Dynamics of German-Colombian Peace Cooperation:

An Analysis of The Implementation of German Personnel Cooperation in Peace Initiatives

Dinámicas de la cooperación colombo-alemana con personal en iniciativas de paz

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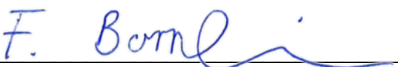**Aprobación obtenida el 20 de abril de 2021**

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Abstract

In the post-agreement context of the long and complex armed conflict in Colombia, peace cooperation funded by German development actors is a promising, but not unambiguous tool. By the means of qualitative methods comprising expert and group interviews, as well as participant observations of instances of cooperation among the personnel of two Colombian-German peace initiatives, this paper explores the social dynamics that unfold in these contexts. This approach grants insights into the negotiation of roles within Colombian-European teams and allows to identify and retrace local resistances to Northern development personnel. The analysis points to some shortcomings in the conception of North-South development cooperation with personnel, primarily the failure to consider the latent conflict between the global North and South that arises from and perpetuates itself through the global imbalance of power.

Resumen

En el contexto post-acuerdo del largo y complejo conflicto armado colombiano, la cooperación para la paz financiada por actores alemanes representa una herramienta prometedora, pero no libre de ambigüedad. Con métodos cualitativos, componiéndose de entrevistas con expertos y grupales, así como observaciones participantes en dos iniciativas colombo-alemanas de cooperación para la paz con personal, este trabajo explora las dinámicas sociales que se desarrollan en estos contextos. Este abordaje facilita el estudio de procesos de negociación de roles en los equipos colombo-europeos, y permite la identificación y la explicación de resistencias locales al personal europeo. El análisis señala carencias en la concepción de la cooperación con personal Norte-Sur para el desarrollo, principalmente la falta de reconocimiento del conflicto latente entre el Norte y el Sur global que se origina en y se perpetua por el desequilibrio global de poder.

Contents

1 Introduction

International development cooperation has been a prominent instrument in Colombia's numerous social, humanitarian, and political struggles in the past decades. The internal armed conflict has significantly shaped this playing field; at least since the signing of the Peace Agreement by the Colombian government and the FARC-EP in 2016, peace and conflict transformation have become motifs of most initiatives of international development cooperation in Colombia. With the officially agreed upon end of military approaches to the resolution of the complex conflict that has plagued Colombia for decades, civic means of peacebuilding have become all the more important. Civil peacekeeping initiatives can be considered a category of their own among the many forms and shapes in which international development cooperation is practiced today. The support of Colombia's fragile peace certainly is an important enterprise, especially since the question for its sustainability is looming on the horizon as a first wave of enthusiasm is slowly but certainly ebbing away four years after the signing of the agreement (Baron-Mendoza, 2019).

What makes internationally supported peace initiatives in Colombia an object worth studying is the historically difficult relation between the global South and North. In the context studied in this paper, the former is reified by Colombian peace initiatives, while the latter is represented by German peace workers. They are the main actors on the stage of peace cooperation, which, as a mode of today's development cooperation, is contingent on the relations of past eras marked by an overt colonial rationale. The resulting subliminal tension between Northern and Southern partners hinders peace in the broad definition established in section 2.7 of this paper.

The ambivalence of international development cooperation has been discussed at length in a variety of national and international academic works, exposing some cases in which development cooperation successfully contributes to the construction of viable and sustainable solutions on the one hand, but on the other hand pointing to misguided projects that sometimes leave the target communities worse off than they have been before (Almoza, 2018; Coyne, 2013; Delgado, 2009).

This mixed success rate can be traced back to two central issues with international development cooperation. Firstly, the allocation of resources by any nation to the support of social,

humanitarian, or political development in another nation is seldom a pure act of charity. Programmes of development cooperation can – and do – serve all kinds of interests of the nations on the giving end of the relationship. These interests can align with goals of the population on the receiving end[1]: supporting other societies' transition to peace should be considered beneficial for humanity as a whole, and even in crude neoliberal terms it is worth the effort because it allows more people to participate in the global economy. However, there are certain scenarios in which international development cooperation serves a more unilateral purpose, and when this is the case, the receiving populations tend to be on the losing side.

Secondly, even when a programme of international development cooperation sincerely pursues the goal of supporting the receiving population in its development, things do not always turn out the way they should. Poorly planned and executed projects, a lack of cultural sensitivity or unconscious mindsets of superiority vis-à-vis the receiving populations can cause unintended, but no less severe harm. The typically unequal relationship between the givers and receivers of development cooperation results in a dependency that further aggravates the potential harm that can result from international development programmes (Fundación para la Cooperación Synergia, Vela & Vela Mantilla, 2011, p. 31).

