Supporting the Interethnic Relations and Conflict Resolution trough Networking (Georgian case)

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Abstract

In this paper we are discussing the role of Networks/networking to increase the social integration and decrease the effects of ethnical conflicts in Georgia. Networking, as an effective and direct way of communication could have a remarkable role in the peace building and post war conflict resolution process in Georgia. In the article we have defined the great potential of networking in above mentioned cases.

Keywords - Networking, Ethnic Conflicts in Georgia, Communication, Sharing Knowledge, information and values, Conflict resolution.

1. INTERETHNIC RELATIONS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION THROUGH NETWORKING

Among the challenges (climate change, sustainable energy, famine) which humanity faces in the 21st century, interethnic relations, peace and conflict resolution are one of the key issues, because several regions in the world still have war conflicts which devastate and break human lives and economics. Besides the other solutions, sharing information, values, education (generally) and informal education particularly can be considered as a way of increasing interethnic relations and conflict resolution, as sharing information (values) and education is the key to uniting nations and bringing human beings closely together. In many parts of the world, civil society suffers because of situations of violent conflicts and war, disintegration. It is important to recognize the crucial role of information, communication and education in contributing to building a culture of peace and condemning instances in which communication and education are undermined in order to attack democracy and tolerance, especially after the failure of numerous political negotiations.

We come from a region which unfortunately still remains as the ethnic conflict zone (Georgia *de facto* is divided into 3 parts), big number of Internally Displaced People, war affected population, polarized society and other negative consequences of civil and ethnic wars still is a problem. Tension between neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan influences situation in Georgia, as there are the ethnical minority compactly dwellings in two regions of Georgia: Kvemo Kartli (Azerbaijanis) and Samtskhe-Javakheti (Armenians). Minorities living in Abkhazia and in so called "South Ossetia" are **de facto** politically separated from Georgia and the disintegration of "Kvemo Kartli" and Samtskhe-Javakheti, besides others, is a result of the fact that minorities do not speak State Language (Georgian) or, in the rare instances that they do, their knowledge is too limited to understand others or to be understood. This

issue needs a proper solution as well in order to build sustainable interethnic integration process, peace and conflict resolution culture.

In the current paper we will try to express, how social networking can be used in establishing interethnic relations, peace building and conflict resolution process and which activities and media should be implemented.

Social networking is software which brings together people with the same interests and goals. Social networking sites have become popular among millions of users including youth, students, politicians, members of governments etc of all ages. These sites have the growing potential to support the communication, information sharing, defining people's expectations, teaching and learning in general and, particularly, to complement understanding, knowledge and culture related to social integration, peace building and conflict resolution. Social networking, as a channel of communication, can lay its own big contribution in construction of the general trends towards solution of the problems of the outlined type. Social networking can be a tool in combating isolation, poverty, in promoting peace, social justice, human rights, democracy, cultural diversity and environmental awareness, which are foundations for building interethnic relations, peace building and conflict resolution. Networking for interethnic relations implies an active concept of peace through values, and knowledge in a spirit of equality, respect, empathy, understanding and mutual appreciation among individuals, groups and nations.

How can we use networking in supporting interethnic relations, peace building and conflict resolution?

- Establishing a social network with regional focus points by sharing and disseminating knowledge of and research on what works, outreach, and providing information to diverse strategic partners;
- Establishing and strengthening international collaborations and regional networks among adults and youth from different heritage and cultural background via web-conferencing, forums etc.;
- Forming partnerships with other organizations to disseminate best practices and models for designing and implementing conflict management systems in schools, universities, and systems (justice, defense, economic development, faith-based);
- Providing information to governments about what is working including policies and educational practices from inside the country and other countries as well.

