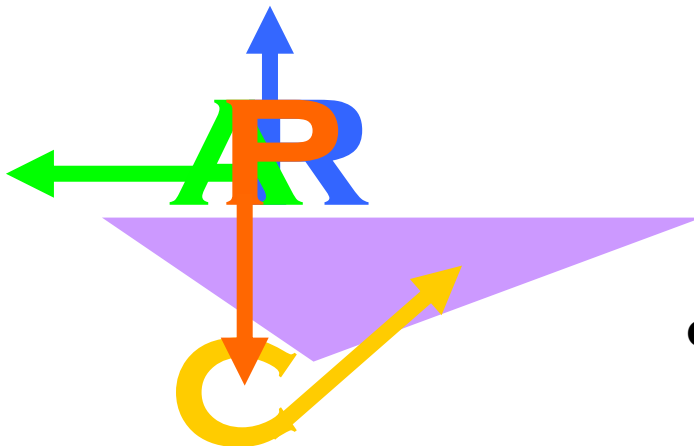


**RELATIONAL PEACE ADVOCACY NETWORKING  
(RPAN)  
REACHING  
THE EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS**

**IN**

**THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO  
WITHIN  
THE GREAT LAKES REGION**

**RPAN-C**



**MACSP, 2003-2004  
ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR  
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# **RPAN-C**

A. SUMMARY: Presentation of RPAN-C

The paper aims at integrating two points: a task and a method.

- The task is to develop a peace advocacy project. In this paper I present one step of the early process of *Advocacy Networking* (AN) reaching the European Union (EU) Institutions at the service of Sustainable Peace Building (SPB) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) within the Great Lakes Region (GL).
- The method is the way of organizing the task. In this paper I attempt to integrate some of the principles and tools of *Relational Constructionism* (and social constructionism) in peace building networking, *Peace Architecture*, and to concretely apply it to advocacy work in the DRC.

The integration of these two points, the organizing methodology and the project of peace advocacy networking, is what we will call: RPAN-C. This abbreviation stands for *Relational Peace Advocacy Networking* in Congo. The strength of this peace advocacy networking is in the combination of a clear task-oriented model “looking at the tree and at the woods” at the same time when building Peace Architecture, and using a relational constructionist process with special attention to the knowledge and meaning, ownership, and motivation that are constructed in the relations among the actors involved in the peace task creating a *community of practice*.

B. INTRODUCTION: A “*relational* step” in the networking process.

The proposal of this paper is to take a step further our process of peace advocacy networking: to integrate some organizing principles and tools of social constructionism and *Relational Constructionism* into advocacy work in *Peace Architecture*.<sup>1</sup>

We believe that by integrating these two models, we can offer a potentially effective approach in peace advocacy that has not yet been used systematically for the benefit of those suffering from violent conflicts.

In this paper we attempt to put into words, systematize and summarize some of the reflections and practices that a group of people sensitive to the need of peace advocacy in the Democratic Republic of Congo has been sharing and searching for more than a year. The paper comes from the experience of some practices in peace advocacy networking in the Great Lakes Region reaching out to the European Parliament. This paper wants to help in new future practices (action research).

In the following we will systematize these reflections and practices in the frame of a draft project that could help the group to take the next steps in the coming months. We are aware of the complexity and challenge of the project. It will take time (years) to develop this model of practice. In a learning methodology the group involved in the project (*community of practice*) will consider day-by-day the pertinence of the project, whether or not it is workable. This paper is written with the aim of being deconstructed and, if pertinent, reconstructed by the group.

In the body of the paper we will proceed as follows. First, we will talk about the context from where this project arises; second, about the mission statement; third, about the vision of the group of people involved in the project; fourth, about some aspects of the organizational identity; fifth, about some orientations in the working methodology; and finally about some suggestions for an action plan in the coming months.

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<sup>1</sup> This model of Peace Architecture has been developed by Luc Reychler in his MaCSP courses in the academic year 2003-2004. Previous stages of the development of the model can be read in Luc REYCHLER, *Democratic Peace-Building and Conflict Prevention, the devil is in the transition*, Leuven University Press, 1999, p. 25. Also see Luc REYCHLER, “Conflict Impact Assessment”, in *Cahiers Internationales Betrekkings en Vredesonderzoek*, vol 67, 4<sup>o</sup> Kwartaal 2003, pp. 43, 49.

## C. THE PROJECT AS A BODY

We will use the metaphor of the body to show the interaction of the various parts of the project. We will first talk about the feet of the project or the violent context where it stands, second about the head orienting the action or the mission statement, third about the heart or vision and the values behind the project, fourth about the bones or the unique selling points of the organizational identity, fifth about the flesh or the Relational Organizing methodology, and finally about the hands to express a possible action plan.