This paper emphasises the second of these issues, approaching the staff of two Colombian organisations devoted to peacebuilding that are supported by German personnel. The first organisation is *Fundación Mujer y Futuro* (FMF); the second organisation's name cannot be disclosed by request of the interview partners and will therefore simply be referred to as 'the network'. The main focus of the analysis of these two organisations is the dynamic between Colombian and German peace workers in the receiving organisations, which is accomplished by gathering perceptions and reflections of both Colombian and German professionals in their respective workplaces and in confidential interviews. Observations made by the researcher throughout these conversations further contribute to the understanding of the intra-project dynamics. Furthermore, the personal attitudes of the German peace workers towards their respective receiving organisation and their Colombian co-workers will be examined by means of personal interviews. Finally, the structural characteristics of German peace cooperation

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[1] More on the terms "giving" and "receiving" in section 2.4

programmes in Colombia will be explored through the revision and analysis of institutional structures, documents, and policies. The research question that ties these objectives together is the following:

What dynamics can be observed between Colombian and German peace workers at FMF and the network and what are possible underlying individual and structural explanations?

The investigation of the social dynamics unfolding among the local and foreign personnel of peace initiatives sheds light on potential unintended impacts of development cooperation in the global South. In order to obtain a balanced image, both the local and the foreign professionals' perceptions of their roles in the respective organisation are considered in this paper. By the means of participant observations, group interviews and expert interviews, a sociological analysis takes shape in chapter 4.

While this analysis does speak for itself to a certain degree, it would be negligent to treat it as if it were taking place in a socio-political vacuum. Both the Colombian and the German peace workers act on a playing field defined by the involved institutions and their approach to peace cooperation. The insights into the intra-project dynamics are therefore tied back into the structural framework provided by the implementing institutions in sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.3. Due to the limited scope of this paper, the analysis of the latter will be less exhaustive and rather shine a spotlight on particular details that are likely to influence or even shape the dynamics observed in Colombian-German peace initiatives. This second step allows for more informed conclusions about the two examples of development cooperation scrutinised in this paper, as well as some general conclusions about North-South personnel cooperation in peacebuilding contexts.

2 Theoretical Concepts

The paper at hand draws upon a number of theoretical concepts adapted from a range of academic fields. A nuanced and critical approach to international development cooperation is facilitated by theoretical inputs from development and postcolonial studies. Peace and conflict studies offer a theoretical basis for the analysis of peace initiatives in their local and global

context. An approach to the more sociological aspects of this paper, namely the social dynamics observed among the staff of FMF and the network, is substantiated by a concept borrowed from social work. Furthermore, the concepts of intercultural communication and competence and the network of theories around them are consulted for an informed analysis of the intercultural frictions among the projects' local and foreign personnel.

2.1 Development Theory and Postcolonial Theory

Since development has become an objective, or in some cases a pretext for international cooperation, scientific concepts of development have gone through several conceptual changes. Theories of development guide the practice of development cooperation, although the latter is sometimes reluctant and most of the time slow to adopt new theoretical insights. The time periods mentioned hereinafter are thus not to be taken at face value, but as an indication of the chronology and succession of development theory.

Modernisation theory marked a positivist era of development studies. Throughout the 1950s and 60s, most international development policy was based on the assumption that states in the global South can reach 'modernity' by following in the footsteps of the global North. The technocratic pursuit of modernisation culminated in military dictatorships in most Latin American states by the 1970s (O'Donnell, 2011). This "un-self-reflective" theory exemplifies the potentially devastating 'side-effects' of poorly conceptualised development programmes (Sylvester, 1999, pp. 705-6).

By the 1970, a new paradigm was slowly trickling into the practice of international development cooperation. Dependency theory, which had emerged from Latin American academia in the late 1960, challenged the progressive and linear understanding of development propagated by modernisation theory scholars. This new school of development studies pointed out the structural impediments for development in the global South on a global scale. However, dependency theory "did not question the *goal* of modernisation" (Sylvester, 1999, p. 706, emphasis added).

Most contemporary development programmes carry some of each of these approaches' DNA in them. New trends have been emerging since the 1970s, such as the tendency to actively

involve the receiving communities, as well as a "return to the poverty emphasis" (Sylvester, 1999, p. 708). Besides being criticised for their lack of a larger goal besides 'helping target communities to modernise', these new trends have also been overshadowed by a neoliberal turn in development theory (Sylvester, 1999, p. 709).

