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Matthias Ryffel

Whole system peace – exploring Large Group Intervention in peace mediation

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Preface

The idea of facilitative mediation is to empower parties to find their own solutions to their conflict. They, so the assumption, have the best understanding of their dispute and need procedural assistance rather than substantive help. And it is they who will ultimately have to implement any solution (Moore, 2014, p. 46).

This model simplifies reality. Mediation and dialogue facilitation in peace processes deal with systems and subsystems of a conflict playing out on multiple societal levels. At any of these levels, processes that seek to resolve, manage, or prevent conflict face enormous complexity.

How does facilitative mediation work in such complex situations? The number of people affected makes it impossible to include everyone in a conflict resolution process physically. Moreover, violence, escalation, power, and other dynamics may prevent broad inclusion.

Thus, peace practitioners face difficult challenges and choices: How can a process be designed to be effective under such constraints yet still produce solutions that account for the conflict's full complexity and receive broad enough support to contribute to a sustainable peace? How to assist the parties to conflict in understanding a situation that is so complex and help them identify the right solutions? Should one try to break complexity down and address it in its parts? Or is it possible to embrace complexity and address a conflict comprehensively?

The peace mediation field has come up with numerous approaches to answer these questions. However, relevant processes may also be found and studied beyond the field of peace mediation. When I came across reports of mediators who apply so-called Large Group Intervention methodology in the organizational context and in conflicts that involve entire communities in the public sphere in Western societies, sometimes leading participatory processes that can number in the thousands, I was perplexed. After working more than five years in peace mediation support, why had I not heard about these Large Group Interventions before? Had these mediators found something that had not been tried in the peace mediation field before?

As I will show in this thesis, Large Group Intervention (LGI) reflects the evolution of participatory approaches in organizational development. These interventions attempt to bring together large groups that reflect an organization's full complexity and enable that group to understand complexity to find solutions acceptable to everyone. The approach is inspired by systems thinking. Its fundamental as-

sumptions are that complex systems are inherently self-organizing. Thus, one cannot steer them towards a specific change – change must emerge from an interaction of the whole system. They also sought to deal with constraints of inclusion, as organizational hierarchy tends to promote exclusive decision-making.

That is how the idea for this thesis was born. It aims to study LGI regarding its potential to inform concepts and practice in the field of peace mediation. My research question is: How relevant and applicable is the LGI approach to the field of peace mediation?

In the following, I will briefly outline the research method. The second part of the thesis focuses on theory: It outlines the approach of Large Group Intervention and defines the field of peace mediation, to then assess the LGI approach against concepts of peace mediation. In the third part, I present my analysis and conclusions about the relevance and applicability of LGI to the field of peace mediation. In part four, I wrap up by summarizing and discussing my conclusions, taking a step back to put them into perspective, and looking at the potential for further research on the topic.

Matthias Ryffel, November 2021

1. Methods

This thesis is literature-based with a degree of reality contact. This means that I primarily answer my research question based on existing literature. The 'reality contact' comes through four interviews with LGI and peace practitioners, conducted throughout November and December 2020.

The thesis aims to explore the research question without intending to offer conclusive and evidence-based answers to it. Exploratory research usually studies a problem that has not been clearly defined yet. It allows tackling new issues on which little or no previous research exists while the researcher believes it may offer insights that merit discovery, seeking to generate new ideas or link ideas to create theory (Stebbins, 2011, pp. 5-8). Qualitative research aims to discover, understand and interpret a situation, phenomenon or process, or perspectives and worldviews of the people involved, seeking to describe these and inductively generate hypotheses – rather than testing existing theory (Merriam, 1998, pp. 17-21).

It is thus important to emphasize that I do not aim to assess the effectiveness of the LGI approach for the field of peace mediation. Instead, I explore whether this approach could be relevant and applicable and make sure that I ask the right questions. The literature I have relied on in describing these methods would not be suitable to perform such assessment either. It mainly consists of handbooks or reflections written by practitioners. One can assume that these practitioners tend to be biased towards the validity and efficiency of the methods and concepts they use and the values that underpin them. There is indeed very little research that empirically studies the efficiency of LGI (Worley et al., 2011), which is an essential gap that this thesis cannot fill.

The qualitative data collection involved semi-standardized interviews. This type of interview generally follows an interview guide that is devised before the interview and focuses on a core topic. While it thus provides a general structure, the semi-structured interview allows for discovery by following topical trajectories as the interview unfolds (Magaldi & Berler, 2018). Semi-structured interviews are of particular use "if you are examining uncharted territory with an unknown, but potential momentous issues and your interviewers need maximum latitude to spot useful leads and pursue them" (Adams, 2015, p. 494). This interview type suited my purpose to openly explore the interviewees' perspectives. At the same time, it allowed me to give them hints and clues about the LGI approach or the peace mediation field, as I could not count on the interviewees' familiarity with both fields of practice.

The small interview sample includes three practitioners from the field of peace mediation and one LGI practitioner. I sought to capture different perspectives that reflect the mediation field's breadth and include practitioners who work explicitly with LGI. Although diverse, this small sample is in no way representative and does not accurately reflect the relevant larger fields of practice. Consequently, the findings of this thesis are not representative.

Below is a description of the interviewees' profiles. They decided to remain anonymous due to confidentiality considerations regarding their work:

– Senior peace mediation practitioner with government affiliation who has substantial experience in accompanying track I processes.
– Senior dialogue practitioner, formerly affiliated with an international organization, for which she ran a large-scale dialogue program in Latin America.
– Senior mediation and dialogue specialist in the peace mediation field, affiliated with a regional organization.
– Independent LGI practitioner who uses the approach in large mediation and development processes in the organizational and public sphere in Switzerland.

In consultation with the interviewees, I have fully anonymized their names and specific affiliations. For concrete examples mentioned in the interviews, I have anonymized or abstracted names, dates, and places to the necessary level to ensure confidentiality. Each of the semi-structured interviews is between 1 and 1.5 hours long. They were conducted based on an interview guide (see annex 1). All interviews were conducted online through the platform 'zoom' given social-distancing requirements due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Due to time constraints, I have refrained from editing and annexing the rough transcripts that I have established. To evaluate the interviews, I relied on a thematic analysis, which identifies patterns and themes within data. It begins with data collection and continues throughout the transcribing, reading, analyzing, and interpreting (Evans, 2018, pp. 4-5). In the process of identifying the patterns, I have cross-checked the interviews against the literature review.

2. Peace Mediation

The term peace mediation is used in this thesis to describe a field rather than an instrument. In this field, third party actors usually apply mediation or related tools (e.g., dialogue facilitation) in the framework of an existing or emerging peace process, addressing different levels and segments of society.

Without aspiring to be comprehensive, I will now outline the peace mediation field's key features to set the stage for the subsequent assessment and comparison with the LGI approach, thus identifying the requirements a participatory approach like LGI needs to fulfill to be relevant to and applicable in the peace mediation field. I will do so by following a broad structure of what mediation is, who it involves, when it is done, and how it is done.

2.1. Definition of Peace Mediation

Peace mediation is not a clearly defined field. It can include a range of different actors with differing agendas, processes with different aims, and foci on different levels of society that play out at various moments in a conflict.

A narrow perspective on peace mediation may focus on official political negotiations between the main parties to a conflict. Mediation, in a simple understanding, then equals negotiations that are assisted by an impartial third party (Mason, 2007, p. 10).

Reflecting a focus on the official negotiations, the United Nations (UN) Guidance on effective mediation defines mediation as "a process, whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict, by helping them develop mutually acceptable agreements" (United Nations [UN], 2012, p. 4).

Looking beyond the official negotiation tables, a range of different third-party processes may form part of the peace mediation field, and the spectrum quickly broadens beyond the concept of assisted negotiations.

One broad concept that applies to many of the other processes is that of dialogue or dialogue facilitation. Facilitation (subsequently dialogue facilitation) is relatable to mediation, in particular to facilitative mediation approaches. However, dialogue facilitation is less outcome-oriented than mediation and focuses more on enhancing mutual understanding, preparing joint action, and less on decision-making. Dialogue facilitation is complementary to mediation and applicable in other phases and on different tracks, which the official political negotiations cannot address

(Mason, 2007, pp. 4-8). Even a comprehensive peace agreement will not automatically translate into sustainable and positive peace on all levels of a society. Dialogue facilitation is thus needed on different levels.

Dialogue facilitation should not be confused with facilitation the way for instance Switzerland conceptualizes it as part of its 'good office' foreign policy. Such understanding of facilitation is closer to the idea of 'host state services'. It focuses on providing (often material) support to conflict parties and accompanying them in arranging for a negotiation process in the sense of a lighter version of mediation (Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

Neither mediation nor dialogue are limited to a specific level of society. Just as mediation may be needed to address conflict on a local level (UN, 2020), dialogue facilitation can address the national level. For example, the so-called 'National Dialogues' aim to expand participation in political transitions beyond military and political elites. National Dialogues are processes that strive for maximum inclusivity across the tracks and full national ownership. They are broad-based participatory processes that may include large groups. They may aim for crisis prevention and management or fundamental change, such as renewal of the social contract regarding the relation between state and society, or constitutional change. National Dialogues come into play in times of deep political crisis, be this post-conflict or during political transitions. They may take place before, after, or even in parallel to a mediation process (Blunck et al., 2017, pp. 20-34).

To avoid confusion by the labels mediation, negotiation, and dialogue, it may help to think of three underlying mechanisms at play in all of these processes: Dialogue, deliberation, and decision-making. According to the practitioner handbook for democratic dialogue (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, p. 23) one can distinguish between:

Dialogue: Brings together many voices, stories, and perspectives; makes use of shared inquiry, exploration, and discovery; encourages deep listening that fosters respect and understanding; aims for shared meaning-making and co-construction of knowledge.

Deliberation: focuses on argumentation based on reason; seeks to examine possible solutions seriously; potential tradeoffs are weighed-off; judgment is taken on an informed and reasoned basis.

Decision-Making: decisions can be made based on authority; by negotiating; based on consensus; by voting.

It helps to understand that mediation, dialogue, and negotiation processes can involve all these mechanisms, depending on their goal and framing. In peace mediation, the lines between mediation, dialogue, and negotiation are often blurry.

Analyzing a process according to the mechanisms of dialogue, deliberation, and decision-making can help to look behind the labels and see what a process is really about.

For instance, we can say that mediation is an outcome-oriented process and focuses on decision-making (based on negotiations or consensus). Yet, mediation also involves dialogue and deliberation. Interest-based mediation uses dialogue to identify the parties' diverse perspectives and interests to find mutually acceptable solutions. Other types of mediation focus more on the level of relationships and may put an even stronger emphasis on dialogue. The same is true for negotiation processes, depending on the negotiation approach chosen. While distributive negotiation focuses on decision-making through positional bargaining, integrative negotiation requires dialogue and deliberation to identify the parties' interests and produce win-win solutions (Spengler, 2003, p. 1). And while dialogue processes may focus on fostering understanding, they often go beyond the strict dialogue mechanism. As they may aim for tangible output, they will include aspects of deliberation or decision-making.

2.2. Those involved and affected by Peace Mediation

The focus on political negotiations between the main conflict parties can be broadened to the society at large in which a peace mediation process takes place. Accordingly, one can distinguish between different levels or segments of a society that an initiative addresses: Track I (officials, government, decision-makers, key representatives); Track I.5 (referring to a setting where participants take part informally and not in their official capacity, or to a mix between Track I and Track II actors); Track II (non-official but influential figures with links to decision-makers); Track III (grass-roots level and civil-society). (Mason, 2007, p. 5)

The UN Guidance for effective mediation emphasizes that mediation processes should be inclusive and consider the needs and concerns of the main conflict parties and of other relevant stakeholders and address the root causes of the conflict as well as the needs of the broader affected population – thereby increasing the legitimacy and national ownership of a process (United Nations [UN], 2012, pp. 11-13).

This understanding of inclusivity circles around the challenge of designing an inclusive peace process and thus puts great emphasis on who should be involved in a peace process at which point and in which way. Many different models of broadening participation in peace negotiations exist. Paffenholz (2014) mentions

eight models that range from the representation of stakeholders in the official negotiation process to mass action, such as demonstrations that may influence the process (p. 4).

One can challenge the focus on this type of inclusivity, criticizing the top-down perspective that depicts a peace process as a rather monolithic and hierarchically organized system, in which peace practice gravitates around the track I process. Such an understanding of peace processes may correspond with the strong influence of track-oriented thinking in the field of peace mediation. The multitrack perspective may offer an alternative. It suggests understanding a peace process as a plethora of different processes that can but need not necessarily be linked to each other (Palmiano et al., 2019, pp. 7-11). For instance, local processes may work autonomously towards sustainable peace, regardless of track I. Conscious of such a critical perspective, this thesis seeks to avoid suggesting or implicating a hierarchy when referring to the track model. None the less, it will draw on it to look at the relevance of LGI to peace practice with regards to different levels of society.

2.3. Timing in Peace Mediation

Time is another dimension that helps depict the field of peace mediation. One common model identifies three or four phases in peace mediation: pre-pre-negotiations; pre-negotiations; negotiations; implementation (Mason, 2007, p. 6). Zooming into the negotiation phase, one can further distinguish different phases of the mediation process. Common models identify five to eight different phases, usually including the beginning of mediation; the initial presentation of the conflict parties' perspectives; a deeper clarification of issues, interests, and needs; the generation and evaluation of options; and the reaching of an agreement and closure (Moore, 2014, p. 186).

Such models simplify an oftentimes messy reality: mediation processes do not usually stick to phase models. Yet the models can provide an overview and indications about an ideal order of the mediator's interventions. For this thesis, the phase model may be useful to situate where LGI methods fit in.

A different way to look at time in peace processes is to ask about the time horizon of intervention: The 'SMALL-framework' organizes the goals and activities of interventions in a fragile context according to short-, medium-, and long-term and puts a focus on the need to link these different levels. Short-term responses include reaching agreements through contextualized mediation. Medium-term responses include establishing interim peace structures for peace practitioners to

work across conflict cleavages, and long-term responses focus on using consensus to support effective and legitimate governance (Abdi & Mason, 2019, p. 13). A strength of this model is that it also allows looking at peace practice beyond a narrow phase model in fragile contexts where there is no clear peace process in place.