### **1. Context or Feet of the Project: Violence and Armed Conflicts in the World, more concretely in DRC**

The project arises amongst people who have had their feet on the terrain of violent conflicts.

Personal Perspective: I have written this paper from a personal commitment to look at our violent world divided by armed conflicts, and to take up the challenge to join my work to peace efforts. This personal commitment is fed with my experience of three years in Rwandan and Burundian refugee camps in Tanzania, and Sudanese camps in Ethiopia. These suffering people are behind my motivation in looking for solutions to that extreme violence. I want to do this in collaboration with others who share a similar commitment.

Jesuit Perspective: When talking about the context and analysis from where arises my personal interest in this paper I look first at the violent situation of the world as a whole (a), and, second, I look especially at the violent situation of the African continent (b). For these two steps I make use of two documents written by Jesuit companions and collaborators from all over the world. Those texts express my point of departure and the interests behind this paper. I share the concerns of the Jesuits with regard to armed conflicts, violence, and gross human rights abuses all over the world. When looking at societies that are torn apart, the Catholic Church organization of the Jesuits sees:

#### a. Violence and War in the World as a Whole.

*“The entire world has witnessed during the last years new forms of violence and conflict that have engulfed many developing countries in a spiral of conflict and war, and have generated an unprecedented preoccupation with issues of national and international security vis-à-vis the widespread phenomenon of terrorism. From a global point of view, this complex phenomenon has had a considerable impact on the goal of achieving sustainable levels of development, on a fair and credible system of local and global governance, and on the respect for human dignity. There are three issues in particular that demand our attention.*

*The most disturbing form of terrorism all over the world is often projected as a clash of cultures, and many of the conflicts seem to be motivated by ethnic or religious conflicts.*

*A homogenising cultural process fostered by markets and technology seem to have given rise to an intensification of localised identities that struggle to retain their hold on people. To what an extent is this diagnosis true? How successful have the various peace and reconciliation initiatives been?*

*The pattern of economic growth pursued by rich countries and the new global forms of economic organisation represented mainly by transnational corporations have made **it** both imperative and easier to gain control over vast deposits of mineral and natural resources located in many developing countries. Ensuring a permanent access to cheap oil, timber, precious minerals, and even water has become of primary importance for conglomerates and rich countries so as to keep up with increasing levels of competition and productivity. A new ‘scramble’ for Africa is underway. Many conflicts are mysteriously intertwined with hidden interests for the control and access to these resources. Is this diagnosis true? How successful have the campaigns to unmask these interests been and what has been the impact of these efforts on the affected countries?*

*The combat against terrorism (national and international) has become a priority for all governments and increasing sums of money have been spent **on** devising strategies to combat it. While the violence and the loss of innocent life must be condemned unambiguously, the ultimate causes of these desperate acts are generally ignored. Under the pretext of fighting terrorism, many social issues and movements are ruthlessly suppressed and the protection of universal rights and duties are disregarded and, in some cases, conspicuously flaunted. In an atmosphere where feelings of fear and distrust are promoted, it becomes more and more difficult to promote solidarity, especially with the weakest, and with the unknown migrant. Is this diagnosis correct? Are we witnessing a weakening of the universal consensus on the need to build a society committed to the protection of human rights for all?*

*From the perspective of the Jesuit mission to a faith that promotes and struggles for justice, and from the standpoint of Catholic Social Teaching, it is imperative to confront these issues creatively, to examine the various efforts being made to deal with them, and finally, to propose an adequate response, however humble.”<sup>2</sup>*

Before proposing one possible response with RPAN-C we want to look closer at Africa and more especially DRC.

## b. Violence and War with Special Reference to Africa and DRC

*“The prophetic words of General Congregation 34 (GC 34) describing the widespread acceptance of a ‘culture of death’ have unfortunately become even more pertinent today. This culture has encouraged “war, terrorism, and violence”<sup>3</sup> on an unprecedented scale. What has become increasingly evident is that these forces of death*

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<sup>2</sup> This text is taken from the draft project for the *Advanced Program on Violence and War: Cultural and Economic Interests*, Jesuit Social Justice Secretariat, Rome 2004.

<sup>3</sup> GC 34, D. 3, n. 8. A General Congregation (GC) is the highest participatory body of decision making in the organization of the Jesuits. The last GC 34 sets the main worldwide priorities and mission for the Society of Jesus as a whole.

