?' as it's written here. That you can kind of tell if you've done it five times the past couple months, you know, gone through these questions in your head, read the vibe of the person. Because this is the type of thing that's functioning in a group where you don't know everyone, you don't have relationships with everyone. So you kind of have to practice this assessment.

F: Also, yeah. Having written out techniques on transformative justice, it is... Nobody is born with the conflict resolution skills. You can totally learn them. One of these mechanisms that was, it was like practising a muscle, maybe even like a broken muscle to me, where I really saw progress. It felt really bad on an emotional level, on a conflict avoidant thing. If you want to assume always the best of people, if someone tells you they were hurt by another person, immediately emotionally reflex might be not believing them. Because believing them might mean that there is conflict and stuff.

This always believing the victim thing, was sometimes a very very conscious process for me, where all my guts were like 'no, that can't be true!' And then I just believed them anyway, and in my experience, it's just the best thing you can do under any circumstances. And even if people might abuse that, it's still the best process to believe them. So you do that consciously for awhile and then it also becomes kind of automatic. That's also encouraging to see that.

Because we also live in an abusive society, so maybe there's also sometimes a reflex that people are more or less are gaslighted at some point or another in our childhood or adolescence into abandoning our rather rational and reasonable emotional reactions. Then you need to reconnect. Or some processes might go out of hand and we need to reconnect and reassess and retrain our brains to be more just.

F: As transformative justice came out of restorative justice, I find it so encouraging to see just the processes improving. The Tyranny of Structureless and super loose long-ish paper, because people they have just vast thoughts, seeing them crystallize in more and more concrete ways of action. Yeah, I find that super encouraging. I often liked those things to health care or, for example, medical emergencies. How back in the day when it came to CPR, there was the chest compressions and also the mouth-to-mouth breathing.

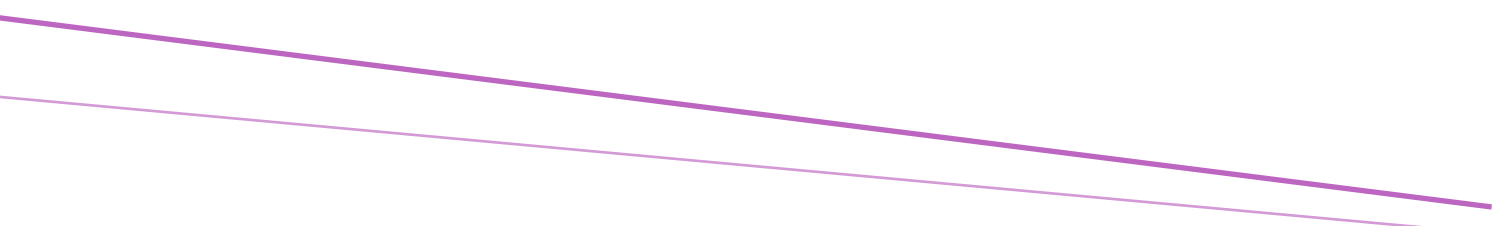
For most people, that is too complex to handle, so by now, the medical community has boiled it down just to check compressions. Don't think about too much. If the person seems to not be breathing, just start chest compressions. Because it's important to just start that and also you move the lungs so a bit of air comes in and out of it with just pressing on the chest. And that's the most important thing. Reducing super complex things to the very very simple actionable things, keeping in mind that not everybody can be a medical professional and be able to all the difficult things.

I think that has a huge impact on things in general.

C: Wait, shouldn't we just make sure every group has a code of conduct and then we've solved the whole dilemma with conflict in our groups?

F: In general, it's a very very good direction, but just that you have a Code of Conduct does not mean that you will be free of conflict or that you will always resolve the conflicts in a satisfying way for all parties.

C: Waaa waaoooo. Let's not let ourselves get discouraged by challenging experiences with conflict. There seems to be great transformative potential. It was a pleasure diving into that topic with you today.



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Tune into our next episode of the podcast series Push or Pull, coming out next week!

You can listen to the podcast here: https://archive.org/details/pushORpull_ep5

Transcription episode 5

Hello dear listeners, welcome to the fifth, and likely final, episode of 'Push or Pull', the podcast where we say 'conflict is ok!'