2.4. Approaches to Peace Mediation

In this paragraph, I will not focus on techniques but rather look at important concepts and mediation and dialogue facilitation principles.

One can distinguish between many different 'schools' of mediation (Moore, 2014, pp. 46-59). The models and concept that this thesis discusses tend to match best with process-oriented and relationship-oriented schools of mediation, but less so with substantively focused schools. The process-oriented approach (for instance, facilitative mediation) implies that mediators primarily provide process assistance and leave the mediation's substance or content to the conflict parties (Moore, 2014, pp. 46-47).

In contrast, the relationship-oriented school (for instance, transformative mediation) "focuses on procedures to improve and enhance mutual understanding, address psychological and relational issues, manage and work through emotions, improve interactions, and promote the establishment of positive and respectful relationships between or among disputing parties (Moore, 2014, p. 47). Substantively focused schools involve the mediator's substantive assessment of the issues in dispute, based on which he may also advise parties in conflict on substantial aspects (Moore, 2014, pp. 54-55). While it could be enlightening to study LGI against the full spectrum of different mediation schools and approaches, this would go beyond this thesis's scope.

The practitioners' handbook for democratic dialogue establishes five principles for dialogue that can guide action: Inclusiveness, joint ownership, learning, humanity, long-term perspective (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, pp. 26-29).

Inclusiveness is the idea that a dialogue process should allow all those to be involved or represented in the dialogue who are part of the problem system the process seeks to address. The assumption is that a) the combined knowledge of the constituents of a problem system builds the expertise required to address everyone's problems, and b) that their sense of ownership in the problem, the process managing it, and the solution found is needed to produce (sustainable) change (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, pp. 26-28).

Joint ownership implies the participants' commitment to contribute to change by engaging in and shaping the dialogue process. To develop such ownership, participants must feel that they discuss substantial issues that truly matter for any attempt to bring about change (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, p. 28).

Learning means that a dialogue process requires openness from participants to listen deeply to each other to gain new insights and new perspectives, for which they need to learn to suspend certainties, assumptions, and judgment (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, p. 29).

Humanity can be summarized as the need to create a safe space where participants can engage in genuine interaction about what truly matters, and where they can respect each other as human beings, with all their differences, and understand each other in an empathic way that reaches deeper than cognitive reasoning (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, pp. 30-31).

Long-term perspective implies that dialogue must go beyond stopping violence and stabilizing the political situation. To find sustainable solutions to crises requires attention to underlying patterns of relationships and behavior. No 'quick fix' can achieve this – it requires time (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, pp. 31-32).

The same handbook also mentions five challenges that dialogue processes need to address to be effective (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, pp. 15-18):

Dealing with complexity: Dialogue processes must be capable of dealing with complexity along three dimensions. *Social complexity* means that a problem includes many different stakeholders and actors with diverse perspectives and interest, so outside experts cannot solve it. *Dynamic complexity* refers to a situation where cause and effect are not obvious because they are far apart in space and time. *Generative complexity* means that a situation is so complex that the future is unpredictable, and solutions cannot simply be generated or copied from past experiences and lessons.

Coordinate meaning: Since effective dialogue processes aim for coordinated action under a common goal, they must establish a common language as a basis. In conflict, people interpret and make sense of a situation differently based on different experiences and conceptual frameworks. Participants must be open to acknowledging the various meanings given to words to achieve shared understanding as a basis for coordinated action.

Produce innovation: Dialogues attempt to deal with problems in a new way, because other ways have not worked. They thus need to empower people to overcome the status quo and develop new solutions that are broadly supported and implemented.

Enable deliberation: If dialogue is to produce sustainable solutions, these need to build on decisions informed by an awareness of the different options and choices at hand and the trade-offs involved.

Produce sustainable results: Dialogues respond to a crisis with the ambition to go beyond producing a quick solution to the crisis. While the dialogue needs to address the current problem, it must tackle the underlying problems and, moreover, empower the people to handle these problems in the future and find sustainable solutions.

Mediation Practitioners Dirk Splinter and Ljubjana Wüstehube suggest a framework to characterize dialogue, which is broad enough to link many of the earlier mentioned dimensions and situate them against the track levels (Splinter & Wüstehube, 2020, pp. 70-72): The framework characterizes dialogue processes along four dimensions. The first dimension looks at the already introduced levels of society (tracks I-III) on which an intervention plays out. The second dimension looks at the degree to which a process aims to produce deep understanding between its participants instead of merely convincing each other of different perspectives. The third dimension captures the decision-making involved. It asks to what extent participants are involved in making decisions: Are they merely informed about others' decisions, consulted about their opinions on such decisions, invited to contribute to identifying options and solutions jointly, or even involved in consensual decision-making? The fourth and last dimension captures the dialogue's focus: Is it focused on substance (the issues at hand)? Or is it focused on identity-oriented discussions that aim for trust-building and transforming relationships, for instance, by making the personal experience of the participants a topic?

The Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) framework is another useful means to understand how peace initiatives differ in fostering change. It suggests a simple, two-dimensional matrix: The first dimension looks at the people addressed by an initiative, project, or program: Are these 'key people', who are critical to the resolution or the continuing of the conflict, in other words, individuals who yield special power and influence to bring about or block change? Or are these 'more people', implying a broadening of the basis for peace by mobilizing larger numbers of people and constituencies who become engaged in the process? The second dimension looks at the level of change the intervention aims for: Is it on the individual/personal level and seeks to change the skills, values, attitudes, behavior, perceptions, ideas, and relationships of individuals? Or is it on the socio-political level and aims to change institutions, norms, culture, or group- relations and behavior, to address grievances that drive conflict, or promote peaceful means of addressing

conflict? For instance, by reforming government policies, negotiating peace agreements, or addressing norms that regulate inter-group relationships. Beyond helping to clarify how a peace initiative seeks to bring change, the framework emphasizes that change, which is to contribute to comprehensive peace on all levels of a society (referred to as 'peace writ large'), needs to link these different dimensions (CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2015, pp. 33-42).

As an aspirational document, the United Nation's Guidance on effective mediation establishes seven fundamentals that the UN suggests should inform peace mediation initiatives:

Preparedness: This fundamental mainly speaks to the need for a structured and phased approach through which mediators strategize and plan their interventions (process design), including the necessary flexibility to account for such processes' non-linear nature and uncontrollable developments (UN, 2012, pp. 6-7). **Consent:** Peace mediation is a voluntary process, which implies that parties must consent to the process and to the mediator and can always withdraw from the process (UN, 2012, pp. 8-9).

Impartiality: A 'cornerstone' of mediation, impartiality means that the mediator needs to be able to talk to all sides and treat them fairly and in a balanced way. While the guidance includes that a mediator should not have any material interests in the outcome of the process, it distinguishes impartiality from neutrality, referring to the rucksack of values and principles that particularly UN-mediators carry and need to uphold (UN, 2012, p. 10).

Inclusivity: Mediation processes need to consider the needs and concerns of the main conflict parties and other relevant stakeholders and address the root causes of the conflict and the needs of the broader affected population, thereby increasing the legitimacy and national ownership of a process. The guidance clarifies that inclusivity does need to mean direct participation. It can also mean the establishment of mechanisms, which ensure that the process considers all perspectives. It also outlines challenges associated with inclusivity, such as the resistance of the key conflict parties to open the negotiations to others, the rising complexity of processes that include more stakeholders, and the difficulties in identifying and reaching legitimate representatives of interest groups on the various levels. Dilemmas exist around the notion of inclusivity. For instance, the mediator must balance normative considerations speaking for inclusivity with the context's reality, which often limits the space for participation. This could be because key parties push against inclusivity or because of pragmatic consideration of resource-constraints (time and funding) and manageability of complexity (UN, 2012, pp. 11-13).

National ownership: Both conflict parties and the broader society need to take ownership in the mediation process and commit to the implementation of agreements. Those affected by conflict and those able to stop conflict are thus required to work together towards peace. In building such ownership, inclusivity is key. While mediators cannot impose any solution, they can help parties develop options for solutions (UN, 2012, pp. 14-15).

International law and normative frameworks: Peace mediation does not operate in a legal and normative void but takes place within normative expectations and international law frameworks. Depending on the mediator's organizational affiliation and his or her mandate, regulations and norms may differ. For instance, international law may apply to human rights violations. That law may also enjoy varying degrees of legitimacy and enforceability within a national context. While consistency with norms and laws may increase the legitimacy of a process and help garner international support, the mediator may have to balance the norms and legal frameworks carried into the process from the outside with the demands of conflict parties (UN, 2012, pp. 16-17).

Coherence, coordination, and complementarity: Conflicts on the international level today usually involve several actors who play different roles in peace processes and aspire to mediate. These different efforts need to complement each other or be coordinated into a coherent approach (UN, 2012, pp. 18-19).

Quality peace agreements: Peace agreements may be comprehensive or reflect sequenced approaches and address just a part of the issues at hand or procedural aspects. Ultimately, they should however, not just end violence but add up to "a platform to achieve sustainable peace, justice, security and reconciliation". They should thus set out a common path for the future but also address the past. They should consider the implications of the provisions of the agreement for all segments of society into account (UN, 2012, pp. 20-21).

3. The Large Group Intervention approach

In this chapter, I will introduce the reader to the Large Group Intervention (LGI) approach. By first looking at the origins of LGI and its theoretical underpinnings, to then deepen aspects of LGI that I see as most relevant for this thesis. These include the notions of whole system thinking; self-organization; common ground orientation, the participatory concept of LGI; and what I refer to as process orientation. Given the limited scope of this thesis, I refrain from introducing the different LGI methods' practical procedures, although such basic technical knowledge would help the reader understand my reflections.

3.1. The roots of LGI

The term LGI seeks to capture a specific type of facilitation methods. These methods share assumptions about how change can be fostered in systems such as in organizations or communities. While this thesis speaks of the LGI approach, it would be an exaggeration to frame it as a clear-cut approach with a defined set of methods and rules that are agreed upon widely. The list of methods associated with the approach depends on the source but sometimes extends beyond 60 distinct methods (Holman et al., 2007, p. 16). The most known methods, sometimes referred to as the 'big five' of LGI, are Future Search, Real Time Strategic Change (RTSC), Appreciative Inquiry Summit, Open Space, World Café. These methods were developed separately by different practitioners, yet they share common characteristics and underlying assumptions. Various terms describe the overall approach that these methods form part of, such as Large Group Interventions, Whole System Change, Large Group Methods, Change Processes, etc. (Holman et al., 2007). For the sake of coherence, I have decided to stick to the term LGI in this thesis.

A key point of departure of these methods comes with inherent or explicit assumptions about complex systems' functioning. Weisbord and Janoff (2010) describe a paradigm shift in Organizational Development that paved the ground for LGI. The field moved from experts who were trying to optimize parts of a system in participatory approaches, to experts who were trying to optimize entire systems in parallel, to the recognition how systems are optimized by all its constituents simultaneously (p. 2). In the last step, LGI plays a significant role.

The invention of LGI methods was linked to the emergence of systems thinking in organizational development. Many other theories and approaches have influenced or contributed to the LGI approaches' theoretical underpinning. The inventor of the 'Whole Scale Change' (WSC) method mentions a mixture of theories, approaches, and models such as chaos and complexity theory, adult learning, systems thinking, and many more (Dannemiller, James, & Tolchinsky, 1999, p.10).

LGI practitioner Ruth Seliger identifies four central roots of LGI: In its beginnings, Organizational Development put human beings at the center of organizations' development. An emancipatory approach, Organizational Development sided with the individual to strengthen its autonomy vis à vis organizations. However, the resulting long-term pedagogical processes did not suit the reality of organizations. Thus, LGI has retained the participatory approach and balanced it with a new respect for hierarchy, reflecting the larger balance between humans and organizations' needs (Seliger, 2020, pp. 19-20).

The Group Dynamics approach has discovered the learning potential of a group that starts paying attention researching its dynamics. Based on this, in LGI, it is the entire system (or organization) that creates the knowledge it requires to perform the tasks or solve the problems at hand. In contrast to Group Dynamics, LGI does not focus on the individual as a group member and should thus not be considered a group process. It looks at the function that an individual fulfills in the structure of a system. LGI sees an organization's development as the product of a dialogue between the organization with all its function carriers, horizontally and vertically (Seliger, 2020, pp. 22-25).

The Action Learning approach has empowered organizations or systems by recognizing that they may acquire the knowledge required to change without help by specialists but by engaging in practice-relevant learning exercises and starting to research and engage with their learning journey. Accordingly, LGI seeks to encourage participants to develop knowledge about their system jointly, engage in concrete problem solving, and try to improve by observing themselves while doing so (Seliger, 2020, pp. 25-30).

Lastly, systems thinking is one of the critical influences on LGI. It portrays organizations as living systems that emerge from the communication of its function or role carriers (the employees). LGI conferences focus on establishing the communication required for specific topics or issues. Changing an organization thus requires changing the collective construct of communication. To do so, one needs to get the entire system into one room. The idea that this is possible without having to gather all people that belong to that system is a fundamental assumption that LGI has adopted from systems thinking. The other is that organizations cannot be

steered towards change from the outside but organize autonomously in reaction to outside or inside stimuli (Seliger, 2020, pp. 28-36).

LGI methods were since transferred to other fields, including domestic mediation and dialogue facilitation, as will be shown in this thesis.

3.2. Key assumptions and characteristics of LGI

The LGI approach seeks to address complex challenges that lead to conflict or merely the need for change in systems. The collaborative and common ground oriented approach claims to answer the need for efficiency and speed in change processes while tapping into people's intrinsic motivation to make change sustainable (Holman et al., 2007, p. 13).

The approach can be described simply by the following core characteristics: it seeks to include everyone with a stake in or who may be affected by the issues at hand; it aims to reveal the different perspectives around these issues; it gives all the participants a chance to influence the discussions; it seeks to establish common ground about what participants can agree on (Bunker & Alban, 2006, p. 227).