*have been unleashed primarily in the African continent. GC 34 has asked the universal Society “to do whatever it can to change international attitudes and behaviour towards Africa.”<sup>4</sup> The urgency of this call sounds more acute today when war and violence have dramatically underscored “the marginalization of Africa in the ‘new world order’” in a way that “renders an entire continent paradigmatic of all the marginalized of the world.”<sup>5</sup>*

*By way of example, we may recall that, since 1994, the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo has killed around 3.5 million people. In a situation of war and conflict people do not matter, and are used merely as tools to settle power-disputes and obtain economic advantages. In addition to those already dead, these conflicts have caused the internal displacement of millions who have had to flee their countries as refugees. In the process, they have lost all they had, and are in a situation marked by dreadful food scarcity, lack of proper shelter, and little access to primary health care. Not surprisingly, intermittent hunger, illness and, ultimately, death have characterized their lives.*

*The seemingly successful use of violence to achieve narrow interests appears to have become even more attractive and widespread, destroying the fabric of society, the rule of law, and democracy. Trust in human beings and in social institutions has been almost completely lost. People feel powerless and unable to control their future while criminals and terrorists have occupied the space created by lawlessness. The causes of these wars and conflicts lie in a powerful combination of internal and external interests bent on pillaging the natural and mineral riches of these regions.*

*Though Africa remains the most dramatic example of the manner in which these forces of death have destroyed the hope of life, similar situations prevail in other parts of the world, for example the Middle East, Colombia, and various countries of Asia. In these countries, the Society of Jesus has shown remarkable imagination and courage in finding new peace alternatives.”<sup>6</sup>*

## **2. Mission Statement or Head of the Project: What Peace Work to Do in that Violent Context**

The mission statement is the head that discern the actions of the group.

The international Society of Jesus is looking for a response to the previous analysis. Trying to clarify its mission the Jesuits write: *“Efforts to promote peace and justice should use our networks more effectively and collaborate with other groups, NGOs and institutions; only then can we articulate this problem in a clear, loud and strong voice. We should join other NGOs and institutions which have access to the general public to lobby for peace and against the trade in armaments (...). The formation of a Christian ‘political leadership’ capable of creating a viable option for peace should be supported*

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<sup>4</sup> GC 34, D. 3, n. 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> “Social Apostolate in the Society of Jesus, Challenges and Situation: Violence and war with special reference to Africa”, in *Promotio Iustitiae*, n° 80, Rome, 2003/4, n. 17-22.

*in Africa and other regions sensitive to these issues.”<sup>7</sup> And it comes to a concrete proposal: “Setting up a network that could be initiated soon by the Secretariat with the collaboration of various centres already working on these issues”.<sup>8</sup>*

Inspired by the former analysis and challenges of the Society of Jesus as well as by the analysis of the International Advocacy Group of the Jesuit Refugee Service<sup>9</sup>, our proposal aims at addressing some of the many issues raised in those documents.<sup>10</sup>

In the next paragraph we formulate our mission statement. We express what the organization stands for, what we want to do at the service of peace in the violent context described:

**To facilitate *relational advocacy networking* (RAN) reaching out to the European Union Institutions at the service of *sustainable peace building* (SPB) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Great Lakes Region (GL).**

In this mission statement four considerations are implied that require a more precise explanation. They are: (a) Relational Advocacy Networking, (b) Sustainable Peace Building, (c) the European Union Institutions, and (d) the focus on DRC and GL.

a. *Relational Advocacy Networking* (RAN).

We define *Relational Advocacy Networking* (RAN) as a type of advocacy qualified by the following points:

- Relational advocacy is a type of defense of victims of human rights abuses in armed conflicts that is inspired by relational constructionism.<sup>11</sup> Relational advocacy is facilitated by a *people centred network* where caring personal relations are as important as the work of the group (people relating to each other with the values presented in our vision – see *vision* in 3).
- A people centred network has a low institutional profile. RAN is built in a supportive and collaborative network (*community of action*) beyond the normal power games and competition of political bodies, NGOs, research centres, and other organizations and institutions abroad or locally.
- RAN is a qualified type of advocacy or defence of human rights focused on identifying and proposing solutions. Appreciative

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, n° 80.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, n° 80.

<sup>9</sup> See *Minutes of the First Meeting of JRS International Advocacy Network November 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> 2003*, Rome, Italy.

<sup>10</sup> The RPAN-C is in collaboration with the Jesuit organizations but independent at the same time. No institution or organization possesses the project. The people that work on it at personal level own the project. In this sense we say that RPAN-C is a people centred project and not institution centred.

<sup>11</sup> We will develop later the term of *Relational Constructionism* referring to Rene Bouwen.

enquiry does not stick to merely analysing the problems, but it gets energy from envisioning a better future, imagining what the world is calling for, what is the dream about solutions and peace.<sup>12</sup> Workable solutions are proposed on the base of serious participatory action-research.<sup>13</sup> RAN is rooted in serious research because of the complexity of armed conflicts in current days: there are no easy answers. Deep action research is at the core of our qualified advocacy. Any action has to be based in this action research.