1.1 Benefits of the Network for Strengthening Interethnic Relations, Conflict Resolution Education and Peace Building.

In a global network of individuals and organizations committed to and passionate about building civil societies with the capacity to educate, model, communicate, create policy, promote and implement peace education and conflict resolution education. It develops/builds capacity to promote a culture of peace and non-violence through the engagement of networks and support structures at local, regional, and international levels with the strong participation of youth and community in general. The benefits of networking might be:

- ➤ **Engagement**: Using social media and networking tools obviously has a *social* aspect to it, and it requires proactive effort on the part of the user. In other words, using these tools to communicate and interact requires a networker's active engagement. Socialization also provides opportunities for emotional engagement.
- ➤ **Interpersonal relations:** direct interpersonal relations between the people from different heritage and the different sights of conflict. To observe trough documentaries, photos, voice records or simply texts uploaded on networks makes people realize that people even from different parts of front lines have fundamentally the same values and dreams. The videoconferences, chat rooms, blogs, Wikis could be the powerful tools to develop the personal communication and contacts between the people and promote integration, peace and conflict resolution.
- ➤ **Multimedia tools:** possibilities of using multimedia (text, audio, still images, Animation, video footage, interactivity) in the communication makes the process of communication interesting and enriches the process with "live examples".

> **Communication of people** with different social rolls and impact on society. War survivors have to adjust to new reality, which includes new residential places, new rules and ethics, new communities. Youth uses social networking in their daily activities.
> Also, government officials, NGO-s (non government organizations) and organizations working on peace building and conflict resolution completely realize the importance of social media in the modern society (especially after "Arab Spring"). Both groups should take the chance and use the networking as a great possibility in reaching their goals – decrease the negative effects of war through virtual communication. Effectiveness of social networking increases when chances for face to face communication are   limited or restricted. **To change or form the community's values and perspectives about interethnic communication, peace and conflict resolution.** War does not end when battles are finished. For instance, in Georgia, the negative consequences and results of ethnic and civil wars (1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, and 2008) and conflicts are still obvious. People who suffer from ethnic conflicts, beside the economical support need emotional help. It is our collective responsibility. Social networks can form whole society's values: calling people for donation, uploading the photos of refuges' dwellings, letting IDP -s (internally displaced person) telling the stories about their personal feelings and struggling regarding to war could be the effective way to reach the positive outcomes. Video records, chat sessions in frame of network, forum discussions and any other multimedia channels creates friendly and "human" atmosphere, that can be one of solutions to decrease the tension and negative stereotypes between people from different sides of war and form, new "post-war" "community value".

> **Social Learning:** "People learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling". [1] Of course, the type of socialization that occurs via "social" computer tools is certainly offers opportunities for social learning. This advantage should not be ignored in the peace building and conflict resolution process as well. If you let people compare countries where war takes place to those with peace they'd realize the negative impact of war on economics, culture, health care and other social aspects of lie. This information should be offered via real-life examples (texts that belong to people from wartime, records of such people, statistical data uploaded on the blogs and Wikis etc) could be reasonable.

> **Encourage dialogue, reach more people and more cultures**: It's social! "Let's talk and share". More people are more opportunities and chances, different cultures. Culture is complex matrix as it involves many ingredients, such a religion, gender, social customs, and so on. Culture covers almost all aspects of human life, including the things, people learn to do. Culture defines our thoughts, behavior, values and etc. Social networking might be a good space to develop the cultural understanding of people with different cultural backgrounds. Video materials, literature, communication provide a unique opportunity to present, teach, and internalize authentic information—linguistic, cultural, and visual—about the target country/region. Because these materials can be edited for network "presentation", they are also excellent venues for focusing our users' attention on specific details and for creating exercise materials based on the video itself.

After the General talks we would like to focus on who will be the potential target groups in Georgia and concrete activities which can be implemented in Georgian vase. As we already mentioned, in Georgia Networks and Networking should be focused on the following directions:

1. Integration of minorities and majority:

- Minorities which have political problems with majority (Abkhazian, Ossetian minorities).
- Minorities which have no problem with majority (Armenian, Azeri minorities

2. Mutual integration of minorities

- Integration of minorities confronted to each other (Azeri, Armenian minorities).
- Integration of all minorities.