In the following, I will explain and deepen these characteristics, which are mostly interlinked, and complement them with further assumptions of LGI that I deem most relevant for this thesis.

3.2.1. Whole system thinking

LGI seeks to gather the whole system (this could be an organization or a community) at some point in a broader change, conflict resolution, problem-solving, or decision-making process. LGI thus invites people to create a new perspective that looks at the whole system to enable them to develop a deeper understanding of their system. They start to see the interconnections and are empowered to understand how they can best contribute to the process. "When this occurs, system members know better how to contribute and therefore make commitments that were previously unlikely. Because more people understand the whole system, they can make intelligent, informed contributions to substantive decisions" (Holman et al., 2007, p. 12). The whole system thereby represents what its constituents consider it to be. In other words, systems are socially constructed by its observers (Seliger, 2020, p. 31).

The 'whole' system does not necessarily equal the entire system with all its components. It means to bring together and work with a selection of stakeholders that genuinely represent the whole system and get the critical mass to initiate

change (Seliger, 2020, p. 38). Dannemiller (2002) transferred the idea of DNA, representing a system's profile, to organizational development. This idea allowed her to manage the complexity of bringing the whole system into the room by working with participants representing the system's DNA as a microcosm. If they could identify and integrate the change needed in an organization, that change would spread in the more extensive system (pp. 4-5). Seliger (2020) describes the organizations' DNA as the specific nature of an organization, found in the perspectives and attitudes of persons representing the organization's identity. Having identified its DNA, practitioners can engage the whole system through smaller groups that form a microcosm, a smaller version of the system, and react identically to changes and triggers (pp. 31-32).

Weisbord and Janoff, founders of the Future Search method, speak about the right mix of people "who among them have what it takes to act responsibly if they choose" (Weisbard & Janoff, 2007, p. 17). This right mix should include people who bring to the group: the authority to make decisions; access to resources needed (e.g., financial); expertise in the topic at hand; information about the case that no others have; and it should include those who will be affected by the outcome (Weisbord & Janoff, 2007 p. 17). The actual number of participants may follow the estimation of what constitutes the critical mass, as mentioned above, which makes it highly case specific. Practitioners apply the methodology with groups ranging from several dozen to several thousand people. While Seliger gives an upper limit of 2000 persons (Seliger, 2020, p. 14), other practitioners state that they work with even larger groups and do not mention upper limits (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, p. 168).

3.2.2. Self-organization and change

The point of bringing the whole system together goes back to the assumption that the "knowledge and wisdom exist in the people in the organization or community" (Holman et al., 2007, p. 12). Hence only the whole system itself is capable of changing and re-organizing sustainably. Neither any one individual component nor outside facilitators or experts can do that job. "Indeed, the nature of the whole cannot be understood by anyone unless all participate. Nor can people be expected to act responsibly without understanding the impact of what they do" (Weisbord & Janoff, 2007, p. 18).

The systemic assumption holds that living systems – and with that social systems – are autonomous. They decide how to react to inputs from the outside, for

instance by changing or adapting their internal order. Hence, the possibility to influence such a system from the outside is limited (Seliger, 2020, p. 33). Self-organization is seen as a process by which order in complex systems results spontaneously from the system's individual components' interaction. If order emerges spontaneously and inherently, the only way to facilitate change is to help create the right conditions for a system to self-organize. These conditions are described as a state at the edge of chaos, where a system is far from its comfort zone of stability and order (Arena, 2009, pp. 54-59). 'The edge of chaos' is further characterized as a transition state between order and disorder, in which formal subsystems (e.g., hierarchy) and informal subsystems (e.g., diversity, ambiguity, conflict) balance each other. The system's complexity is then at the highest level possible before the system would slip into disorder (Antonacopoulou & Chiva, 2005, pp. 9-12). According to Arena (2009), these conditions emerge when systems produce high levels of interactions and interconnectedness between their components while maintaining clear boundaries that limit the degree of instability. Arena argues that large group methodology is one possible approach to facilitate such conditions from the outside (pp. 54-62).

From a system thinking perspective, organizations are communication systems, whose central elements are not the individual persons within that system but the communication interactions between those elements. How to develop the organization thus means how to change the communication system. As Seliger writes, "if the communication of an organization changes, the organization as a whole will change. […] Not the people have to change, but the communication, which's surroundings are the people" (Seliger, 2020, p. 29).

For change to happen through self-organization, a system must be able to learn. Seliger argues that large group conferences provide the frame in which an organization learns about itself, by urging participants to step out of their daily work processes to discuss these processes and make them visible. Understanding the patterns and rules of how the organization allows and creates change is seen as a prerequisite for changing these patterns. In that sense, profound transformation aims to change the way an organization changes (Seliger, 2020, pp. 34-36).

We can summarize the above as follows: LGI works under the basic assumption that a system is capable of self-organizing towards change if it reaches a maximum amount of communication between all its different components. And if these components communicate in a way that also allows the whole system to observe this communication and develop awareness and joint understanding of the communication patterns and the structures that condition it.

3.2.3. Facilitation in self-organization

The self-organization concept bears implications for the facilitator's role, whose focus thus lies on creating structures for this type of communication, observation, and joint understanding. A first point that follows is that – just as in mediation – the facilitator need not try to control the substance or communication outcome. What matters is communication itself. Thus, the facilitator remains neutral towards the substance, which means he or she will not take a stance on substance or relationship matters but will limit their authority to controlling and enabling the process (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, p. 47).

Yet how can a facilitator enable the communication process in such large groups?

With dozens, hundreds, or thousands of people in a room, there are limits to guiding individuals' communication. Many of the communication tools that mediators or facilitators can apply in smaller groups (up to a few dozen people) may not work. The facilitator can hardly engage in direct communication with everyone in a larger group.

Notably, LGI practitioners do not seem to see this as a problem. To them, the unit of change is neither the individual nor the group, but the system. "We've let go believing that we can manage what individuals feel, think, say, and do" (Weisbord & Janoff, 2007, p. 33). A person does not participate in large group conferences as a group member, but as a carrier of roles and functions that characterize the system. Change in the system is the product of changing patterns of communication (Seliger, 2020, pp. 29). Put simply, the primary aim of LGI is to foster communication amongst the whole system – for which there is no need to control the individual's communication. The facilitator thus largely relinquishes control of how individuals communicate and focuses on the conditions of communication instead: "[I]t is easier to create structures within which people manage their own behavior than it is to make people behave the way we want" (Weisbord & Janoff, 2007, p. 32).

To enable this kind of communication, large group practitioners control group composition, division of labor, time, use of space, goal focus, and subgrouping. There are of course differences regarding the level of control facilitators exert in LGI, depending on the methodology applied and the practitioners' approaches. 'Open Space' is frequently highlighted as the method that most heavily relies on participants' self-organization and provides only minimal process structure, whereas other methods use more pre-designed processes. However, as Ruth Seliger

puts it, even the more pre-designed processes merely offer a structure to allow participants to self-organize in communication, decision-making, and planning (Seliger, 2020, p. 39).

During a large group meeting, one critical method to control the communication process is the work in subgroups. In this, the facilitator only manages the composition of groups, introduces the question at hand, and potentially a tool to tackle it, and defines the timing of their interaction. Every small group will then self-manage by selecting their moderator, timekeeper, note taker, and reporter who will feedback to the plenary (Seliger, 2020, p 38).

The task of self-organized small groups is basically to share and interpret information and decide on action steps. Thereby, LGI seeks to reduce the influence of hierarchy, passivity, conflict, and dependency on experts or facilitators. To encourage such self-organization, facilitators also refrain from offering exercises, instruments, explanations, or games, based on their diagnosis about what a group needs. Neither do they organize data or coordinate follow-up plans (Weisbord & Janoff, 2010, p. 51).

3.2.4. Common ground orientation

The method that informs the subgrouping is that of differentiating and integrating (D/I) the large group's perspectives. D/I captures a process that, first, helps to identify all the different stakes and views in a system. The second step then focuses on integrating these differences into something larger than the individual (e.g., a common goal): "Our job as leaders/managers/facilitators is to set things up so that people can accept their differences and integrate their capabilities for the good of all" (Weisbord & Janoff, 2007, p. 9).

The LGI approach is thus fundamentally common ground oriented. LGI explores differences to enable the identification of common ground. Some practitioners, such as the inventors of the Future Search method, explicitly call for a "focus on common ground and future action, not problems and conflict" (Weisbord & Janoff, 2010, p. 50). However, this does not mean that conflict is not acknowledged. 'Future Search' knows the rule that conflict is heard but not worked. In 'Future Search', conflict is contained: "We do not mean to avoid, bury or deny conflict. We mean only to contain it, to invite people to put on the back burner what they cannot resolve so as to find out where they are all together" (Weisbord & Janoff, 2010, p. 138). The D/I principle aims at bringing disagreement into the open and does not seek compromise. In 'Future search', as in many other LGI methods, participants map out their differences and visibly include them into a 'Not

Agreed' list. Identifying common ground thus also differs from consensus building, as it does not push for convergence (Weisbord & Janoff, 2010, p. 84).

However, mapping the differences serves to get the group to agree to put the differences aside and focus on what is acceptable to everyone. This intentional focus on common ground is described to tap into a group's positive energy to increase its capacity for action. In contrast, attempting to clarify conflict in a large group is seen to risk paralyzing that group; LGI thus avoids it (Seliger, 2020, p. 40). The focus on the common ground also implies a focus on solutions and the future. Again, the past is not ignored but usually examined closely by the group. But the purpose of this examination is to identify resources that help shape the future. Problems are identified and acknowledged to orient the perspective towards resources and solutions (Seliger, 2020, p. 41). In other words, producing common ground helps increase a system's capacity to act. Above all, this fosters the efficiency and effectiveness of the system (Krummenacher et al., 2019, p. 149).

As I will show in more detail below, practitioners who use LGI as part of more extensive mediation or dialogue processes also work with the problems and issues that a large group could not agree on. They often do so in smaller formats, mediated if need be, either before or following-up on the large group conference (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, pp. 48-53).

In practical terms, D/I means alternating between a) interest-based breakout groups (stakeholder groups) and mixed breakout groups, and b) breakout groups and plenary sessions. To illustrate this with an example: The Future Search method starts in mixed groups of eight – defined ahead of the meeting. The facilitator thus ensures that every small breakout group includes representatives of all the different stakeholder groups. In these mixed groups, participants first establish and analyze timelines of the past, to then report back to the plenary. Then they switch to stakeholder groups to discuss external trends, which impact the topic at hand. They again report back to plenary, mapping and prioritizing the diverse trends altogether, thus creating a complex picture of reality. The process continues to move through this diverging and integrating to formulate ideas and concrete measures or solutions finally. Based on these results, the group may mandate mixed working groups to continue working on the suggestions (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, pp. 77-80).

The D/I process continues in plenary. Suppose any individual speaks up to state his or her disagreement with a statement that comes from one of the small groups. The facilitator will then simply invite others in the room to join the informal subgroup of the person who disagrees – for instance, by asking the question: Who else sees it that way? The facilitator may also count on an integrating statement that

hints towards the common ground to eventually come from the participants' ranks (Weisbord & Janoff, 2010, pp. 146-147).

From the outset, this process is supposed to give participants the chance to recognize differences within their stakeholder groups and surprising commonalities with members of other stakeholder groups. Thus, the mixed subgroups seek to steer people away from stereotyping along the lines of stakeholder groups and focus them on the task at hand. They do so by continuously exploring the diverse spectrum of views and by always acknowledging deviating opinions. Thus, informal subgroups begin to emerge, which run across the cleavage lines that divide the usual stakeholder groups. As a result, participants may start to see commonalities (Weisbord & Janoff, 2010, pp. 146-152).

3.2.5. Participation

One of the overarching mediation practice goals is empowering individuals to solve their conflicts themselves, thus strengthening their private autonomy and self-responsibility (Glässer & Breidenbach, 1999, p. 211). If this is the goal of mediation, then participants need to consent to the process and the solutions – they cannot be forced upon the involved parties.

In conflicts in the public sphere, the disputes usually concern and impact many people's lives. Whether the individual has a say in specific issues or not also depends on the governance model in a particular context. Conflict resolution and management in the public sphere thus operates in conditions in which the individual's private autonomy and self-responsibility to solve a conflict is usually more limited.

Participatory processes allow involving the broader public in such situations. LGI understands participation as an attempt to combine top-down provisions with bottom-up expertise. While mandated or elected representatives may ultimately make decisions, individuals representing the whole system are invited to participate in the process leading up to the decision-making. It is essential to clarify the space for such participation: What are the top-down provisions, and to what extent can they be influenced bottom-up? What will be decided by an exclusive circle of decision-makers, and to what extent can the broader public influence these decisions? LGI operates in this space and depends on it: If there is no room for maneuver, if a decision is just about 'yes or no' – then a participatory process does not make any sense (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, pp. 54-58).

LGI is precisely that – a participatory mechanism. Large Group conferences are no instruments of grassroots democracy (Seliger, 2020, p. 117). The development

of LGI can be seen in the light of society's broader shift in values towards greater individual participation in decision-making in the hierarchical business world, which has traditionally been a more exclusive matter for management (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, pp. 53-54).

LGI is described as a useful tool to involve everyone in a system that has a stake in a conflict or is affected by it, to identify and clarify the issues and problems at hand and the potential solutions to it. It is supposedly also effective because it respects the final decisions of more exclusive circles of decision-makers – be this the management of a corporation, the local government executive in a community, or the head of a federation (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, pp. 53-54). Practitioners caution to respect hierarchy and refrain from forcing it to make decisions or publicly commit to something. On the contrary, leaders may need protection and support in this setting. Through LGI, Seliger states, one supports a process by which the management learns to re-define its own business and try this out in real-time (Seliger, 2020, p. 117).