We talk about conflict resolution and mediation as well as touch on conflict transformation processes. In each episode we will delve into different aspects of the topic, we will listen to, share and talk with young activists from social justice and climate justices movements in Europe about their different perspectives and experiences of conflict.

For this episode we are going to revisit the participants and trainers who we interviewed at the start, to see how they are now reflecting on the topic of conflict mediation after participating in the week-long training. It's exciting to hear hopeful voices talk about what plans they have for self-organised conflict mediation in their activist groups.

Q: Since we just went through this experience together, I wanna ask you about your impressions from this training.

P1: Yeah, it was very interesting. The people were very nice. I have now a better idea, while I'm not sure I grasp everything. I think I need some practice. Well, maybe you don't want practice because you don't want conflicts. Yeah, it's clearer in my head. They talked a lot about this "I" thing and how to de-escalation of the conflict. I hope, it gave me some tools, but I'm not super sure yet if I'm really able to do it if really things happens, if I would be ready to jump in, if this is gonna happen in the heat of the moment.

Q: Can you imagine taking any of it back to your group and how you would talk about it with them?

P1: Yeah, I think will give some sort of report or something when I go back. We have a meeting on Wednesday, so there will probably be some announcements. I will explain what happened at the training. If some people are interested, we can do like a little session to share some of the tools.

Q: Could you share you with us maybe any impressions after participating? Were there any expectations that you met or that were not met? Any impressions that you wanna share if there's something that you're gonna take with you back to your city or your groups where you work? Anything that you wanna share with others?

P2: I really feel like most of my expectations were met, but what I can share is a specific reflection that I had on the topic of structural discrimination. I really appreciated this discussion because this kind of framework is not so openly discussed in my circles. And people still tend to view conflict as a clash of personalities or lack of compromise and they don't really see all the underlying aspects to conflict.

Q: Maybe on a more personal note, do you think that conflict mediation or facilitation is something that you would like to pursue further in your life, not just in non-formal trainings?

P2: Yes, actually. I have plans on getting more involved in mediation processes. Maybe do a professional course, since it's it's in line with my sociology studies anyway. However, I would be a bit concerned about how the courses in the particular field are conducted. Because personally I see many underlying layers to conflict that can't be addressed by a specific blueprint. If I can find a course that takes into consideration the intersectional and complex nature of conflicts, then I could definitely get on board and join. Yeah, why not?

P3: Well, I have to say that I have actually changed my mind, or this training has been kind of life changing experience in a way, because suddenly I felt more empowered to deal with conflicts. Not necessarily acting as a mediator in this kind of official form, but also as a person who just knows how to identify conflicts at the very early stage. Also, how to keep people on non-aggressive stages in a way. At the same time, I feel like I am the only one who came here from my collective. It feels like I am the only one who brings this idea back. They have not experienced it. They don't know that it really works. They're not so much excited as I am. So I am a little bit afraid that I could come back and people could be also sceptical about the idea. Because the conflict is so long, like it's kind of old, so I think it feels like people would be maybe fidgeting if they really want to touch it again. This is what bothers me a bit at the moment.

Another thing is that, yeah, I changed my impression that a mediator should be necessarily a very trained expert, having some psychological training or even sometimes legal training or something like this. This is what I imagined before. I see now that everybody basically can do it, if they really try. If both sides want it. So, like I said, there is hope and there is also a little bit of concern that people will not accept it.

P4: Yeah, I have to say that I really like it and I was surprised by how many different techniques there are for the conflict resolution. And towards some of them I am still sceptical. Some of them probably I will not be able to put into the context of our group, but I think for me the most important experience during this camp was to participate in this exercise that is called 'Arbor Alma', or something like that.

So basically it was about me trying to impersonate the person who is coming back to my home region after a few years and wants to start up some kind of eco-friendly village and attract tourists with it. It was also connected with logging and destroying the forest a little bit. The purpose of this task was to put myself in this position and not in a position of an activist that is trying to block it. Because that was another person's role. It was a really really interesting experience for me and it made me think a lot about it. Because I was also involved in some direct actions in Białowieża forest over the past years.

Yeah, I think that this process of gaining perspective of the other side is really enriching your perspective on the collective process and how you perceive other people's opinions and perspectives. I think I would like to go back to my group and maybe test it with them. It was a really interesting experience.

Now let's talk about some of the concrete skills that are there for those interested in self-organised conflict mediation.