- This action-research is rooted in the work of the practitioners of peace building in the field where the conflict takes place. RAN looks at the role of field diplomacy through participatory methodology, indigenous and *mestizo* peace mechanisms, among other tools in the field.
- When advocacy is based on action-research it is not a re-active advocacy but a pro-active advocacy. It does not wait for the effects of violence to address urgent response, but it looks for the causes of the human rights violations at structural level. We need to move beyond a re-active advocacy towards a pro-active advocacy, beyond the urgent (e.g. providing assistance in a food crisis in refugee camps) towards the important structural changes (e.g. persecuting illegal exploiters of natural resources and arms trafficking fuelling the conflict that produces refugees).<sup>14</sup> RAN looks at the causes of structural injustices.
- RAN is Networking. It is a permanent webbing of relations among people in the three angles of the triangle diplomacy. The impulse to cooperate through networking comes from the experience of the complexity of social issues in a “globalising” world and the relative powerlessness of each individual effort. A real commitment to cooperation, which often means sacrificing one’s own preferences or immediate interests, shows that we do not consider ourselves or our project the sole or entire solution. On the contrary, we happily acknowledge complexity, diversity and pluralism, and consider, therefore, cooperation an essential value<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> The methodology of appreciative inquiry is expressed in the “4-D Cycle”: 1- Discovery: what gives life? (mapping the positive core achievements to appreciate), 2- Dream: what might be? (envisioning, imagining what the world is calling for), 3- Design: what do we want to be? (determine the ideal and constructing it), 4- Destiny: what will be? (empowering inspired action to sustain the process). See Diana WHITNEY, Claudia LEBELER, and David COPERRIDER, *Appreciative Inquiry in Organizations and International Development: An Invitation to Share and Learn Across Fields ...* See also David L. COPERRIDER, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Brief Introduction*, and David L. COPERRIDER and Suresh SRIVASTVA, *Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life*.

<sup>13</sup> Participatory action research can be defined as collective, selfreflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situation in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social practices in four moments: reflection, planning, action and observation in a circular process creating an open-ended spiral. See Kaye Seymour-Rolls & Ian Hughes, *Participatory Action Research: Getting the Job Done*, 1995,2000, <http://www2.fhs.usyd.edu.au/aorw/ar/004.htm> and Yoland Wadsworth, *What is Participatory Action Research?*, 1998, <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/ari/p-ywadsworth98.html>

<sup>14</sup> See UN Panel of Experts Reports on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources in the DRC.

<sup>15</sup> New technologies (internet, e-mail, fax, telex...) closer and closer to remote fields make networking more possible and inexpensive. The network can serve quite different purposes: urgent action, exchange

*b. Sustainable Peace Building in Peace Architecture (RPAN).*

RAN is at the service of *Sustainable Peace Building*. This peace is the type of peace aimed at RPAN (Relational Peace Advocacy Networking). Sustainable peace goes beyond a negative peace and is defined by the next four factors:<sup>16</sup>

- The lack of physical, psychological, structural and cultural violence (the structural violence is due to lack of good governance addressing the causes of conflicts).
- Existence of internal and external legitimacy (moral backing).
- Self-sustainable (does not demand external crisis interventions)
- Promoting constructive *conflict transformation*

The architecture that sustains peace building is comprehensive, holistic, organic, systemic, trans-disciplinary. RPAN looks at the elements of the building and at the whole building of peace in its layers, levels and actors, domains and measures: peace making (effective communication, consultation, and negotiation), peace building (reconstruction: political, legal, economic blocks; and reconciliation or integrative climate: psychological, moral, cultural, religious, educational, artistic blocks), peace reinforcement and keeping (security of the military and police), leadership for good governance, and environmental block. Peace architecture is a model with a holistic and trans-disciplinary approach to peace. RPAN is on the line of the model of *Peace Architecture*.<sup>17</sup>

RPAN works out thanks to joined efforts of three tracks in diplomacy for sustainable peace building (*triangle diplomacy*): Track I or *traditional diplomacy* of the politicians, Track II or *expert diplomacy* of the research centres and NGOs, and Track III or *field diplomacy* of the people working for peace on the terrain where violence takes place<sup>18</sup>.

*c. Our Track I Diplomacy: European Political Actors*

Our Track I in the *Diplomacy Triangle* for RAN will focus on the European Union politicians and the role that EU political bodies can play serving Sustainable Peace Building (SPB) worldwide. The European Union bodies are gaining a political role as third party committed to multilaterality in many conflicts in the world and may become an alternative or balance to the role played unilaterally by USA.<sup>19</sup>

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of information, cooperation in a common project, advocacy or lobbying, monitoring private, public institutions nationally or internationally, or participating in special events and summits.

<sup>16</sup> Luc REYCHLER, *Democratic Peace-Building and Conflict Prevention: The Devil is in the Transition*, Leuven University Press, 1999, pp. 25, 73.