3.2.6. Process-orientation

The above tells us that the large group conference itself can only cover certain aspects and phases of a mediation process. Practitioners who use LGI in extensive mediation processes have developed a process orientation: They tend to embed large group conferences into comprehensive processes that often involve various other formats. They see change as a process, not as an event. The change handbook mentions the process orientation as a common principle of the over 60 methods: "While most of the authors describe a half-day to three-day event, they are all quick to say that the sum total of a transformational effort is not just one change event. While events help focus people's attention, they are only one part of the change equation" (Holman et al., 2007, pp.12-13).

The LGI practitioners Hinnen and Krummenacher suggest that large group conferences are suitable for certain mediation phases only. They refer to the classic phase model used in mediation, which usually establishes a minimum of five stages that distinguish between the beginning of mediation (1); the initial presentation of the conflict parties' perspectives (2); a more in-depth clarification of issues, interests, and needs (3); the generation and evaluation of options (4); and the reaching of an agreement and closure (5). These are preceded by preparation and followed by implementation (Moore, 2014, p. 186).

Hinnen and Krummenacher (2012) see large group conferences as suitable to the mediation phases two, three, and partly phase four. In their concept of broader

participatory mediation processes, the large group conferences focus on gathering information, clarifying issues and interests, and identifying solution options. The other phases of the mediation process require different formats (p. 52).

Phase four, the search for and evaluation of options, might continue in working groups formed as an outcome of the large group conference. In processes where the purpose is conflict clarification, mediated working groups may tackle the key conflictive issues emerging from the large group conference (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, pp. 50-52).

Phase six usually sees the making of agreements and the process conclusion. In LGI, the decision-making runs parallel to the participatory process. Decision-makers may directly formulate their decisions based on the recommendations from a large group conference. Or the decisions may result from the mediated working groups, or an even more exclusive mediation process between key conflict parties. Whatever way the decision is taken, process-oriented LGI practitioners emphasize the need for decision-makers to present their decisions back to the whole system. They may do this by re-convening the large group for a results conference (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, pp. 158-159).

Before the large group conference (comparable to mediation phase one), facilitators have the strongest influence on the process. Seliger compares LGI to ballet: "when it looks really easy, a lot of work must be behind it" (Seliger 2020, p.113). Preparation starts with clarifying the LGI practitioner's mandate in direct discussion with the leadership in a system or the conflict parties if it is a mediation setting. In this discussion, the LGI practitioner would often seek the mandate and the contacts to work with small insider planning teams, which are usually set up as little microcosms of the large group and help the facilitator prepare the process and the event (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, pp. 151-153). Bilateral consultations with stakeholders may complete the work with the planning team. Such consultations are critical for conflictual contexts and mediation processes (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, p. 51).

I have described how an extensive LGI process may include a range of more inclusive and more exclusive formats. Despite such sequencing, the whole system approach remains center stage as the facilitator seeks to keep up the large group conference's momentum in the overall process. Hinnen and Krummenacher (2012) emphasize the dynamic and energy generated and liberated through a large group event, which helps systems endorse self-organization and participation in change or clarification processes. They also stress the importance of a structured process before and after the large group conference to foster trust and confidence in the

large group and commit the system to follow up and learn through feedback loops (pp. 144-145).

Whole Scale Change (WSC) is one example of an overarching LGI process-model that alternates between large group conferences and smaller group work (Dannemiller, James, & Tolchinsky, 1999, pp. 2-3). The model stresses the need to "keep the system whole" (Dannemiller, James, & Tolchinsky, 1999, p. 11) beyond the moments of gathering in large groups. It encourages to publish results and commitments generated in the large group conference, creating cross-functional teams for concrete initiatives as a result of the large group conference, and to set dates for feedback and learning loops. Dannemiller and colleagues describe how growing engagement with microcosms is key to building critical mass for change. Not only should the dynamics of the large group meeting be kept up in daily business by continuing to bring together diverse representatives in microcosms – the circle of those involved should also be expanded. "When a critical mass of different microcosms experience the paradigm shift experienced by those who participated in the original event, the whole system will continue to change" (Dannemiller, James, & Tolchinsky, 1999, pp. 11).

Dannemiller and colleagues explain their theory of change through an allegory from medicine. In stem cell therapy, medical doctors succeed in isolating and stem cells of the human system that are not changed by cancer. By re-implanting stem cells into patients, the physicians give the body an instrument to find its own solution to the disease. The patients' system can use the stem cells to develop those cells, which the body needs to fight the disease (Dannemiller & James, 2002, p. 6). With that allegory, we can say that microcosms become nuclei of change: they become the change that a system requires. "When we all (as a microcosm of the whole organization) see the world differently, and we know that we are all on the same path, the organization as a whole will begin to shift behavior. When the microcosm began to shift in their ways back home, it was like a 'positive virus' moving through the large organization" (Dannemiller & James, 2002, p. 5).

4. Analysis and conclusions

In the following, I will present my analysis of the research question, exploring the relevance and applicability of the LGI approach for peace mediation. I will first discuss the current dissemination of LGI in the peace mediation field as an indicator of its relevance and applicability. Secondly, I will discuss the relevance and applicability based on comparing the concepts and principles of the two approaches. Thirdly, I will reflect on challenges that this approach will face when implemented in peace mediation. Lastly, I will try to situate the LGI approach with regards to different tracks and phases in peace mediation. In this, I will also draw on the analysis of the interviews with the practitioners.

4.1. Spread of the LGI approach in the peace mediation field

This chapter will describe my understanding of the current state of the application and spread of LGI methodology in the peace mediation field. This is based on a limited literature review and the interviews conducted. I have not focused on case studies, which might have revealed deeper insights, especially if combined with targeted interviews. My findings are thus indicative, in parts even anecdotal. A valid and representative assessment would have required a much broader literature review and quantitative and qualitative data collection.

Summarizing, I can say that LGI methodology is not new to the field of peace mediation. Particularly in dialogue facilitation, the LGI approach appears to be relatively well established. Some of its methods feature in dialogue facilitation guidance in the peace mediation field. Moreover, critical assumptions of LGI, mainly whole system thinking, seem to have found their way into influential approaches and dialogue concepts.

How widely LGI is applied in practice is difficult to assess. However, the literature consulted in this study, and the interviews conducted hint towards a frequent use, especially in post-conflict settings and on lower tracks. Concerning peace negotiations at the highest level, one of the interviews revealed that methods resembling LGI are applied in some cases, however not necessarily in the narrow sense of the participatory and collaborative approach of LGI.

That said, LGI is perhaps not perceived as a coherent approach in the field. Instead, dialogue and mediation practitioners seem to draw eclectically on methodology and tools that go back to LGI. Specific methods, such as the 'World Café' have become mainstream instruments in peacebuilding. While it would be relevant

to understand whether their everyday use accurately reflects the LGI approach's underlying principles, such assessment was beyond the scope of this thesis.

4.1.1. Conceptual references in literature

On a conceptual level, LGI's specific methods are frequently mentioned and recommended in the relevant literature. Important reference publications such as the practitioner's handbook for democratic dialogue (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, p. 116) or the 'mapping dialogue' publication (Bojer, 2008) each include four out of the 'big five' methods of LGI (Open Space, World Café, Future Search, and Appreciative Inquiry) in the list of tools they recommend and explain.

These publications explicitly mention the LGI approach's general aptitude for facilitating large groups and moving beyond the participation of small groups of representatives or decision-makers towards including the whole system (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, p. 116). Moreover, specific applications for the different methods are recommended, for instance, 'World Café' and 'Open Space' for processes that seek to explore or raise awareness, and 'Future Search' or 'Appreciative Inquiry' for multi-stakeholder processes that aim for collaborative action and whole system change (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, p. 115). Another publication depicts LGI methodology as suitable for dialogues, which can help track I processes to develop options for specific topics, fostering mutual understanding and trust and relationships by addressing the identity dimension (Splinter & Wüstehube, 2020, pp. 77-78).

Moreover, some of the dialogue approaches put forward in literature share critical assumptions with the LGI approach. Most explicitly, I found reference to whole system thinking and to the idea of working with microcosms. The democratic dialogue handbook equates the work with microcosms to the fundamental principle of inclusiveness. "The principle of inclusiveness dictates an effort to create a participant group that is a microcosm of the social system where the challenge to be addressed is located" (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, p. 88). Other central concepts of LGI methodology, such as self-organization, process- or common ground orientation, were not reflected explicitly or directly in literature, certainly not linked to the LGI approach. The facilitator's intentional limitation in managing the communication process in large groups, or the operationalization of self-organization through D/I methodology, were not reflected in the literature.

However, publications such as the Berghof Foundation's 'basics of dialogue facilitation' (Ropers, 2017) or the aforementioned 'mapping dialogue' (Bojer, 2008, pp. 13-14) reference the model of 'Converge/Diverge' to indicate the natural

flow of dialogue processes. This model links back to the theory of how organizations need to differentiate and integrate to develop, which provided an essential impetus for the 'WSC process-model' that blends large group conferences with other formats (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, pp. 163-164).

Indirectly, one can relate principles such as 'joint ownership' or 'learning', which are fundamental to the democratic dialogue approach, to LGI assumptions: According to the LGI approach, to change a system requires the whole system to learn. This is possible by providing platforms for a microcosm group to communicate intensely about what matters in that system, thus learning from each other and assuming joint ownership, becoming a nucleus of the change required in the system.

4.1.2. Reference to practical application

A systematic literature review of practical cases was not possible in the framework of this thesis. However, in the literature I was able to study, I found references to LGI methods used in the peacebuilding field.

The list of references found includes the use of the Open Space method during the transition in South Africa in one of the townships in a preventive manner to improve communication among political groups (Bojer, 2008, p. 51). A different source describes a project that relied on 'Open Space' in a third-party intervention between representatives of two opposed political parties that had fought each other in the inner-Kurdish civil war during the 1990s in Iraq. The institute that acted as third party decided to combine 'Open Space' with mediation and negotiation training. In the training, the representatives became familiar with mediation and started working through less central conflicting issues, thereby developing trust. The following 'Open Space' allowed the representatives from both sides to engage directly with each other and talk about the real and more conflictive issues without translators. The source describes how the event achieved a degree of reconciliation and culminated in creating a bilateral conflict resolution center, which supported further collaboration between the parties in the field, including further use of 'Open Space' for high-conflict problem-solving (Holman et al., 2007, pp. 53-54). One of the practitioners involved describes the use of 'Open Space': "In Open Space, participants found the passion and responsibility to talk directly to each other about what mattered most. With newly learned skills, and momentum behind them, the space was opened, and held by a neutral third side, as they worked the core conflict issues of their time" (Holman et al., 2007, pp. 53-54).

Future Search conferences are mentioned in the literature to have been applied in South Sudan during the civil war from 1999 onwards to conduct visioning exercises with young people. Future Search conferences also formed part of demobilizing child soldiers and establishing a vision for their future, following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006. Moreover, they were applied in Northern Ireland, ten years after the Good Friday Peace Agreement, to unite the still divided communities in the city in establishing common ground to envision a pathway for the city's economic and social regeneration (Weisbord & Janoff, 2010, pp. 18-26).

The Practitioners Handbook for Democratic Dialogue mentions the practical challenges of assembling a microcosm for multistakeholder dialogues with examples from Guatemala, Colombia, and Peru (Pruitt & Thomas, 2007, p. 89). We can assume that the LGI approach informed these dialogues to some degree.

Dialogue Practitioner Norbert Ropers' (2020)description of how he worked on conflict mapping exercises in building an 'insider peacebuilders platform' in Thailand bears resemblances with the LGI approach and D/I methodology. He used combinations of small groups, first in stakeholder, then in mixed compositions, plenary sessions, and timelines. Later, he transitioned the platform into a microcosm to feed into the track I peace negotiations (pp. 228-234).

The interviews I have conducted with peace practitioners confirm that the LGI approach is used frequently. One of the interviewees, a senior dialogue practitioner, who had been associated with an international organization's dialogue program in Latin America at the time, confirmed the relevance of the approach. She mentioned that the program was involved in dozens of dialogue processes that used a whole system approach, also drawing on LGI methods such as Open Space and World Café. These dialogues were implemented in the Central America region, pre-dominantly in post-conflict situations after the signing of peace agreements (senior dialogue practitioner, (24.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

A senior mediation practitioner described how a series of consultative forums repeatedly brought together several hundred people with the aim of broadening participation in a major peace process in Latin America. While these forums used methodology which strongly resembled the LGI method of D/I, their purpose was perhaps more limited than the ambitious participation-model of LGI and more limited in the sense of one-way consultations. (senior mediation practitioner, (2.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

It does not seem easy to find examples of cases that use LGI methods in a rather strict text-book sense. One reason for this could be that peace practitioners are likely to make creative use of these instruments, often adapting or mixing them for their purposes and according to the context's requirements. The 'World Café' is

perhaps a good example of a tool that has become a mainstream instrument in the peacebuilding field. Yet it is sometimes implemented in ways that do not accurately reflect LGI principles: The 'World Café' is often used by assigning specific topics to specific tables – instead of giving the same topic for all parallel tables. As one of the interviewees stressed, as an LGI practitioner he would not use the method in that way because it does not help the group to tap into the full knowledge of the whole system (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

However, to assess whether the tools are used in the 'true spirit' of the LGI approach requires an in-depth examination and understanding of each specific case, which I could not conduct in this thesis's scope.

4.2. Relevance and applicability of LGI to peace mediation

In the following chapters, I will try to answer how relevant and applicable I deem the LGI approach to peace mediation practice. I will thus compare the methods and assumptions described for both fields as outlined above, informing, and amending my reflections with the analysis of the conducted interviews.

I will present my conclusions structured around themes that have emerged during the interview process: I will first compare the LGI facilitator's role with that of the mediator regarding essential principles such as impartiality, preparedness, and the mediator's style. I will then look at how LGI may deal with the high levels of complexity in peace mediation. Following this, I will look at inclusivity and ownership and the use of 'understanding' in LGI. I will identify challenges the peace mediation field may bear for the application of the LGI approach. I conclude the analysis by trying to situate the LGI approach against peace mediation phases and tracks.