A more radical approach to rethinking development theory is brought forward by postdevelopment theory, advocated by scholars such as Arturo Escobar. In *Encountering Development: The making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Escobar deconstructs the development discourse as a "practice of representation", meaning a submission of the so called 'Third World' to the determination of the so called 'First World' (Escobar, 1998, p. 401, author's translation). Escobar suggests that this process has been implemented successively through colonialism, the imposition of European concepts of modernity in the rest of the world, and finally through the pursuit of 'development' (ibid.).

The latter is nowadays administered first and foremost by governments and international organisations in an assistentialist fashion. Escobar points out that the idea of development relies on a logic of otherness of the 'Third World', so that the 'First World' can construct itself as opposite of the former (Escobar, 1998, p. 402). Escobar's deconstruction of the concept and practice of development draws a clear connection between colonial and contemporary patterns. He goes as far as claiming that development is a destructive practice (Escobar, 2011, p. 424).

With this postcolonial critique of development both as a term and as a practice, Escobar ties together two fields that are central to the paper at hand. Postcolonial theory will not be discussed in greater depth in this paper, but some insights generated by the field are substantial for the analysis of contemporary relations between the global North and South in development cooperation. In this sense, the "overarching structure of power that has impacted all aspects of social and political experience in Latin America since the beginning of the colonial era", as it manifests itself in the social dynamics of Colombian-German project teams, is explored in chapter 4 (Moraña et al., 2008, p. 17).

To write about 'postcolonial' times is not to consider colonial structures a thing of the past; on the contrary, it means to acknowledge the "transhistoric expansion of colonial domination and the perpetuation of its effects in contemporary times" (Moraña et al., 2008, p. 2). Structures of

colonial oppression persist not only from the North towards the South, but also within these meta-regions (Trefzer et al., 2014). Today's practice of development cooperation is thus approached in a postcolonial context.

2.2 Global North and South

As the concept of development evolves, so does the terminology that describes the different poles of the development spectrum. If one wants to divide this spectrum into just two categories, there is a surprising variety of theories to be consulted. Throughout the investigation conducted for this thesis, the theoretic approach most prominently encountered is the centre-periphery model. The centre is constituted by the 'West' or the 'global North', which dominates the periphery – which is more or less identical to the 'global South' – by means of exploitation and the accumulation of capital (Hussain, 1984; Amin, 1989). The model is associated with the dependency theory and critiques of capitalism, and it appears to be endorsed by most of the Colombian professionals interviewed for this paper.

Another term that appears throughout the interviews and thus requires a definition at this point is Eurocentrism. This term refers to a worldview which is distorted by its central assumption that Europe – the 'West' – is the yardstick by which the rest of the world – the 'non-West', the South, the periphery – is to be measured. Eurocentrism looks at a tiered world, the order of which is described in more detail by the centre-periphery model. Amin (1989) points to the many shades of grey that disturb the black and white image of a world divided into two categories, be they latitudinal, longitudinal, or concentric. This is exemplified by the case of India, whose rapid economic growth throughout the past decades now puts the country in a position somewhere between the poles. Colombia, too, can be considered an ambiguous case in the light of its recent ascension into the ranks of the OECD (OECD, 2020).

Even within the theoretical realm, gradations and overlaps between the two poles become evident when the definitions of the 'West', the 'global North', the 'centre', and their respective counterparts are compared (Amin, 1989, p. 100). For the purpose of this paper, the subtleties of the definitions of the dominant and dominated poles of the various models can be neglected; what is relevant is not their precise delimitation but their relationship with one another.

Though terms such as 'Third World' have fallen into disuse, their 'politically correct' substitutes are not exempt from questionable connotations. This makes writing about the global South a difficult enterprise. The terms global North and South are frequently used throughout this paper. Contrary to the differentiation into 'developed', 'developing' or even 'underdeveloped' regions, the North-South terminology constitutes a less normative classification of world regions. This is not to say that the terms are inherently unproblematic – any binary categorisation of a complex system can be criticised in some way – but it is the least problematic terminology known to the author.