<sup>17</sup> Luc REYCHLER, *Democratic Peace-Building and Conflict Prevention: The Devil is in the Transition*, Leuven University Press, 1999, p. 25. Luc REYCHLER, "Conflict Impact Assessment", in *Cahiers Internationales Betrekkings en Vredesonderzoek*, vol 67, 4<sup>e</sup> Kwartaal 2003, pp. 43, 49.

<sup>18</sup> ELÍAS LÓPEZ, *Incaruate Forgiveness, Gift and Task of Field Diplomats from a Christian Perspective*, Licence Thesis in Theology, Leuven 1999.

<sup>19</sup> This is the perception that moves the Jesuit social work for justice in Latin America to look for an antenna of human rights at the service of their countries but based in Brussels.

#### d. DRC as a Focal Priority

Our advocacy networking focus is on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) within the Great Lakes Region (GL). This country becomes our priority due to its ongoing conflict. It is the most deadly war after WW II: 3.5 million people have died and there are several millions of refugees and displaced. The conflict of DRC is linked to the whole region in what has been called “the first African World War” including direct involvement of eight countries in the region. For this reason to focus, somehow, on Congo is to focus on the whole Great Lakes Region.

### **3. Vision or Heart of the Project: Some Values when Looking at that Violent Context**

Here we present some aspects of our values from where we address our mission (2) in the violent context (3). RPAN is a people centered networking consisting of people who share some common human values:

- People who care, who are committed to human rights in the midst of ignored gross human rights violations.
- People living in self-donation because they are aware of how much they personally have received in comparison with others with less fortune in an unjust world.
- People who believe in the human capacity of dealing with conflicts in a non-violent way. People who can bring about critical reasons for an unbreakable hope even in the middle of armed conflicts.
- People generating positive relations and mutual trust among its members (friendship among members).
- “*Relational*” people: People who are paths through borders and frontiers, who are roads joining cities, rather than streets of one city on one side of the border.
- People sensitive to the “grass roots”. People who experience solidarity with the victims of conflicts emerging from the personal encounter with them in the armed conflict areas. People who listen and give time to personal encounter with the victims.
- People oriented by the principle of human subsidiary (facilitating self-help): the victims and perpetrators of conflicts are the first actors responsible for the peaceful life in their own communities and societies. We give primacy, although not exclusivity, to the bottom-up peace work.
- Good professionals. People with deep insight into the problems and solutions and expertise in tools of analysis and intervention in conflict transformation and peace work. People who know about constructionist methodology and are guided by it.

#### **4. Organizational Identity or Bones of the Project: Unique Selling Points**

There are two assumptions at the basis of the design of our organizational identity determining the networking and the relationship among the members. We consider that there are two opportunities missed in organizational peace work. The use of these two opportunity windows become the unique selling points and bones structuring the body of RPAN.

##### **a. To Be Connectors in Low Institutional Spaces Between Institutions**

First assumption: There is a missed opportunity in the “non-institutional corridors between institutions”.

There are missed opportunities identified in the intra and inter space of institutions that can offer an enormous service at the peace process. In the “corridors” between institutions and formal organizations there is this “space at the borders” where non-formal relational peace advocacy is misused. RPAN dose not want to miss these opportunities of using “non-institutional corridors between institutions” to meet people and to build a people centered network.

The attempt in RPAN is to “go and meet” in some of these “spaces at the institutional borders” where these opportunities could arise, in between formal organizations and institutions at different levels (emergency aid or development aid provided by GOs, IGOs, NGOs, INGOs, UN Agencies, Red Cross Family, religious based organizations and institutions, grass root and community based organizations).

The use of this “encounter space” for networking is what we call “non formal organizing” or “low institutional organizing”. We define non-formal organizing as having a low institutional profile in the sense of free from specific institutional mandate, flexible to adapt itself to the learning process of the members in their personal interactions and relations.

This assumption on missed opportunities in non-formal organizing in the EU is based on our experience of informal contacts with some politicians in the European Parliament (EP). These personal contacts (*people centered net-work*) made us possible to present some resolutions approved in the EP, and other actions by the EU in favor of the victims of the armed conflict in Great Lakes where we had some personal contacts. In concrete, we would like to make a better use of this opportunities and do not miss them.

Members of RPAN who meet at this space on the borders of institutions are “more threads of the net than nodes”. They are connectors among institutions, a type of diplomat or peace facilitator that is more on the way between formal organizations and persons than seated and confined in a concrete institution. The members of the advocacy networking share a type of leadership by crossing frontiers, dismantling mental and sentimental walls dividing parties in a conflict, and promoting collaborative action among institutions and organizations. They are like glue and cement joining peace building blocks in the peace architecture.

b. To Relate in a “Supportive Networking”.

Second assumption: There is a missed opportunity of the energising capacity of a caring environment in a relational network supportive of its members.