4.2.1. Impartial, facilitative, common ground oriented, prepared

In this chapter, I argue that the LGI facilitator's role bears significant similarities with that of the mediator or dialogue facilitator, making it suitable for facilitation approaches in dialogue and mediation. The impartial and facilitative character of LGI stands out in that regard. For the highly conflictive settings of peace mediation, the LGI approach must include mechanisms to deal with escalation and open conflict in groups. LGI does so, mainly counting on thorough preparation and D/I methodology. However, if working on relationships and transforming deep-rooted conflict is at the center of a dialogue, other facilitation styles and formats may be

better suited. The somewhat messy reality of dialogue facilitation implies that facilitators cannot always prepare perfectly. Hence, they may rely on adaptive approaches towards facilitation style, also combining directive and non-directive approaches.

LGI places great emphasis on preparedness, linked to the commitment to self-organization in large groups. The work with system insiders in preparation is relatable to the insider-mediator approach in the peace mediation field.

As shown in the theory part, impartiality towards conflict parties and neutrality towards substance are key aspects of the facilitator's role in LGI, which makes it suitable to process-, or relationship-oriented mediation and dialogue facilitation. Hinnen and Krummenacher (2012) draw explicit parallels between their roles and that of a mediator, emphasizing that they do not hold any responsibility for neither substance nor results. They see themselves as process facilitators ("Prozessbegleiter"), accountable to the entire system rather than to individual parties (p. 199). In a similar vein, Seliger (2020) describes the moderator as an "advocate of complexity", who tries to make complexity accessible and workable to the system (p. 114). One of the interviewees stated that for his work in organizations and the public realm, he has come to see the LGI and mediation as the same, as his approach does not really differ between the two (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

On the spectrum of different mediation styles, I propose to situate LGI methodology on the facilitative and passive side with a procedural orientation instead of relationship- or substance-orientation. I base my assessment on the emphasis LGI puts on the process to allow a group to self-organize and use its combined expertise, on the LGI facilitators refraining from taking a stance on substance and on their restraint to control or intervene in communication. Thus, the LGI facilitators' role compares best to what Moore (2014) describes as 'independent mediators' (pp. 29-43).

Clear-cut distinctions in approaches and styles, perhaps do not do justice to the messy reality of dialogue facilitation. Speaking about her experience in dialogue facilitation, one interviewee stated that the facilitator often needs to be more active or even directive in the beginning. He or she would thus create a safe space and establish trust before turning into a more facilitative mode to open the space for self-organization (senior dialogue practitioner (24.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

Moreover, the facilitator's role may change with the different formats in a more complex process. For instance, in working groups that follow the large group conference, more active mediation may be required. The facilitator's role and style

may also vary with individual preferences. Moreover, he or she may want to adjust it according to the preferences of participants.

The passive character of LGI facilitation and its orientation towards finding common ground raises the question of how LGI can deal with disruptions and intense conflict, which peace mediation often grapples with.

One condition to enable self-organization even in highly conflictive settings is meticulous preparation. Stakeholder groups may not be willing to mix up from the start. The differentiating then needs to be achieved through other ways, such as working in stakeholder groups first or fleshing out the differences through sociometric constellations (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

The facilitator needs to be aware of and prepared for such situations. Weisbord and Janoff (2007) advise exercising maximum control ahead of meetings: "control what you can, let go what you can't" (p. 31). This is comparable to process design in mediation or dialogue facilitation: clarifying the problem system and the mandate, balancing the goal with participation with other process dimensions such as the person of the mediator, timing, venue, format, financing, communication (Abdi & Mason, 2019, p. 24). LGI practitioners even use 'scripts' to design a conference, from which they rarely depart – not least, because versions of this script are usually shared with participants. The scripts aim to give participants orientation and a feeling of security that will foster their openness to engage in self-organized groups.

Comparable to best practice in peace mediation, LGI process design can be a participatory exercise. The third party taps into the intimate understanding of small planning groups of the system's insiders to feel out what a group can cope with and what may or may not work with that particular group. As shown in the theory part, LGI emphasizes the benefits of working with such small planning groups already in the preparatory stage.

Very basically, the preparation needs to ensure that those who will participate are open to dialogue. One interviewee mentions this as a critical condition. The insider group also helps to contextualize the formats and methodology, for example, by clarifying whether an exercise to change perspective is appropriate for a group or preparing the right questions for a 'World Café'. The members of such planning teams can then also prepare their respective constituencies for the interventions to secure their buy-in ahead of the conference (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

This insider concept can be compared to the peace mediation typical work with insider mediators who work in both formal and informal peace mediation processes in cross-cleavage teams, combining in-depth knowledge about a conflict, great

dedication to work on the conflict and intimate relationships with the parties. (Mason, 2009, p. 16). One of the interviewees mentioned how she relied on such insiders to prepare dialogue processes, as they could shuttle between key stakeholders that might not talk to each other or herself as an outsider (senior dialogue practitioner, (24.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

During the large group conference, LGI primarily relies on the D/I approach to manage conflict, for instance, in the form of escalating or frozen situations and individuals. An active mediator might push for consensus-building or compromise in case of open conflict. In contrast, LGI acknowledges conflictive issues but does not try to resolve them through compromise or consensus-building during the large group conference. A relationship-oriented mediator might put her finger right on the painful spot, seeking to work through past injuries and grievances. Doing so, she might apply empathy and tools such as 'looping' or even 'pacing' and 'leading' to deal with an agitated or icy participant, make him feel understood and appreciated, and keep him in the process. In contrast, LGI does not seek to work through conflict but seeks to contain it. With a large group of dozens, hundreds or thousands of people, such engagement with individuals may not be possible.

The LGI facilitator instead trusts in the capacity of small mixed working groups to absorb and thwart escalation and to contain conflict. As one interviewee explains, it is common for individuals to seek escalation the first time they work in mixed breakout groups. But being mixed with new participants in new groups, again and again, getting repeated chances to express their opinion while experiencing the complexity of differing perspectives in a large group, the stereotypical conflict lines that follow stakeholder groups are challenged. As the individual continues to assess where he or she stands regarding the overall group, this experience tends to calm escalation tendencies (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

The LGI approach towards conflict is one of preventing or containing it. Thus, LGI can indeed be seen as applicable in – even highly – conflictive settings. However, large group formats focus not on working through conflictive issues and the consequence for relationships. Instead, the process identifies conflict, common ground, and resources, intending to put the conflictive points aside and continue to work with the common ground towards a jointly acceptable outcome.

Avoiding or resolving substantial deadlock around highly conflictive issues may demand additional formats such as more exclusive mediated working groups. It may also be easier to conduct loops to the identity level to break the substantial deadlock in such smaller formats.

Given its focus on the future and the containing of conflict, the LGI approach may not apply well in a situation that requires working through deep-rooted conflict. Such a situation may require a third party to hold that space together and help a group and its individuals express and process strong feelings or even work through past grievances. Dialogues that focus on the relationship and the identity-level and aim for transformation may prefer other approaches.

4.2.2. Complexity

As shown above, a key challenge in the peace mediation field is the complexity of the conflicts. In the following, I argue that LGI methodology is designed to deal with high levels of complexity. Responding to maximum levels of complexity to the scale of addressing conflict in the entire nation, the work with subsystems becomes relevant for the approach's manageability and efficiency. LGI offers a lens that allows keeping the system whole, thus accounting for the full complexity of an overall system, while breaking the practical work into dialogues that address different subsystems and keep processes manageable. LGI thus appears capable of dealing with the complexity levels faced in peace mediation.

To what degree of complexity is the work with microcosms possible? One of the interviewees argued that the higher the complexity of a system, the better LGI works – because the larger the microcosm group is, the quicker it will grasp the complexity and realize the need to address the situation with non-positional approaches. (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference].

Yet experience with LGI seems to stop at gatherings of less than five thousand people. For a community level, this seems a relatively large number. But what is the critical mass needed to initiate change for an entire society? And how would one go about assembling a microcosm of society as a whole? While I did not find any specific answers to this question, a way around it may be to think in terms of subsystems.

One interviewee gave the example of political negotiations focused on the re-integration of an armed group into society. Despite this delimited process goal, these negotiations' agenda would still contain some five chapters with 60-70 sub-topics. Generally speaking, the practitioner deemed the complexity far too high to work with one single microcosm of the entire problem system in tackling all of these. In his opinion, different groups at different times would be required to discuss these. Negotiating the technicalities of the group's disarmament, for instance, would not require the participation of the same people as when it came to discussing the victims of the conflict. (Senior mediation practitioner, (2.12.2020), personal

interview [videoconference]. In that case, the different topics may have represented different subsystems of the overall conflict system, which consequently requires distinct groups to work on them.

Hinnen and Krummenacher (2012) suggest specific process models for highly complex systems that consist of multiple semi-autonomous subsystems. These models sequence the LGI process into conferences with different subsystems. The whole system lens is kept intact by identifying thematic issues that cut across the subsystems and linking the subsystems' conferences back to the overall system. One example they provide is a process that involved the church in one of Switzerland's largest cantons. The church is composed of multiple parishes, which it sought to involve in a locally owned development process while looking at themes relevant to the overall system (e.g., spirituality, or working with youth). The process was opened and framed in a kick-off large group conference, which included participants from all subsystems. During a year, 60 subsystems (representing the parishes) held their respective large-group conferences on specific topics relevant to the overall system. The facilitators had trained system insiders beforehand to capacitate them to run such conferences. The process ended with a concluding conference, which again brought a microcosmos of the whole system together and summarized the results from the different subsystems (pp. 180).

Such a model's strength lies in creating a process that mirrors the hyper-complexity of a system with multiple subsystems. Conflict in these subsystems may affect the overall system and vice-versa but articulate themselves differently in each sub-system. Such a process allows the relevant problems to be addressed both within the boundaries of the corresponding sub-system and on the whole system's overall level. Such a model may offer interesting insights for large participatory processes on higher levels of society, such as National Dialogues.

4.2.3. Inclusivity, participation, process-orientation, ownership

A key challenge of peace mediation revolves around the inclusivity of processes. As described above, one of the dilemmas in peace mediation is the challenge to create inclusive processes in environments characterized by conflict, fragility, and absence of democracy and the rule of law, which tend to promote exclusive decision-making by those in power. I argue in this chapter that LGI methodology provides one instrument to address that challenge. Summarizing, we can say that the participatory LGI approach is well suited to enhance inclusivity both quantitatively and qualitatively. It allows to collaboratively involve large groups, which form microcosms of the whole system, in the dialogue- and deliberation process that feeds

into decision-making. The participation model of LGI allows factoring in that decision-making authority may remain with exclusive circles. Such an approach seems to fit well with the dynamics at play in the peace mediation field, where power structures often hamper inclusive decision-making. However, the collaborative involvement of the whole system in dialogue and deliberation goes much beyond one-way consultations. Mediation and dialogue processes in the peace mediation field may not always offer the political space for this type of inclusion. The LGI approach can create high levels of ownership, which peace mediation processes strive for. Yet, sustained ownership comes with a need to keep the system whole beyond the convening of large group conferences and to create moments of inclusivity and feedback loops over the entire span of the peace process. Again, this requires political space, which may not be realistically available in peace mediation. While tools such as World Café could also be used as instruments for one-way consultations, this does not fully reflect the principles of LGI.

The LGI approach conceptualizes participatory decision-making as a holistic process that includes the different mechanisms of dialogue, deliberation, and decision-making. It builds on the assumption that the inclusivity of this process can be enhanced through all these mechanisms. In cases where the actual decision-making remains exclusively in the hands of powerful conflict parties or governmental actors, participatory dialogue and deliberation may serve to prepare the decision more inclusively. Accordingly, its process-orientation approach allows LGI to design a participatory process beyond a single event, thus combining different formats that cater to the need for moments of dialogue, deliberation, and decision-making with different levels of inclusivity.

This fits well with the concept of inclusivity suggested for peace mediation. As the UN Guidance on effective mediation outlines, designing an inclusive process does not need to mean that the broader society directly participates in a mediation process, but that their perspectives are represented (UN, 2012, pp. 11-13).

Far from grassroots democracy, LGI methodology fits well into a process that respects leaders' decisions or decisions that come out of the negotiations of the key parties to a conflict. At the same time, it requires collaborative participation of the whole system to prepare and reflect on these decisions. I would thus argue that the participatory model of LGI takes inclusivity a step further.

From an LGI perspective, inclusivity means that decisions are taken based on a participative process that relates top-down and bottom-up. The top-down decision-making is linked with bottom-up exploration of needs, ideation, and deliberations

about how decision-making could consider these needs. An inclusive process ensures that the whole system's perspective is considered in decision-making and that the decision-makers will answer to questions concerning their decisions.

One of my interviewees explained how he would usually educate decision-makers that the LGI process is not about them having to comply with the recommendations a large group comes up with. Rather, it is about the leadership considering these recommendations seriously in their deliberations and demonstrating credibly, how some of these recommendations were considered and others not. Often, he revealed, the decision-makers would fully subscribe to the participatory process once they realized that it really strengthens their leadership and that the intimate insights into the diverse perspectives in the system are valuable to them (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

In terms of sequencing the participation in a broader decision-making process, LGI may serve to a) ask the whole system to identify the issues that need to be addressed in the negotiations or mediation process and thus inform the agenda setting before a process starts, or b) if the negotiation has already started, let the whole system comment on the first results of the negotiation or mediation, mainly with a view to how suggested options could be translated into concrete and implementable solutions (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

This sequencing of participation matches well with the descriptions of the senior mediation practitioner, how participation in track-1 negotiations can be broadened through consultations. He works with a model of three basic stages of how participation may be broadened in political negotiations (senior mediation practitioner, (2.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

A. In the pre-negotiation phase, rather broad and open consultations may look at questions such as whether negotiations should actually take place, or what should be the content of the negotiations, or whom the negotiations should include.
B. In parallel to the actual negotiations, consultations may seek the opinions on how feasible, realistic, implementable, and viable the identified solutions that come out of the negotiations are before an agreement is drafted.
C. Once the agreement(s) is (are) drafted, a last consultation round may seek the opinions on the agreement.

Thus, we can state that the LGI participation model appears applicable with a sequenced approach to broadening participation in political negotiations.