It cannot be denied that the term 'global South' carries some connotations that date back to colonial times. Afterall, it is yet another word referring to the same territories that were once scientifically described as the "underdeveloped" "periphery" or "Third World" (Dados and Connell, 2012, p. 12). Nevertheless, the North-South concept has been adopted by modern development studies and political sciences both from the North and the South (ibid.). Especially the contributions of the latter have fleshed out the history-conscious use of the terms. Today, North-South terminology "references an entire history of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and differential economic and social change through which large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources are maintained" (Dados and Connell, 2012, p. 13).

Germany can largely be considered a part of the global North, while most of Colombia can be classified as part of the global South. It is important to point out, however, that despite the geographical origin of the terms North and South, not all regions below a certain degree of latitude are homogenously part of the global South. As indicated above, the global South is to be understood as the historically and structurally disadvantaged parts of the world. Within Colombia, one can certainly find social sectors that are more akin to the global North than to the global South. Likewise, a significant power asymmetry can be observed between the Colombian 'centre' – the urban centres of the country, especially the capital Bogotá – and the Colombian 'periphery'.

2.3 International Development Cooperation

In addition to the historic shifts in the meaning and purpose of development cooperation, in the present paper an intercultural dimension must be considered. The term 'development

cooperation' appears more frequently in Anglo-Saxon scholarly and technical documents, while Hispanic sources tend to embrace the term 'cooperación internacional' (international cooperation). The latter emphasises the international aspect of initiatives such as the ones analysed in chapter 4 of the paper at hand. Due to the fact that no non-international development cooperation is addressed in this work, the 'international' attribute does not need to be spelled out. Thus, the term 'development cooperation' is preferred over the Spanish variant, firstly to locate the work within Anglophone literature, and secondly to highlight the de-facto asymmetry inherent to North-South cooperation. Where the term 'international cooperation' is used instead, it is done for the sake of more precise translation.

2.4 Giving and Receiving

Development cooperation can hardly be analysed without using the terms 'giving' and 'receiving'. They somewhat contradict the concept of development *cooperation*, pointing to a structural problem: semantically, the involved parties are considered 'partners' cooperating in a joint effort, but in practice the receivers' intrinsic dependency on the givers impedes their cooperation on a level playing field. The terms appear in the reports of the Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC, by its Colombian acronym[2]) and in the self-portrait of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ, by its German acronym[3]) (BMZ, 2020c; Vela Mantilla et al., 2011).

One promising development that has picked up pace in recent years is the shake-up of the principle that givers must be from the global North. In what might be considered a new paradigm of international development cooperation, the established North-South flow of financial, technical and personnel support has increasingly been complemented by South-South and triangular cooperation policies and programmes. The APC reports that throughout the year 2018[4] a total of 54 South-South or triangular projects has been implemented in the country (APC, 2018, p. 10).

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[2] Agencia Presidencial de Cooperación Internacional
[3] Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung
[4] Latest available data

Triangular cooperation is a step forward from traditional North-South cooperation in the sense that it enables institutions from the global South to take on a more active role in development cooperation. However, they tend to be 'junior partners' of the ever-present Northern giver (BMZ, 2020a). The BMZ's understanding of triangular cooperation indicates that it still classifies states in tiers, where the 'slightly more developed' "threshold countries" may adopt a giving role under Northern supervision (ibid.).

South-South cooperation represents a more consistent implementation of development cooperation on a level playing field, due to being more "horizontal" in terms of economic and political power (Klingebiel, 2013, p. 23). According to Klingebiel, South-South cooperation relies on different development theories than traditional North-South cooperation and tends to avoid getting involved in foreign politics. These new trends in international development cooperation have the potential to reform a field which otherwise appears to be doomed to repeat and reproduce colonial dynamics. The paper at hand acknowledges this development but turns to the analysis of traditional North-South cooperation, which continues to be by far the most common form of development cooperation to date.

2.5 Personnel Cooperation

Personnel cooperation is a mode of cooperation aimed at strengthening local organisations and projects in the global South via the deployment of qualified personnel, typically but not necessarily from the global North. They act as consultants for processes of institutional strengthening, and in some cases for civil conflict resolution. Compared to financial or technical development cooperation, personnel cooperation is a much 'softer' modality. For lack of a better term, the qualified personnel deployed as consultants to local organisations or projects will be referred to as 'cooperants' throughout this paper, borrowing from the Spanish term 'cooperante'.