We need a “safe heaven”, a caring environment, a “supportive network” of people based in personal relations, personal commitment and trust among members. If we want to be effective in using the opportunities of the “non-institutional corridors between institutions” to generate this RPAN-C we need to be aware of the importance of the process and not only the product of our work. This style of work attentive to the process has an energizing power that we normally do not use when we work within institutional organizations where competition attitudes and behaviours (frequent among politicians, NGOs, research institutions linked to universities...) eat most of the personal energies and time of its members managing internal conflicts within the institutions with less energy left to implement the mission and mandates of their organizations.

As a consequence of this assumption we say that the most valuable asset in RPAN are its people, the members of the relational networking, the personal resources. It is essential for the service we want to provide to look for, identify and invite the proper people in the group. The profile of the members of the network is defined by the vision (3). These people have to come from the three angles of the triangle diplomacy. The rest of the means, the material resources will appear if we have the proper people in the network.

After what we have said we can conclude that the unique selling points of the organizing identity of RPAN are:

- From the first assumption we say that our way of organizing is networking at the borders of institutions through non-formal leadership that crosses frontiers and connects parties.
- From the second assumption we say that our way of organizing is a “supportive networking”, a caring “safe haven” for the group members.

## 5. Networking Methodology or Flesh of the Project: Relational Organizing

As we said before, one of the interests of this paper and project is to introduce *Relational Organizing* within *social constructionism* in our peace work, and concretely in RPAN-C. This approach gives the flesh to the body of the project.

### a. Social Constructionism.

“Social constructionism has been developed within sociology of a.o. Herbert Blumer (symbolic interactionism). **They stress the importance of the relations among people and communication in the development (construction) of meaning.** Social phenomena derive its meaning not from the objects in themselves (e.g. a war, a revolution, a problem, friendship, etc) but from the discourse or communication that is being held on these phenomena. The meaning of a conflict or an event within a conflict is thus dependent on the meaning the people within the conflict give to it. As long as we don't know this, we can only construct our interpretation, our meaning of that phenomenon, but we risk missing the meaning that it has for those involved. This is why it is hardly possible to construct a useful conflict analysis 'from above', from 'a distance', using only quantitative data, etc. It is perfectly possible to do this, but you run the risk of missing the meaning, the point. If you want to induce change in a conflict, I believe, it is important to co-construct a vision of the conflict reality together with those directly involved. Otherwise the distance is too large, and any intervention constructed on an 'expert knowledge' risks of passing over the heads of those involved.”<sup>20</sup>

How to deal with social constructionism's key issue of relational communication in the multiple perspectives of the group members coming from multiple disciplines in the triangle diplomacy networking, from different peace building blocks in peace architecture? How to deal with the heterogeneity? Five tasks facilitate the RPAN from a social constructionist perspective:<sup>21</sup>

1. Identifying “interpretative repertoires” of all the members: cognitive schemes, ideas, logics, perspectives, models, images, metaphors, frames, languages...with which the members interpret the task, goals, means...
2. Mapping the “multi-perspectives” or the pluralism in interpretations and ways of doing in all the members: discovering and sharing different

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<sup>20</sup> Anton Stellamans has written this based in Gale Miller's book, *Becoming Miracle Workers*, (introduction, p. xii). Miller is a professor of sociology at Marquette University in Milwaukee, USA. He studied the work of Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, both therapists at the Brief Family Therapy Center, also in Milwaukee. They are the 'inventors' of solution focused brief therapy. Anton Stellamans says that the difference between constructionism and constructivism is that the former arises from sociology and the latter from psychology. “Constructivism was developed in psychology and more specific in learning psychology and pedagogy in the work of Piaget and his followers”, he says.

<sup>21</sup> Rene BOWEN, *Inquiry and Intervention for Development in Change and Innovation Contexts: a Learning Methodology from a Social Constructionist Perspective*, University of Canterbury, Department of Management, Christchurch, June 1993.

- ways, comparing differences and similarities (e.g. problem solving approach or appreciative enquire).
3. Clarifying “relational functions” and relationships: How are the working and personal relationships? Are the relations a source of energy? (Should the politicians be present in all meetings???)
  4. Deconstruction of fixed meanings that do not help in achieving the goal of the network (maybe the way I have of looking at advocacy is not “adapted”, nor the only one valid one).
  5. Constructing and building a new-shared understanding of what RPAN-C is and implies at each moment of the process of networking. Come to a choice and commitment to follow a certain line of action that includes all members and makes all feel owners of the new and common understanding.

b. Relational Constructionism.