However, the LGI model of participation goes further. LGI seeks to sustain inclusivity and participation by keeping up the whole system thinking over the time span of an entire process: In preparation, LGI does so by working with small planning insider teams that form tiny microcosms. For the follow-up to a large group conference, the system is kept whole by constituting and mandating working groups (or mediation processes) directly in the large group conferences. In the final stages of a process, the feedback loops and results conferences serve to keep the system whole. In the implementation, LGI seeks to link the process results with the wider system. This may involve information campaigns or broadening the circle of the involved by replicating the microcosm experience in implementation initiatives.

One interviewee described how he and his partners came to realize that isolated large group conferences would not lead to sustained results and how they came up with a process in which working groups would follow the initial large group conference to deepen issues and solve conflict. Finally, a results-conference would provide a platform for the decision-makers to speak to the results of the process, to outline their implementation, and for the whole system to react to the process and to raise questions (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

The LGI approach towards inclusivity and participation I have outlined so far, seems to apply well to the concept of 'democratic dialogue'. As shown in theory, the concept very similarly suggests operationalizing inclusion through whole system microcosms. It also conceptualizes participatory decision-making as a broader process that spans the phases of dialogue, deliberation, and decision-making, thus allowing to design inclusivity flexibly and pragmatically for each phase, while seeking to foster the overall level of inclusivity.

With reference to the dialogue framework suggested by Splinter and Wüstehube (2020), I would argue that the LGI approaches' participatory model and level of inclusivity may be suitable for National dialogues, communal dialogues, and mediative-workshop dialogues (p. 82). I would expect all of these to require broadening participation sustained over time while also requiring more exclusive decision-making formats.

Joint ownership by those who participate is a requirement for working with the whole system and at the same time a product of the collaborative and participatory process. We could say that LGI serves to broaden the ownership for the more extensive change or peace processes behind a decision-making process. As I have

shown in the theory part, operating under the concept of self-organization, LGI does not see change as something that can be directed from the outside or by any individual element of the system. This means that the LGI approach requires the system to develop joint ownership to produce change. In line with this, three of my interviewees emphasized the importance of the self-organization aspect for the development of ownership. As one interviewee put it, self-organization contributes to dialogue participants' empowerment and development of a sense of ownership for solving the issues at hand (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]). Another interviewee stressed participant's ownership of the thinking process and rising confidence in the process with the experience of being capable to hold the dialogue space together (senior mediation and dialogue specialist, (16.12.2020), personal interview, [videoconference]). A third interviewee emphasized that self-organization makes participants feel that they can contribute to something that will be useful (senior dialogue practitioner (24.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

With such ownership come expectations. As outlined above, the process needs to incorporate feedback-loops or continuous moments of participation to sustain ownership. The idea of 'keeping the system whole' reflects this. The participant's ownership for the process and the outcomes of that process are more likely to be sustained when decision-makers answer questions about their decisions and clarify how they have taken up participants' recommendations or why they did not take them up. Moreover, having transparency on this process in advance, knowing that decision-makers are committed to facing questions following their decision-making, is likely to increase the participant's confidence in the process and their commitment to engage in the process and to support and implement its outcomes.

In principle, such measures to keep the system whole and the inherent logic of the LGI approach to sustain the level of inclusivity and joint ownership throughout all phases of a process seem very much applicable and desirable for peace mediation processes. As shown in the theory part, policy documents and guidance books emphasize inclusivity and joint – or national – ownership as critical principles for mediation and dialogue. Again, the question regarding peace mediation is whether the political space allows for such measures.

Let us now take a look at how the participation model of LGI may apply to processes in the peace mediation field that strive for maximum inclusivity and joint ownership. National Dialogues can be seen as such processes. National Dialogues have the ambition to foster fundamental change and produce visions of how society wants to go forward in the future, e.g., by re-negotiating its social contract and preparing the way for a new constitution. This requires maximum inclusivity and

national ownership. The National Dialogue handbook states that "National Dialogue Processes have to be designed in a way that reflects the social make-up of a society related to the issue(s) that need to be addressed" (Blunck et al., 2017, pp. 20-34). This formula appears in line with the LGI approach, particularly with its microcosmos and whole system approach. The full national ownership these processes aspire for fits well with the emphasis LGI puts on self-organization.

Yet there is a difference between LGI and National Dialogues with regard to their participatory approach. National Dialogues are seen as essentially consensus-oriented initiatives, in which decision-making is based on consensus unless complemented by other mechanisms to break deadlocks (Blunck et al., 2017, pp. 104).

In combination with the ambition for maximal inclusivity, this creates a dilemma of efficiency: "On the one hand, bringing too many parties and interests to the negotiation table makes it harder to reach an agreement. On the other, the representation of a broad range of actors is a prerequisite for broader popular support, legitimacy and ultimately the sustainability of an agreement" (Blunck et al., 2017, p. 82).

The National Dialogue handbook suggests thinking in terms of 'inclusive enough' to balance efficiency with inclusivity considerations. When full inclusivity is deemed inefficient and thus not desirable for pragmatic reasons, a process should still be inclusive enough. The handbook proposes four formats of inclusivity to increase the flexibility of a process to be inclusive enough. The two inclusivity models that seem most compatible with LGI participation are a) parallel consultation forums that influence the decision-making processes from the outside and b) thematic multi-arena inclusivity where decision-making on different topics happens at parallel negotiation tables. For these parallel tables, participation is matched with the thematic focus at stake. In line with its emphasis on consensus-based decision making, the handbook stresses the need to build in binding decision-making mechanisms for such parallel formats (Blunck et al., 2017, pp. 82-83).

As shown in the theory part, LGI does not foresee consensual decision-making in its large group conferences. It seeks to prepare decisions based on identifying common ground in the whole system but does not seek consensus amongst its members on conflictive issues. LGI's participatory approach aims to broaden decision-making by preparing it through the phases of dialogue and deliberation. The decision making itself remains rather exclusive. Whether the decisions are ultimately negotiated, taken on a consensus-basis, or by authority is not of particular concern in the LGI model.

Does this mean that LGI does not apply to consultative forums in National Dialogues?

I would argue that the participation model of LGI might be a viable alternative strategy to help address the efficiency dilemma in National Dialogues. The LGI approach deliberately keeps the decision-making separate from the large group conference. The argument is that participatory processes are strongest when they are free of decision-making pressure and focus on common ground instead. Including decision-making may pin large groups down in negotiations over areas of disagreement and paralyze it by strengthening positional bargaining.

Accordingly, an LGI perspective on National Dialogues could suggest that self-organized regional forums, as subsystems of the nation, develop non-binding recommendations according to the National Dialogue's topics. The key parties and stakeholders would take these recommendations up in the smaller formats, deciding based on consensus building. The decisions would then need to be presented back to the whole system.

In LGI, participants do not represent the interests of their stakeholder-group. They represent the system's complexity as the process seeks to help them move beyond their positions and explore common interests. The cost of such open-minded thinking is that the decision-making itself remains more exclusive. As one interviewee puts it, people do not necessarily seek grassroots-democracy, they usually expect somebody to take decisions and assume responsibility for the decisions. Yet they do want to be involved (LGI practitioner, 26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

Another interviewee shared an observation that may also count as an argument to avoid overburdening consultation forums with consensus-based decision-making. As the interviewee described, with the progressing of the peace negotiations, the discussions in the consultation forums would usually turn increasingly technical, as the broader public's participation thinned out, and the remaining participants were often technical experts from the stakeholder-groups (senior mediation practitioner, (2.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]). This may lead to the interpretation that the broader public is not as interested in the technicalities of decisions but desires to have a say to provide the broad directions. Of course, one might also interpret it quite differently: that the broader public shows only limited interest in consultations if ultimately, others will make the decisions.

4.2.4. Understanding, trust and relationship building

In this chapter, I argue that the LGI approach is suitable for outcome-oriented mediation and dialogue processes. LGI is at its core an outcome-oriented approach, as it seeks to increase a system's capacity to act based on identifying common

ground. This requires an increased and broader understanding amongst the microcosm that represents the whole system about the whole system. While LGI allows trust-building and addressing relationships, it is not at its core a relationship- or an understanding-oriented approach. However, it could be worth exploring how LGI can be linked to more transformative and healing-oriented approaches.

LGI is fundamentally outcome-oriented but requires a common understanding of a problem's complexity from a whole system perspective. One interviewee identified the key innovation of LGI in letting people develop a shared picture of the reality of a problem system in all its facets by quickly and iteratively mixing individuals with different perspectives in small, self-organized groups, and to have these groups report back to the entire group, thus requiring the individual to question and assess his or her perspective against the other perspectives in the room and to see where she stands in relation to the entire group (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

We may compare the LGI approach to integrative, or interest-based mediation in its outcome and common ground orientation. The idea of encouraging the whole system to develop a picture of the reality of that system jointly matches well with the goal of formulating a joint problem statement that includes all parties' needs and interests, which is central to phase three in mediation (Moore, 2014, p.204). As shown in the theory part, LGI processes seek to identify common ground to increase a system's capacity for acting. They do so through increasing and broadening understanding amongst the whole system about the whole system. In integrative mediation, the identification and shared understanding of the individual's interests equally builds the basis for the subsequent development of options that match everyone's interest.

One interviewee shared his experience about how consultation forums that involved large groups helped produce a deeper understanding of the interests linked to issues discussed in political negotiations on track I. While he stated that it would have been difficult to get to that level with the parties to the official negotiations, the larger group managed well to move beyond the hardline positions. The conflict parties were not only represented in that larger group format, but also had the chance to go through the documentation after the consultations to inform their negotiation strategy (senior mediation practitioner, (2.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

I have shown that LGI is suitable to an outcome-oriented and interest-based mediation model. However, peace mediation, particularly dialogue facilitation, may require a relationship orientation to foster deeper understanding, and consider the identity level.

Working through deep-rooted conflict and past grievances, rebuilding trust, and restoring relationships may require deep understanding. This would be the kind of understanding that allows conflict parties or participants to genuinely take their counterpart's perspective and emotionally or cognitively understand how and why their counterpart feels and acts a certain way, what is important to them, and why. Achieving such understanding is usually not a matter of a few meetings but may require longer- and more complex processes (Splinter & Wüstehube, 2020, pp. 42-43).

I would argue that LGI aims for a less ambitious understanding. Identifying common ground based on the interests of both sides may not require maximum understanding. It may suffice that both sides come to appreciate the complexity of a situation and the diversity of interests in a system. They may trust the process enough to develop options based on the common ground they find, regardless of whether they believe or fully understand each other's differing perspectives. Such a solution may still be more wise, fair, and sustainable than a solution based on positional bargaining, although, with regards to the conflictive issues, stakeholder groups might continue to mistrust or feel negative about each other.

Certain LGI practitioners do include methodologies to work towards deeper levels of understanding. Krummenacher (2020) describes a tool called 'in the shoes of the others' that is reminiscent of classical instruments used in mediation to foster perspective-change. By this tool, the practitioner invites large, polarized groups to gather in smaller groups according to the respective cleavage and try to take the respective other groups' perspective and empathize with them by identifying their main challenges concerning the issues, then debriefing in plenary (pp. 231-235).

Regarding Splinter's and Wüstehube's dialogue framework, one interviewee re-iterated that LGI is principally substance-oriented and not identity-oriented. LGI also focuses on the community, not on the individual. As a large group practitioner, he would not see himself as responsible for the well-being of individuals. However, people's personal experiences and their connection with the issues at hand matter and can be very important. The interviewee describes a tool, which he frequently uses to start a process: Gathering in buzz-groups, participants discuss a personal item that they were asked to bring to the process, which signifies the situation to them. Another such ice breaker tool is a sociometric constellation in which individual participants are asked to situate themselves in the room for example along specific questions like their expectations or fears concerning the conference, or for instance according to the Riemann-Thomann-model of personality, relation and development (Schulz von Thun Institut für Kommunikation). Such excursions to the personal level may allow to create spaces for dialogue and evidence that allows

participants to see commonalities beyond the stereotypical cleavages that divide stakeholder groups (LGI practitioner (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

We can conclude that LGI allows to make use of understanding- and relationship-oriented tools to the degree needed, to capacitate the system to focus on common ground.

This matches well with the concept of dialogue loops put forward by Splinter and Wüstehube (2020), which suggests that in substance-oriented processes the atmosphere or environment may not be conducive to directly go to the identity-level. In such cases, dialogue loops to the identity level can become possible after a while once substantial discussions end in a deadlock. Then, participants may be ready to share and listen to personal experiences that help understand why someone is positional about a certain issue. This personal understanding may, in turn, unlock substantial discussions (pp. 73-74).

We can conclude that LGI is not geared towards working through deep-rooted conflict and processes aiming to restore relationships. On the spectrum of substance vs. identity in Splinter's and Wüstehube's (2020) dialogue framework (p. 82), LGI would lean towards the substance side. As shown in the theory part, the entity of change in LGI is not the individual, but the system's structures and communication patterns.

I would suggest viewing trust and relationship building as a welcomed and sometimes needed side product of the LGI approach. In line with this assessment, one interviewee acknowledged increased understanding and humanization as an outcome of consultations with large groups, which clearly did not have a transformative aim (senior mediation practitioner, (2.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

When in-depth trust- and relationship building is a requirement, it might be possible to adjust the LGI format to allow for such discussions or precede or complement it with such spaces. As one interviewee put it, trust can be built as an effect of adversaries sitting together in a safe space, and discussing the hard topics, discussing what really matters. Often, informal spaces around dialogues, for instance a dinner discussion or a walk around the lake closeby a secluded dialogue venue, may be more suitable to work on matters of trust and to fostering relationships (senior dialogue practitioner (24.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]). Norbert Ropers (2020) uses the metaphor of "backstage communication" to describe how conducive such informal moments and get-togethers at the margins of more formal dialogue spaces can be to share personal experiences, concerns, and feelings (p. 237).