F: In terms of self-organised conflict mediation, there are loads of things that the groups can do to work through the conflict themselves, to transform the conflicts themselves. I'm just gonna keep on saying that there is no need to look for external help if you feel in the group that you want to try that out yourselves, you have enough resources to try that out yourselves.

How to start? I think the good place to start is just to look for materials on-line, look for different groups experiences, gather skills and educate yourselves to really understand how does conflict work and what are the available tools and methods of transforming it.

In terms of who can do it, I think really any person who feels that they can do it, feels resourced to do it, can do it. I think the most important skills that that person holding the work around conflict needs to have, is listening. I think that's the base of everything, just being really able to hear what different parties of the conflict are saying and being really able to engage with that, understand that, understand where people are coming from.

And then, obviously, yeah certain practical skills coming from process work or coming from classical mediation techniques are useful. For example, gathering needs and being able to phrase them in "I" statements so that they don't sound like demands to other people. That's a very useful skill. And then being able to sit in the fire.

Actually, I think that's another really important skill, to feel in yourself, to feel that you're able to sit in the fire and not shy away from it or not run away from it. That's often what I see in myself a lot and what I see in other people that when we see conflict, when we feel conflict, we just want to run away.

But the key is to really sit with that and really engage with it. So a person who wants to hold space for the conflict needs to really have that clear that they are able to sit in that fire, that they are able to stay with the conflict and not run away from it.

There are different ways for how the process of conflict transformation in a group could look like or the self-organised mediation could look like. How it is going to be done, really depends on the groups, depends on the group culture, depends on the group members, depends what the conflict is about, how many people are influenced by the conflict. And say that it's also important to mention that whenever conflict happens in a group, even if we think that it's between only two people or three people in the group, it will have an influence on the whole group. It will have influence on relationships and trust in the whole group.

My advice is always to invite the whole into the process, so not to focus only on the two most obvious points, or three most obvious, points or parties of the conflict. Really engage with the whole group.

The classical process would start with listening to everyone in the group, so people who are directly involved in the conflict, listening to their needs, listening to their positions, so where do they come from. Listening to other people in the group and how do they feel in the conflict. That would be the first step, just to open up the conversation, open up the space to engage with that, to go to that place.

Then there could be something like exchanging needs. After listening to people involved in the conflict, making a list of needs, what do I need in this situation, what each person needs in that situation and delivering that to other people and seeing if there are ways to meet those needs.

If you can negotiate meeting those needs and re-establishing trust between people, that can be quite a transformative moment of the conflict.

When let's say there is a conflict between two people in a group and when they actually are able to see the underlying needs of the other person, not only see their opposition of like, 'I don't want to work that way because of certain things,' but like they actually hear 'I just want to be valued. I want my work to be valued. I really care about the world. I really care about this group and I'm afraid that this group is gonna fall apart.' That's the place where real transformation happens, when people can see each other as human beings and can feel each other's feelings. That's a really important of the process.

If it's risky... I think life is risky. Obviously, there is a risk that something can go wrong, but I think whenever we engage with any human relationship, there is a risk that something will go wrong and there is a risk that we will do something wrong, in terms of the process and in terms of holding the space, but I think I also ...

Quite an important thing for me is to really trust the collective knowledge and trust that if the group wants engage with the conflict, there will be ways to move through it. It might be that the outcome is 'yeah, ok, we split the group.' That's completely fine. I don't think that is a risk. If the group is able to come to a conclusion like that, that's a really good thing actually. Just realising needs and wants. If things get really messed up, there is always an opportunity to ask someone for help.

I would encourage groups to engage with conflicts and engage with that area.

I think the most important attitude is just the attitude of wanting to listen to each other and wanting to engage with each other. I think one of the important things we can do be better equipped with conflict is just really pay attention to our group's culture and how is it being formed, how do we form our relationship, how do care/nurture relationships.

I am convinced that if we do engage with relationships, if we really make an effort to establish relationships with each other, truthful, honest, loving relationships, we will have the ground to work through disagreements. We will have ground to be able to hear each other and to be able to listen to each other, to see each other's points of view. For me that's a base, just a real willingness to see each other, a real willingness to engage with each other as humans.

Well, that's it. We for sure have a lot more to learn about conflict transformation, but we are grateful to have begun this investigative journey together with you. Thank you for listening!

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