The first German development agencies focussing on personnel cooperation started operating as early as 1957 (Roxin et al., 2015, p. 24). The legal framework for personnel cooperation is provided by the 1969 'Development-Worker-Law'[5]. It defines a cooperant as a person who

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[5] Entwicklungshelfer-Gesetz

"provides a non-profit-service on a cooperative basis in developing countries [sic] with the aim to contribute to the progress of these countries"[6] (Bundesministerium der Justiz, 1969, §1.1). Roxin et al. describe cooperants as an "effective instrument" due to their cooperativity and reflectivity, stressing the benefits of intercultural exchange (2015, pp. vi-vii). It is noteworthy, however, that the German term for cooperant literally translates to 'development aide'[7], which is clearly a reference to the concept of development aid. The term has remained unchanged since its legal definition more than 50 years ago, despite the semantic shift to the term 'development cooperation'.

Nevertheless, Roxin et al. observe a progressive change of the self-conception of German cooperants until the 1990s, shifting from a hands-on-mentality towards the objective of consulting (Roxin et al., 2015, pp. 25-26). This new understanding of the cooperants' role should stimulate the protagonism of local actors and prevent their patronisation by the cooperant. Furthermore, the progressive professionalisation of personnel cooperation has reshaped the field since its creation in the late 1950s (ibid.). In theory,

> [w]ith their personal working method and through creativity and solidarity, cooperants contribute to intercultural cooperation. Furthermore, they use their external status in conflict situations in order to underline their credibility, legitimacy and neutrality, as well as to increase the protection of programme partners (Paffenholz et al., 2011, p. 3, author's translation).

2.6 Peace Cooperation

Development cooperation with the purpose of fostering peace has many different faces, and the terms referring to it are at least as diverse as the instruments themselves. Military cooperation in the form of joint peace missions – such as the UN 'Blue Helmet' missions – are not considered in the present paper. Neither are initiatives of financial nature destined for the post-conflict "reconstruction" or "recovery" (Barnett el al., 2007, p. 38). What remains then are civilian missions run by the church, inter-governmental institutions – such as the UNDP – or

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[6] „in Entwicklungsländern ohne Erwerbsabsicht Dienst leistet, um in partnerschaftlicher Zusammenarbeit zum Fortschritt dieser Länder beizutragen"
[7] "Entwicklungshelfer"

national departments of development cooperation – such as the BMZ (Barnett et al., 2007, pp. 38-41). Interestingly, the BMZ is the only of the 24 institutions analysed by Barnett et al. that includes the term 'development' in its definition of peacebuilding (ibid.).

The BMZ's peacebuilding repertoire also comprises a personnel cooperation programme, namely the Civil Peace Service (CPS), which is intended to strengthen peace processes on a local level (BMZ 2020c). Since its creation in 1999 about 500 million euros have been allocated to the programme, which makes it a relatively minor expense of the BMZ. Despite only amounting to 0,42% of the ministry's total budget in the same time span, the CPS is hailed as a "successful model of […] development and peace initiatives"[8] (BMZ, 2016; BMZ, 2020d, author's translation; Stockmann et al., 2015, p. 415).

The CPS is conceptually defined as a programme for the "prevention of violence and promotion of peace"[9] (ZFD, 2019a, author's translation). Here, peace is understood as opposite to and threatened by armed conflict (ibid.) While this could suggest that peace is merely the absence of violence, the definition is further elaborated as a process of "settling quarrels, establishing contact between groups of enemies and balancing interests in order to make reconciliation and a peaceful coexistence possible again"[10] (ibid.). This conception follows along the lines of Johan Galtung's conception of peace as a condition that requires parallel efforts in reconciliation, reconstruction, and resolution (Galtung, 1998). Besides this, the CPS declares to aim for *restoring* peace, meaning that it recognises that peace is not something that must be *brought* to partner countries in the global South.

2.7 Peace and Conflict Transformation

Both examples of development cooperation considered in this thesis unfold in a peacebuilding context. In order to provide a meaningful analysis of the receiving organisations' strategies and the cooperants' tasks and roles within them, the concept of peace must first be defined. An attempt to define peace in a broad manner has been undertaken by Royce Anderson (2004). It reads as follows: "Peace is a condition in which individuals, families, groups, communities,

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[8] „Erfolgsmodell der Kooperation von […] Entwicklungs- und Friedensarbeit"
[9] "Gewaltprävention und Friedensförderung"
[10] "die Wogen zu glätten, verfeindete Gruppen in Kontakt zu bringen, Interessen auszubalancieren und so Versöhnung und friedliches Zusammenleben wieder zu ermöglichen"

and/or nations experience low levels of violence and engage in mutually harmonious relationships" (Anderson, 2004, p. 103). Here, peace is defined as two-dimensional, combining negative and positive peace. Anderson expands on the understanding of peace as a condition or state which is experienced within specific contexts. Her categorisation of these contexts, ranging from macro – "[peace] with the planet and the natural world" (Anderson, 2004, p. 105) – to micro – "[peace] within the individual" (ibid.), is based on an idea originally coined by Johan Galtung. Somewhere between these two endpoints of the macro-micro spectrum lie the dimensions of peace relevant for the initiatives analysed throughout chapter 4 of this paper.