For dialogue processes where trust-building and the restoration of relationships are center-stage, LGI may not be the methodology of choice. However, it could be interesting to explore in what ways the approach can be adjusted or linked to more transformative processes, thus helping to amplify the reach of such processes through whole system thinking. A newer – deeply transformation-oriented – trend in peacebuilding seeks for instance, to tackle collective trauma (König & Reimann, 2017). The author of the famous book 'Getting to Yes', William Ury, reflects about the need and potential to address collective trauma, as part of peace processes, to avoid that trauma is reproduced. Drawing on his concept of the 'third side', Ury discusses creating spaces or formats where witnessing and processing such trauma becomes possible. He identifies the Colombia peace process as the first victim-centered peace process since it involved arrangements to give victims space to issue their statements (Hübl & Ury, 2017, p. 9). The LGI approach might offer insights into how such transformative spaces can be connected to the whole system and outcome-oriented participatory processes.

4.3. Conditions and challenges to LGI in peace mediation

In this chapter, I will discuss challenges, which the peace mediation setting may offer for the application of LGI. Summarizing, we can say that political space is required for the participatory LGI processes above all. If the conflict parties' engagement demands confidentiality, or if there is not enough political freedom to convene a process where participants can freely gather and express opinions, this space is challenged. This space also depends on the willingness of crucial conflict parties, decision-makers, and stakeholders. They may resent participation in sincere and open dialogue, fearing to lose power. External actors and third parties may influence that space, as the process depends on their support and capacity. Another challenge comes with the need for legitimacy: In the absence of legitimate leadership, third parties may need to step up as convenors. Time can be a major constraining factor as societies' capacity to bear with a transition process may be limited. The LGI approach also needs to be contextualized and may not appeal to every cultural context. Finally, the change produced through LGI and dialogue processes needs to be sustained and anchored in broader society.

Several challenges revolve around the basic condition of having the necessary political space to implement LGI as part of a dialogue or mediation process. One can think of different reasons why that space might not be a given.

One key factor is the willingness of everyone involved to participate in good faith. Openness for dialogue from the side of the participants was mentioned as a key condition by another interviewee (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]). Moreover, the key parties or leaders of a system need to stand behind a process for LGI to make sense (Hinnen & Krummenacher, 2012, p. 193).

However, key conflict parties, decision-makers, and stakeholders may resent participation in sincere and open dialogue, fearing to lose power. They might still engage in the dialogue to stall for time or to please the international community, without any sincere intentions to enter a genuine dialogue.

LGI is a process that takes place in the public sphere. It is hard to imagine how such a large process involving a microcosm of the whole system could be kept fully confidential. Even if it were possible to keep such a process confidential, the LGI premise to keep the system whole and to diffuse change to the wider system might then be questioned. Particularly in the early stages of peace processes, conflict parties often demand strict confidentiality since their engagement in peace initiatives poses great risks to them. This is not particular to LGI but true for inclusivity mechanisms more generally. We can speak of a dilemma between the need for confidentiality and the need for participation in peace mediation (Goulding, 2002, pp. 86-89).

Not just the conflict parties face risks when engaging in dialogue, but probably even more so the participants. In violent conflict, the space to gather and freely and articulate political opinions is often curbed. If participants cannot meet safely and speak up freely, holding a large group dialogue becomes difficult, as one interviewee confirmed (senior dialogue practitioner (24.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

Even if conflict parties agree to broaden inclusivity, they might not agree to the more comprehensive kind of participation that LGI promotes. One interviewee argued that conflict parties in a track I negotiation might feel delegitimized if a larger group was involved in a mediation-like process such as LGI offers it. Conflict parties would sometimes agree to consult with a larger group, but usually not wish to include them beyond that (senior mediation practitioner, (2.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

Even post-agreement and on lower tracks, political space remains an issue.

One interviewee describes her experience in a context in Central America, where she would still face reluctance from the side of government officials to open the space for multi-stakeholder dialogues, despite the substantially increased democratic space after a first track I agreement, which had addressed human rights and

opened the way for subsequent agreements. The officials resented that civil society would be empowered to interfere with governance. On the other hand, civil society representatives would be hesitant to engage, as they weighed their chances to influence decision-making either through dialogue or through applying pressure from the street. The interviewee emphasized the need for frank conversations with both sides in which she would explain to the government representatives how important it was to show openness and try to translate the results into public action. To civil society representatives, she would make clear that the government could in no way be forced to act through dialogue and that they would be well advised to keeping up the pressure in the streets while engaging in dialogue (senior dialogue practitioner (24.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

The issue of political space thus does not stop at convening dialogue. The real challenge is to ensure that the dialogue is linked to governance so that participation and dialogue processes are sincere and not mock exercises. Related to this, Hinnen and Krummenacher (2012) emphasize that there must be enough room for maneuver to have a meaningful LGI process. If the scope of participation is too narrow and dialogue cannot contribute to meaningful change, then it is better to hold information conferences instead of dialogues (pp. 198-199).

Another way of looking at the political space for the participatory process is to look at the space that the third party offers. One consideration here is that in peace mediation, there are often additional actors that influence the goal and scope of a process. This includes the international community or powerful external stakeholders in internationalized and regionalized conflict. One interviewee mentioned that there are often too many disjointed agendas of external powers to make inclusive dialogue in the spirit of LGI possible (Mediation and dialogue specialist, (16.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

As a result, the limited political space available might allow for a process with the goal of re-integrating an armed group but not reconciling an entire society. Consultative participation mechanisms might then be aimed at increasing the legitimacy of a process rather than fostering whole system change (senior mediation practitioner, (2.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

In peace mediation, third parties sometimes revert to the use of leverage and act more directive to push parties towards an agreement (Lanz & Mason, 2009, p. 1). Would LGI work under such 'high-powered mediation' with a directive mediator pushing for a participatory process? One interviewee made it clear that he sees inclusivity as part of the process design and thus under the mediator's authority. As the mediator, he would see it as his responsibility to push for the level of inclu-

sion he thinks is required to achieve the goal of a process (senior mediation practitioner, (2.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]). However, it seems questionable whether conflict parties and participants would be open for a real dialogue under such circumstances.

One reason for the pressure applied by or channeled through the third party can be seen in the limited resources the third party commands. On the one hand, large consultative processes are costly, and their financing usually relies on external donors. This raises the influence of donors on the process, as was the case in the intra-Syrian talks, where donors pushed for inclusion mechanisms (Brück et al., 2020).

Another scarce resource at hand is time. As one interviewee mentioned, mediators are well aware that the time available for their processes is limited. He points out that societies cannot be held in transition too long as pressure rises, and they risk falling back into conflict. He put the maximum period in transition at 36 months. He emphasized that this is a major constraint for mediators as it limits the level of change – and hence the process – that a society may be able to bear within a certain period of time (senior mediation practitioner, (2.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]). Sequenced approaches on track I that limit the inclusivity during a peace process but seek to anchor it with subsequent processes such as National Dialogues or constitutional processes, must also be seen against this consideration.

Lastly, mediators may influence the space for participatory processes and LGI as a function of their expertise and familiarity with different approaches. One interviewee pointed out that he sees facilitation in mediated processes as limited to 50 persons and that beyond that threshold, the process would become hard to control for the facilitator in terms of content, methods, and framing. He also mentioned that he does not think he was trained to facilitate these types of processes (senior mediation practitioner, (2.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]). It may well be that this element of socialization of mediators plays a role in determining whether LGI and related methods are used on the highest level.

Another challenge comes with the question of the legitimacy of a process. In societies in conflict and in fragile states, there may not always be a legitimate 'head' of the problem system or a legitimate authority that could convene a participatory process. Hinnen and Krummenacher (2012) mention the situation when the system's leadership is too weak to hold the process together as a stumbling stone for a successful LGI process (pp. 196-197). Is this problem accentuated in peace mediation where the authority's legitimacy is often disputed as part of the conflict? In such a case, a third party may be available to step up as the convener of the participatory process, as one interviewee suggests (senior dialogue practitioner

(24.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]). If a third party steps up as a convener, emphasis will have to be put on ensuring that the convening entity is acceptable to the conflict parties as well as to the wider system and that its process has the buy-in of the parties in conflict (senior dialogue practitioner (24.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]). Another interviewee agreed that a process may still be legitimate enough if the convening party enjoys the necessary legitimacy to take on the responsibility for that process and can guarantee that the process is open-ended, that resources will be available to follow-up on the results, and that parties will follow-through with results (LGI practitioner (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

Another challenge lies in linking the results of the process to change in the wider society. As mentioned earlier, one way to achieve this is to link the dialogue outcomes to policy or governance-making. This relates to the institutional level in the RPP-framework, introduced in the theory part. The counterpart level is personal change. LGI methodology works under the assumption that the microcosmos of a system will become a nucleus of change, as participants embody the change through new communication patterns, attitudes, and behavior. That way, they will naturally diffuse it to the wider system. In peace mediation, however, that wider system might involve entire societies. Even if it was just cities or communities, it might not be enough to assume that the group participants will automatically carry the change into the wider system. Dedicated initiatives to amplify that change may thus be required to complement the dialogue processes. Along the same lines, one interviewee mentioned how she has come to see the development of a dialogue culture as a key challenge. In her own country, the dialogue culture was promoted intensely in the 1990s as many multi-stakeholder dialogue initiatives were implemented. 20 years later, the country is again at the brink of violence and the interviewee questions, where the dialogue culture was lost along the way and how it could have been sustained (senior dialogue practitioner (24.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

With reference to the earlier introduced 'SMALL-framework' (Abdi & Mason, 2019, pp. 13), I would suggest that working with peace infrastructure may provide a building stone towards institutionalizing and anchoring a dialogue culture in a society. LGI may help peace practitioners with the long-term responses that seek to create a peaceful state for all. Involving the whole system in dialogue can be an efficient way to identify how structures and policies need to change to support effective and legitimate governance.

Such networks of networks reflect the whole system approach, as their composition aims to span the cleavage lines in society to allow collaboration across the

cleavages in conflict (Abdi & Mason, 2019, pp. 13). The interim peace structures can be compared to a standing microcosmos that informs, scopes, prepares, or even convenes both short-term mediation on lower levels and long-term governance processes. For either process, elements of LGI may be beneficial.

A last challenge comes with the need for peace practice to be adaptive to different cultures. Here, one might ask whether the LGI approach is suitable for a specific culture and how it could be contextualized. One interviewee pointed out that he sees the well-scripted LGI approach as overstructured and too linear for certain cultures (senior mediation and dialogue specialist, (16.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

4.4. Situating the LGI approach in tracks and phases

This paragraph will try to situate the LGI approach against the phases and tracks of peace mediation.

Prior to and during the negotiations:
During the negotiations and in the pre-negotiation phase, while a peace process or peace-agreement is still in the making, the high level of inclusiveness and participation the LGI approach requires may overburden official political negotiations or mediation on track I. Particularly in the pre-negotiation phase, confidentiality requirements of the process can render wider participation problematic. Once a process is public, trimmed down variations of LGI seem more likely to be deemed manageable by third parties and acceptable to conflict parties and external actors such as regional powers or the donor community.

Framed as public or unofficial consultations, such adjusted LGI processes may serve the purposes of informing the broader system about the negotiations, consulting broader stakeholders', and affected people's perspectives on the key issues and the substance of the negotiations, explaining the results of the negotiation and measuring the viability of solutions and agreements (senior mediation practitioner, (2.12.2020), personal interview [videoconference]).

Post agreement:
Multi-Stakeholder dialogues that include LGI-methodology appear to be most common (and likely to be possible) in post-agreement phases after a peace agreement on track I has opened the space for more democratic or open and inclusive dialogue on all issues that impact society. Following violent conflict, government

institutions, processes, and capacity often remain weak, and their legitimacy is questioned. The LGI approach may apply well in such situations.

Given its focus on substance and the orientation towards common ground and outcomes, LGI may be less suitable for the highly relationship-oriented or trans-formative dialogues that may be required in post-conflict reconciliation, such as in dealing with the past processes.

Throughout and beyond a peace process:
It has been difficult for me to assess the applicability of LGI in preventive dia-logues prior to conflict escalation, as I have found few references about such pro-cesses in the literature. Only one interviewee mentioned that he has experience with using the LGI approach in a preventive manner when contextual changes, such as for instance new policies, are expected to create conflict in a system (LGI practitioner, (26.11.2020), personal interview [videoconference]). Making the ex-pected change and the question of how conflict can be avoided the subject of a discussion in a community is likely to benefit from involving the whole system. In the SMALL-framework, the interim peace structures, which I suggest may be looked at as standing microcosms of a system, monitor conflict on the local level to quickly react and support the establishment and deployment of mediation teams if required.

Throughout the different phases of a peace process, the LGI approach may be used in dialogue processes on track III-1.5: On track II-III, they may seek to ad-dress conflict in subsystems at the subnational level. The whole system thinking can help ensure that the solutions and change formulas these processes produce are reflective and adaptive to the overall system and diffuse to the overall system. On track II-1.5, dialogue processes may help prepare and feed into the track I decision-making or contribute to forming a safety net if the track I process encounters dead-locks. However, the usually confidential nature of track II and 1.5 processes poses challenges to apply the LGI's whole system approach.

In the absence of a formal peace process, and thus somewhat beyond the phase model, LGI can be a useful instrument for peace practice in fragile contexts. It may offer interesting reflections and approaches to inform the establishment of interim peace structures and their involvement in both short-term mediations as well as for dialogue to support long-term governance. Indeed, the anchoring of dialogue and the LGI approach in peace infrastructure may be important in establishing dialogue cultures.

5. Summary and discussion

I argue in my thesis that LGI offers peace practitioners an instrument to substantially rethink and enhance participation in peace mediation processes – from grassroots initiatives up to its highest tracks. The approach invites us to move from a quantitative perspective on inclusion to a more qualitative one. The mantra that sustainable solutions demand inclusive processes can mislead us to see the aim of inclusion in guaranteeing as many people or constituencies as possible a seat at a table and a piece of the decision-making power. Yet, we may never be able to create full inclusion in peace mediation processes, nor will we likely succeed in levelling all power imbalances. The LGI model of inclusion instead focuses on bringing the right mix of people that truly accounts for the whole system into participatory and collaborative problem-solving to identify differences, common ground and viable solutions, without pushing for an expansion of the circle of those who will ultimately decide on these solutions. LGI teaches us to gather microcosms that recreate the nature or DNA of a system as accurately as possible through representation that accounts for all those who form part of the system and for the system's reality. Furthermore, LGI provides a model to foster cross-cleavage communication and collaborative problem-solving that considers all perspectives in a system. Lastly, LGI instructs us to support and urge those who hold decision-power to learn from the wisdom of the whole system and to become more responsive and accountable to it in their decision-making.