3. Communication with IDP's:

- Communication between IDP's and refugees living in the different parts of country or abroad.
- Communication between IDP's compactly living in different places of Georgia.
- Communication between IDP's and people on the other side of front line.

4. Communication on the political level:

- Communication between the people and the local authorities in the regions compactly dwelled with national minorities or   IDP-s.
- Communication IDP's and government, decision makers, policy makers, stake holders.
- Communication between IDP's the "authorities" of separatist regions.
- Communication between Central authorities and Local authorities (including Separatist regions)

5. Communication with directly or indirectly affected by war:

As we see, target group is quite wide and diverse. On the other hand, as the issues are quite sensitive, we have to be very careful in choosing the activities, materials, suggested topics of conversations to achieve the success in networking.

- ➢ How do we meet the special needs of national minorities, refuges, certain war-affected populations (such as former soldiers and children of soldiers/IDP-s, refugees)?
  Networking can be a right place, where people can discuss or state their personal problems and needs. Chat sessions, social forums, discussions can encourage them to express themselves and reach their voices to people who are able to help and support them. The people in trouble lack the possibility to communicate with the authorities of the different kind who could be in charge of the issues. That is why the social network could provide itself as a good substitute to the whole affair.

- ➢ How should war-affected people recover in post-conflict contexts? Process of recovering is not homogenous and depends on several factors: ex. the life seems easier for those who are within the frames of the certain programs destined to help such people. But those programs are often limited. For the folks left beyond such framework, two rooms of consolation are still left: first is self-modeling and self-sufficiency, and next is reception of any kind of advices, linked up with the problem, ex. models, and schemes being once used. The latter case can be served by the social networking. People working on interethnic relations, conflict resolutions and post-war recovery problems often are framed with improper imaginations about the recovering process, which is given in the documents and resolutions, which, unfortunately, do not work. They can observe the whole process of recovering through networking and follow the needs and accomplish required steps. For example: At the beginning "life saving" support, like medical service and food, shelter and cloth are most important things. After satisfying basic needs, there are physiological and educational (both, professional and civil) needs which must be met necessarily.

1.2 Promoting Peace Education via networking

In 2000, the then UNESCO Director General, Federico Mayor, stressed that *"Education International is not only a vast repository of experience, it also has the know-how and talent to implement innovation and change far beyond what is normally found in government circles […] Education International and UNESCO can work together to achieve the common goals of an educated, intellectually curious and participatory culture of peace and democracy."* [2]

Social learning and common (shared) knowledge is considered to be the powerful means in promoting peace and peaceful co-existence in the globe and the Networking is an appropriate activity to fill the

lack of information, which is often one of the main sources of social isolation or conflict. That is why educators and teachers promote to engage the networking in their teaching repertoire. Peace education is the all-round education of each individual. Peace education should be extended to all learners, including refugee and migrant children, children from minorities and disabled with the objective of promoting equal opportunities through education, decision makers, policy makers, educators, people influenced indirectly by military conflicts and what is for all sides of conflict . On the one hand, unfortunately, in Georgia, in many cases formal education is ineffective, in the minorities or refugees' settlement places are not enough human resources, teaching materials, finances, even space to start formal education. People from different sides of conflict are not provided with the equal correct information and knowledge. While information among national minorities and war affected people contains the content encouraging maintaining tension and misunderstanding, Social Networking can be a good substitution/solution to avoid these problems (all existing social networks and multimedia channels could be included).

Proper education is the main tool for successful and sufficient socialization of person. Among many other skills, the goal of the contemporary educational principles is to develop the skills of social adaptation and the perception of reality. Each Person must be able to develop individually, to share the rules set by society, to receive moral and material values correctly and to integrate with the other cultures, maintaining his own. All these aspects are preconditions for peaceful coexistence While formal education in Georgia failed to achieve these goals (despite the fact that Georgian government's efforts) Social networking is becoming more and more popular in case to promote interethnic relations trough exchanging of knowledge (practical and theoretical) and experiences.