The stress in social constructionism is on the relations among people and on the communication in the development (construction) of meaning in the community of practitioners. We want to better define the identity and organizing lines of this type of networking referring to some points on *Relational Constructionism*.<sup>22</sup>

- The members of RPAN-C create a *community of practice* (Congo peace advocacy) that is a multi-party collaborative community of relational practice.
- Due to the importance of our task (practice oriented group), it is equally important, as we have said, to take care of the relations among members (process oriented organizing): the person to person relations and the task are both rewarding in themselves for each member of the community of practice. These cared personal relations are energizing and motivating participants in their work. They reaffirm the connection among members and recognize each member (self-esteem).
- It implies a long-term organizational process. It is a time-consuming process in caring for the personal non-institutionalised relations among members.
- The members are people who construct together a shared meaning and belonging to the community of practice. The task that they perform and the relations they nourish are full of life sense, and they both make the group construct a shared meaning of the action (common-sense) and feed ownership of the networking by the group. It brings about belonging and identity to each member of the group (membership).
- It is a learning community in a learning process, with an open-ended story that implies to give time to learn together.
- Knowledge is “ethical knowledge” because we always ask ourselves: “whose voice is left out or excluded?” In relational constructionism knowledge is inclusive of the margins and those at the borders and frontiers, those in between.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> RENE BOUWEN, *Relational Organizing: The Social Construction of Communities of Practice and Shared Meaning*, in “Dialogues on Organizational Psychology”, University of St. Gallen, Switzerland, June 17, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Ideas of Prof. Rene Bouwen and Prof. Jacques Haers in conversations in the community of practice.

- Knowledge is “relational knowledge” because of the relational character of human knowledge: *the intelligence is in between noses, not in between ears*.<sup>24</sup> Knowledge is participation in “interwoven narratives”, in shared and group constructed language, dialogue, and communication.
- It is a listening community of practice. Listening is always at the origin of working together. It begins with taking time rather than being too busy, and giving full attention to the one speaking, To listen is to put into brackets one’s own task, role or expertise, to set fears and frustrations aside, and to look beyond the first meaning (often the cause of misunderstanding) for the experience and real intent behind the other’s words. It is important to be eager to provide a sympathetic interpretation of someone else’s statement rather than to condemn it.
- In relational constructionism the practice is a creative activity and not a copied or dictated one. For this reason all the participants feel subjects deciding and creating, and not objects with no responsibility on the product. The participants co-create the network. Relational constructionism creates new ways through multiple perspective membership: members coming from different backgrounds and areas in peace work will meet at the “borders” of their knowledge and practice, and will be able to create something new, not to repeat what is already there. This will be done through *organizational learning*.

c. Conditions for *Organizational Learning*.

As we see in our methodology communication is essential, a type interactive communication called *two sided*, or *opening* communication. This communication is condition *sine qua non* of a good *organizational learning* for a good *relational practice*. This communication is defined by: 1- observable characteristics, 2- governing action strategies, 3- underlying values, and 4- consequences for the organization. Let us see these four points.

1. Observable characteristics of the communication:

- Specific and concrete
- Illustrated
- Open questioning for information
- Inviting testing
- Easy to test
- Based on responsibility
- “I-messages” (vs. “it-messages”)
- “Here and now” terms
- “And-and” terms (vs. “or-or” terms)

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<sup>24</sup> Sentence of Prof. Rene Bouwen in conversations with him.

2. Governing action strategies:

- Mutual testing of info is necessary
- Two-sided, joint task definition
- Feelings are fact, also data (vs. avoidance of failings)
- Open confrontation is possible

3. Underlying values:

- “Win-win” approach
- Control is joint task
- Free and informed choices (vs. compliance)
- Internal commitment
- Valid data sharing

4. Consequences for the organization

- failure / errors can be detected (vs. failures are kept hidden)
- no need for defensiveness
- Open confrontation, exchange
- Double loop learning: implies, first, confront openly errors to improve our product, and second, confront openly norms, policies and objectives of the organization underling organizational causes of failure (vs. single loop learning – only the first confrontation and silence of the second)
- Increased L.T. effectiveness

**6. Action Plan or Hands of the Project:  
Some Suggestions**

I suggest three possible and concrete action-settings for the group in the coming months.

1. First Action-Setting: Internal Relational Practice.
  - a. Complete the triangle diplomacy group for *theory development* of the model of advocacy. The most urgent need in the project is to search for 12 people to become members of RPAN-C who come from Track I, Track II, and Track III diplomacies. Track II members are easier to identify than members from the other two tracks. For this reason is priority to concentrate searching efforts in Tracks I and III.