While LGI methods are not completely new to peace mediation, LGI does not appear to be perceived or discussed in the field as a coherent approach. Rather, its methods have been applied selectively, and they have been contextualized and adjusted. Although key assumptions of LGI, such as whole system thinking, are reflected in key principles put forward by peace mediation guidance, the application of LGI related tools in peace mediation may not always live up to a narrower understanding of LGI principles.

The LGI approach thus essentially offers a lens for the peace mediation field to make processes account for the full complexity posed by conflict in the larger systems. LGI works with microcosm groups that reflect the complexity of the whole system. It also works with a methodology that promotes the self-organization of the groups. Thereby, LGI can help a system tap into its own capacity to address conflicts. It strengthens the ownership of that system for finding solutions to conflict and produces the nucleus (microcosm) for sustainable change.

While LGI is geared to broaden inclusivity and ownership, it factors in the authority of decision-makers and hence accounts well for the reality in political contexts characterized by power differences, political hierarchies, and other constraining factors such as limited resources and time, which often push towards exclusive decision-making. The LGI approach lends itself to change- or decision-making processes that require pragmatic approaches towards inclusivity with different inclusivity levels in different formats. LGI achieves this by linking the decision-making of key parties in conflict or political leaders in fragile contexts to a participatory process, which engages microcosms of the whole system to produce a complete picture of the different perspectives in a conflict system. This participation model does not stop at simple consultations but requires the participants' involvement in the process of open-minded dialogue, ideation, and deliberation. This process resembles the core phases of mediation where perspectives are shared, understanding is fostered, and solution options for a conflict are generated. Moreover, LGI expects key parties and leaders to listen seriously to this dialogue and to account for their decisions.

LGI fits particularly well with mediation or dialogue processes that are outcome- and substance-oriented and aim for collaborative planning or problem-solving based on identifying common ground. While this requires common understanding, the LGI approach does not focus on restoring relationships or working through deep-rooted conflict. LGI may be applicable in escalated conflict situations, yet it does not focus on working through or transforming such conflict at its core. Instead, it seeks to contain conflict and capacitate systems to act towards a desired outcome based on the common ground.

LGI makes high levels of complexity manageable for group facilitation. While it has been implemented with groups up to several thousand people, it also allows to sequence complexity into manageable portions while maintaining the whole system effect that accounts for the full complexity. I see LGI as principally relevant for peace practice in any subsystem of society, from the regional or community level to official political peace negotiations or dialogue at the track I level.

The LGI approach appears to be applied most often in post-conflict and post-agreement situations when the state's processes and institutions are not legitimate enough to ensure that the implementation of agreements or policy and governance processes are broadly supported. LGI may then be particularly useful in linking the different intervention tracks. To broaden participation of a political process on track I during and before negotiations, LGI seems to apply only with limitations.

Throughout the different phases of a peace process, LGI may be used in dialogues on lower tracks to address conflict in subsystems or feed into the track I

process. Although I have found few indications for this, LGI could also apply to dialogues seeking to prevent conflict.

Another process type to which LGI appears to have insights to offer is National Dialogues. Their strong consensus-orientation does not necessarily match with the participatory model of LGI that stops at influencing decision-making. Yet, in the sense of 'inclusive enough', running parallel LGI forums for thematic or geographic subsystems as part of a national dialogue might be an interesting consideration for these processes, as it could help address the challenges of keeping large participatory processes efficient.

There are challenges to the application of LGI in peace mediation. These mainly revolve around the political space required for broadening participation in decision-making. For conflict parties, decision-makers, stakeholders, and participants, participating in such processes can be risky. External stakeholders and third parties may also influence participatory mechanisms' space due to political or pragmatic considerations. Resource constraints may limit efforts to broaden participation during a peace process. Time is a limited resource too. The legitimacy of convening parties of an LGI process can be another issue. A further challenge comes with contextualizing the LGI approach to specific cultures. Lastly, linking dialogue and LGI processes with society at large is another challenge.

In the absence of a formal peace process, and thus beyond the phase model's scope, LGI can be a useful instrument for peace practice in fragile contexts. It may inform the establishment of interim peace structures and their involvement in both short-term mediations as well as for dialogue to support long-term governance. The anchoring of dialogue and the LGI approach with peace infrastructure may contribute to establishing sustainable institutions and dialogue cultures.

Summarizing the above, we can say that LGI has most to offer for peace mediation as a coherent concept that can trigger reflection and inspire thinking about how peace practice may best succeed in

– Balancing the needs for inclusivity, exclusivity, and efficiency,
– Involving large groups in a high-quality participatory process that resembles the interest-based, understanding- and problem-solving oriented facilitation work at the heart of mediated processes,
– Tapping into the capacity of conflict systems to self-organize in addressing their conflict, Rendering complexity of conflict systems manageable while keeping systems whole and inclusivity and participation intact throughout complex processes.

Based on this thesis, I see the potential for further research about the use of LGI methodology in peace mediation. A shortlist of the questions and topics that I deem most interesting includes:

– Further unpacking the potential and limitations for LGI application in track I processes, by empirically surveying the perspectives and reservations of third parties and conflict parties regarding such participation.
– Studying concrete cases of mediation and dialogue processes which relied on the LGI approach or related methodologies. The peace processes in Guatemala, Colombia and South Thailand could be starting points.
– Studying infrastructure for peace mechanisms, in particular interim peace structures such as local peace committees, with regards to their potential role as semi-permanent microcosms of the whole system and in institutionalizing a culture of dialogue.
– What can we learn from the participatory model of LGI for subsystem inclusion mechanisms (thematic or regional) in highly complex processes such as National Dialogues?
– What is the capacity of large groups, which allow little third-party facilitation and must rely on a high degree of self-organization, to work through deep-rooted conflict that requires a relationship-oriented or transformative approach? And linked to this: Can LGI contribute to scaling transformative dialogue processes?

With this thesis, I have attempted to explore the question of whether and how the LGI approach is relevant to the field of peace mediation. The rather broad research question reflects this thesis's exploratory character, which studies the intersection of two distinct fields of work, which – to my knowledge – has not been studied explicitly before.

The broad focus of the research question has allowed me to take a bird's eye perspective to evaluate the general relevance and applicability of LGI to peace mediation. On the downside, the scope of the question has prevented me from digging deep into how things were done on the ground in concrete cases where LGI and related methods were used. While four semi-structured interviews with mediation-, dialogue-, and LGI-practitioners provided concrete and specific insights, the limited number and the varied context of the interviews did not allow me to examine specific cases from different angles and sources to really put the interviews into perspective. Apart from this, the interviews provided invaluable insights about the existing points of connections between LGI and peace mediation in practice, the

perceived limitations of and challenges for the application of LGI in the peace mediation field, and concrete examples that could be studied more closely in the future.

The small interview sample included three practitioners from the field of peace mediation, with substantial dialogue facilitation and track I mediation experience in different parts of this world, and one LGI practitioner who uses these methods in mediation in the organizational setting and the public sphere in European countries. Although diverse, this small sample is not at all representative of the relevant larger fields of practice.

The approach of the thesis is exploratory – not empiric. Based on the literature review, I have first identified fundamental assumptions of the LGI approach. These include whole system thinking, concepts of self-organization, participation, common-ground-, and process-orientation. I then proceeded to outline the field of peace mediation and identify relevant concepts and approaches that would allow comparison with LGI. Without repeating the relatively long list, examples range from key principles such as impartiality and inclusiveness to fully-fledged frameworks such as the SMALL- or the RPP-framework.

For both fields, that selection was to a degree eclectic, and I have struggled to establish a convincing argument for that selection. This was again linked to both fields' sheer scope and the challenge to identify, process, and condense relevant literature. In hindsight, the literature review to identify these categories would have deserved more attention. Conducting additional or a part of the interviews earlier on might have helped to identify relevant categories and narrow down the bodies of literature to be processed.

In a final step, I have compared and analyzed the LGI concepts against the peace mediation concepts, referring to the interviews to illustrate the findings and to put them into perspective. The nature of these findings is heuristic: I have drawn conjectural conclusions based on limited knowledge about a system. These conclusions are likely to deviate from reality to some extent, and their validity would need to be further proven.

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Abbreviations

D/I	Differentiating and Integrating
LGI	Large Group Intervention
RTSC	Real Time Strategic Change
RPP	Reflecting on Peace Practice
UN	United Nations
WSC	Whole Scale Change

Annex

Interview Guide: 'Large group Intervention' in peace mediation

Interview partner	
Date	
Place	
Time	
Consent	

ICE BREAKER

I would like to ask you questions about your experience with and thoughts about Large Group intervention (LGI) and its applicability in the context of peace processes, more specifically in mediation and dialogue facilitation. Very broadly speaking: How do you see the role and the potential of LGI in that context?

MAIN PART

1) **What can be achieved only or better in a mediation or dialogue process by getting 'the whole system' work together synchronously in one room?**

– If the LGI conference is only a brief moment in the overall process – do the concepts of 'whole system' and 'self-organization' still apply throughout the overall process?
– If so, how?

2) **What conditions need to be in place to get a 'whole system' group address conflict in a meaningful way?**

– When is the right moment to bring together the whole system, and when not?
– Does the formula DxVxF>R apply?

– Does the "Mutually Hurting Stalemate" idea apply (the perception that status quo hurts/perceived impossibility to win one-sided/negotiation perceived as way out/parties speak with one voice)?
– What is needed beyond that?
  o Convincing the key decision-makers/stakeholders?
  o Genuine willingness to participation from all sides
  o Genuine willingness for dialogue (listen to learn…)?
  o Commitment to non-violence?
  o Degree of mutual trust and confidence in the process?
  o Group coherence?

3) **The LGI approach works under the assumption that complex systems are inherently self-organizing. Thus change in a system cannot really be directed from the outside. How do you see self-organization apply to peace mediation and dialogue facilitation?**

– As a facilitator/mediator, what type of control do you see as an absolute must – and what could you let go off?
– LGI offers only limited self-organization. In what ways does self-organization still define the process?

4) **What changes when the process facilitator takes a back seat and allows participants to organize themselves in the communication process?**

– What is impossible control when you mediate/facilitate dialogue in large groups between 50 and several thousand people?
– What is it that you lose control of? What are the effects? And how is that control substituted?
– How can the facilitator provide empathy?
– How can the facilitator's one-on-one communication with participants be substituted in large groups?
– Can the sub-grouping and group work substitute the classical communication tools of the Mediator?
– What is the role of the Differentiate/Integrate technique?
  o What does it take before one can go into mixed groups? How do you go about this?

– Imagine in your next mandate (in the context of violent conflict) you would be asked to facilitate a mediation or dialogue process with a group of 2000 people forming a microcosm of the 'whole system'.
  o What goes through your mind? Any thoughts or emotions?
  o Are there concrete fears linked to working with large groups?
  o Any thoughts of opportunities or chances of working with such large groups?

5) **Do you see challenges or limitations in the context of peace processes to work with the LGI approach?**

– To what degree of complexity could you imagine working with 'the whole system'?
– How does LGI work with high degrees of escalation?
  o When thinking of the 9 stages of escalation according to F. Glasl: For which levels do you see LGI possible?
  o Are mixed groups (mixing up interest groups) in case of extreme escalation at all possible?
  o How can groups self-manage in such levels of escalation?
– No clear head/top of system: in peace mediation the position at the top of a system is often disputed – what does that mean?
– Lack of acknowledgment/appreciation that one belongs to a larger system – what does that mean?
– Absence of a constitutional framework: in constitutional settings the decision-making competence lies with a (democratically) legitimated leadership. But what happens if a) no coherent system head exists? b) a system head is based on undemocratic power relations?
  o What can participation achieve under such circumstances?
  o Are there risks in running participatory processes under such circumstances?
– Lack of willingness of powerful stakeholders (not just 'spoilers') to engage in dialogue/mediation is a frequent challenge in peace mediation/dialogue. How would a LGI practitioner go about this?
  o Do you see options like the 'departing train' model; or parallel inclusion formats?

6) **Dialogues can be categorized according to the following dimensions. Could you try to assess the potential of LGI on these dimensions?**

– Addressing substance vs. identity (relationship)?
– In what ways is the individual's identity addressed in LGI?
– Suppose for restoring relationships and transforming conflict, the identity dimension (the participant as a person/human being) needs to be addressed. In LGI, I understand people participate as representatives of a function, not as persons. Is that dimension still addressed in LGI?
– Listen to learn: positional discussions vs. deep understanding
– How does a process organize/include decision making (consensual vs. participatory vs. consultative vs. no say at all)?
– Which "tracks" could LGI help address? (I-III)
– Which phases of peace processes does LGI suit?
  o Pre-Pre/Pre-/Neg./Implementation
  o Prevention/negotiation/post-conflict
  o Mediation Phases I (introduction), II (clarifying issues), III (deepening interests), IV (options), V (agreement making, conclusion)

7) To what extent is large group methodology already applied or reflected in mediation and dialogue practice in the field of peace mediation?

– Do you know of specific processes it was used?
– Do you know people who use it?
– Do you know of lessons/learnt exercises or analysis about this?

CONCLUSION

8) Is there anything you would like to add?

About the Author

Matthias Ryffel is a trained mediator. He works as a program officer in the mediation program of swisspeace (www.swisspeace.ch), where he focuses on supporting mediation and dialogue processes and building up mediation capacity of peace practitioners. Through his own consultancy firm ChangePerspective (www.changeperspective.ch), Matthias also works as an independent mediator.

Before joining swisspeace in 2018, Matthias worked for the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs with the Mediation Desk of the Peace and Human Rights Division. Previously, he had worked as a reporter for the Swiss press.