In multicultural Georgia intercultural education (as we already mentioned, networking could be the good solution in many aspects of this kind of education) will prepare any civilian to live in harmony in multicultural and diverse world and

1. Receive and percept cultural pluralism as an unchangeable and fascinating reality.
2. Promote the establishment of fair and equal society
3. Promote the development of harmonic interpersonal and inter-ethnical relationships. [3]

Increasing of cultural awareness trough networking is another preference of networking. Cultural awareness refers to a set of the abilities listed below:

- The ability to perceive and recognize cultural differences.
- The ability to accept cultural differences.
- The ability to appreciate and value cultural differences.

To achieve touched goals by social networking can be effectively used (6 point list is a variation of Dimitrios Thanasoulas' list). [4]

- Helps networkers to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviors.
- Helps people to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave.
- Helps networkers to become more aware of conventional behavior in common situations in the target culture.
- Helps networkers to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence.
- Helps people to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture.
- To stimulate peoples' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.

1.3 Language Acquisition through Social Networking

In Georgia, besides the ethnical, cultural, religious diversity, the language situation is also diverse, since the ethnic groups have different languages. There are Kartvelian, Indo-European, Turkish, etc. languages spread throughout the country. The Georgian language is the official language on the

whole Georgian territory (in Abkhazia the Abkhazian language has the status of official language – there are two official languages in this autonomy);

Two ethnic conflicts took place after the break-up of the Soviet Union. The Abkhazian and "South Ossetian" conflicts had political roots, but ethnic confrontation influenced them quite much. Some experts label these conflicts as "language wars". [5]

In any country it must be necessary to know state language, though Georgian reality offers a different picture – representatives of minority do not even speak elementary Georgian. People who do not know the state language appear in a disadvantageous position; They cannot receive information – cannot understand what they hear and what they read, except for the occasions when specific approach is used to contact them, so called "greenhouse" conditions are created for them and others speak to them the language (frequently foreign language) they can understand. Naturally, there is a possibility that such an approach can cause rejection, marginalization and finally, isolation of the people who do not know the state language. Specialists consider that the usage of the foreign language, **lingua fransa,** may meet the basic transactional demands, but a different picture is represented with respect to communication, in relation to deep life aspects.

One of the main preferences of the networking is the fact that it provides people with high-level language competence. Nowadays Internet and Social Networks are considered to be one of the most powerful resources for second/foreign language learning. Authentic WebPages and Social Networks offer users rich and variable sources. They allow people to get involved in the natural interaction, communication. Social networking is a very easy and joyful way of foreign language learning [6]. Facebook, YouTube, Skype and different blogs develop speaking, listening, reading and writing abilities of networkers. Web-conferences, internet forums, chats, internet seminars, audio- and video resources, integrated e-dictionary and printed texts are effective ways to get familiar with formal-official as well as colloquial style languages.

Social networking has become one of the major forces by which individuals all over the world are acquiring the necessary skills and education, communicate and share experiences, personal attitudes, establish relationships. This informal modality of teaching and learning makes time and space the regulating variables between networkers located anywhere, yet interacting through powerful and speedy information and communication technology systems and processors. Interethnic relation and conflict resolution are not exceptions, considering that this kind of education requires personal relations and understanding, which social networking is available to promote.

Given these facts we can conclude that Social Networks could have an important role in peace keeping, conflict resolution and informal education. It can be used for different purposes: for delivering official information, supporting interpersonal relations, raising cultural awareness, exchanging ideas and experiences etc. All above mentioned factors in general and in Georgian case particularly encourage disintegration, isolation and many other negative processes.

We would like to stress that internal divisions (caused by political process) among the Georgian citizens had created deep wounds which only a dialogue could heal. Also, besides the practical purposes, Social Networking could have the symbolic meaning and enhance the process of confidence rebuilding among people.

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