- b. Foster the supportive network. Support the, feed motivation of the group members, feed core values, keep the “unique selling points” of the networking, clarify day by day the networking choices and priorities, limits and strengths in the “learning organization” process. This is done by dialogue in informal gathering and more settled meetings. This supportive network auto-generates energy to continue.
  - c. We need to look for effective networking actions within the group members that require: good channelling of communication, good analysis, planning and evaluation, roles distribution, coordination and management, search for material and human resources... in order to keep the standard quality of our relational practice.
2. Second Action-Setting: Relational Practice in DRC.
- a. Facilitate the creation of a “parallel triangle” in the field. Search for some 12 people to become members of RPAN-C in DRC who come from Track I, Track II, and Track III diplomacies there. This group would be inspired in a similar mission, vision and methodology.
  - b. Keep channels of communication between both groups (in DRC and Belgium) strengthening the relational networking and the learning organization process making more and more targeted and efficient our shared advocacy actions.
  - c. People from both groups have to come to know themselves personally with planed or occasional visits. The face-to-face encounter is very important in our relational practice.
3. Third Action-Setting: Preliminar Participatory Research Project.
- a. We will offer the project to our learning group with shared interest in the topic. This learning group will deconstruct this paper and reconstruct a new project with shared meanings, actions, and ownership if this group consider it convenient.
  - b. After deconstructing and reconstructing this paper and with more clear general and concrete goals, means and methods for the project, we could facilitate a first action research that is a condition *sine qua non* for effective qualified advocacy that is core to our mission.
  - c. We expect that this research could bring a concrete project of advocacy for DRC, and the light to see why the conflict tends to perpetuates and discern from a solution focused perspective what are the priorities for advocacy at EU level in our concrete group.
  - d. We expect that this initial research could orient new lines of farther participatory action research and relational advocacy networking in an ongoing or open-ending process.

Final consideration: The group is in an initial clarification stage of its concrete goal and tasks. To choose a concrete issue to advocate will take some time, because core to the very method of RPAN is a deep research that will bring light for a later discernment of priorities and election of our concrete action for DRC connected with the EU. At this initial moment of the group we need a “revolutionary patience” to have done first our research on the actions of other actors (some research like the one done by Luc Reychler on Burundi) before engaging in a second moment in our concrete advocacy actions. If we get involved just now, before this research in many advocacy actions, we can become lost in reactive advocacy. Our main action now would be to have a serious and systematic research about what is done and what are the needs in the field. Later will come our discernment and election of concrete priorities for the group. We are small but want to be well oriented in the mission and concrete target. This is part of our qualified advocacy. At the same time, this does not exclude to engage already the group in a concrete advocacy action just as a learning practice meanwhile we do now a deep participatory action research in the general situation of Congolese conflict to come to clarify our priorities and actions in a medium term.

#### D. CONCLUSION: SWOT in RPAN-C

I want to finish looking at the main strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of this project. This final exercise can help us to asses the work done up to now as a way of conclusion and awareness rising for current and future developments of the project.

##### - Strengths of RPAN-C:

This project is looking for added value in advocacy. Few models are looking to the whole picture of conflicts and peace like the model of *Peace Architecture*. Few are doing advocacy with the comprehensive and trans-blocks approach of *Peace Architecture* oriented to deep action research. On those lines RPAN-C is looking for deep analysis of causes and solutions in a long term, looking for sustainable peace in a non-reactive but pro-active advocacy. There is no deep and qualified advocacy without a deep and qualified research in the field connected to Track I. A fundamental strength of RPAN is the triangular combination of the three tracks in diplomacy (field parties, politicians, and experts). Other strengths of RPAN-C are the unique selling points of its organizing identity: networking at the borders of institutions through non-formal leadership (no bureaucracy, direct communication), and a “supportive networking”, a caring “safe haven” for the group members. Strength is the methodological combination of these tasks in *Relational Constructionism*. Strength are also the highly motivated members that he are already involved in the initiative.

- Weakness of RPAN-C:

We are aware of the enormous work to be done and our limited initial strength. At this starting point there are not many material and human resources available. It is not easy to find people from Track I to be full members. It is also a challenge to connect people from and in the geographic field where the conflict takes place and keep channels of communication and collaboration open and active. The methodology and vision of the model is a really time consuming way of organizing. It is difficult to make room in our agendas to foster the tasks in the community of practice of RPAN-C. This project has low institutional profile. This can be strength but also a weakness because this condition could make the identity of the project fuzzy, and in this sense not clear, not motivating.

- Opportunities for RPAN-C:

The main opportunity is to occupy a complementary space in peace advocacy work that has been missed, the space of non-formal and low institutional space in between institutions. There is a real need for a qualified advocacy based in deep action research out of the normal competing organizations. RPAN is not an alternative to the institutionalised way of peace advocacy done by strong institutions, organizations and agencies at any level and in any of the three angles of diplomacy, mediation or facilitation in conflict transformation. RPAN is conceived as complementary to all these peace efforts. It is a window opportunity in advocacy work for small groups motivated to do direct advocacy with less institutional efforts and frictions.

- Threats to RPAN-C:

A clear threat for the project is the lack of sustainability. This threat in the networking is due to its organizing identity: low institutional profile and people centred networking. It is the problem of any more *charismatic* initiative in its launching moment. If initial members do not feed the motivation, if they disappear without introducing other members in the style of the group the whole project will collapse. Another very clear threat is not to find the time, material and human resources that it demands.