Conflict transformation is a key concept in peace cooperation; both programmes analysed in this paper acknowledge its importance and consider it part of their repertoire (ZFD, 2019a, Brot für die Welt 2020). Conflict transformation is founded on the understanding of conflicts as a necessary aspect of human interaction (Coser, 1957). Thus, a conflict is only considered problematic when it is not constructive, for instance when it spirals into violence instead of providing a platform for discussion and an impulse for the transformation of the underlying issues (Ramsbotham et al., 2016). Conflict transformation also entails the potential – or perhaps even the necessity – to transform the conditions that initially led to a conflict. This reading resonates with the notion of 'transformative reparation'[11] that has been coined in the Colombian context (Uprimny-Yepes and Guzmán-Rodríguez, 2010).

When a third party is involved in the transformation of a conflict, their impartiality is considered an important asset (Ramsbotham, 2016; Reimann, 2004). However, Weller (2014) observes that even outsiders to a conflict are likely to become entangled in it throughout the process of conflict transformation. It is therefore crucial for cooperants in peacebuilding initiatives to reflect on their own position in the conflict that is to be transformed.

2.8 Intercultural Friction

The cooperants interviewed and observed for the paper at hand operate in an intercultural environment. The projects analysed in chapter 4 have been selected with the condition that at least one foreign, in this case European cooperant collaborates with local, in this case

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[11] Reparación transformadora

Colombian colleagues. In this setting, intercultural interaction happens on a daily basis, which makes it likely for intercultural friction to occur in some situations.

What people do, and what they consider 'the right thing to do' largely depends on their values. These values are social, meaning that they are created and shared by a collective. However, they do not need to be universal; often times they are specific to a society (Parsons, 1991, xx). Parsons's refers to these values as "cultural systems" (ibid.). While an action is generally interpreted in similar terms within one culture, it may be understood quite differently in another. In the analysis of dynamics among foreign and local personnel of peace projects, this observation can explain diverging opinions about workplace etiquette, project activities, and perhaps even the cooperation programme in general.

Furthermore, intercultural theory offers the concept of cultural competence, which facilitates the analysis of interactions in an intercultural context and the frictions that may result from them. Intercultural competence can be understood in two ways: On the one hand, content-competence refers to the knowledge of phenomena of a foreign – and one's own – culture. On the other hand, processual competence denotes the application of intercultural interaction skills (Stier, 2006, p. 6).

Another helpful concept for the paper at hand is the cultural dimensions model brought forward by Geert Hofstede. For more than 40 years, Hofstede has compiled and systematised data on cultural characteristics, which he arranges in "national cultures" in order to facilitate cross-cultural comparisons. Originally, Hofstede's research focussed on organisational cultures, categorising people's behaviours in a workplace environment. This has been a source of critique on his work, but for the paper at hand it is rather convenient, since the observed behaviours and potential cultural frictions are all situated in a workplace context.

The two dimensions most relevant for the purpose of this paper are the *individualism-collectivism* scale and the *power distance* dimension. It seems reasonable to assume that different approaches to the way a task is completed – individually versus collectively – and different perceptions of organisational hierarchies will result in some degree of friction in the workplace. On both scales, Germany and Colombia show significant disparities: Germany is characterised as a more individualist nation, whereas Colombia ranks quite high among the

collectivist nations. Power distance is more pronounced in Colombia than in Germany (Hofstede, 2020).

Hofstede's dimensions of "national culture" can be criticised for their reductionist representation of nations as homogenous societies. In fact, Hofstede himself acknowledges that "in reality there can be quite a bit of within-country variation" and that his country rankings in each of the six dimensions "should be seen as rough 'climate maps' of culture" (Hofstede, 2020).

Intercultural competence of development workers plays a significant role for the success or failure of development cooperation initiatives. Nevertheless, blaming all miscommunications within the project teams on intercultural incompetence would be a fallacy. In any communicative situation, personal and situational aspects contribute to a successful interaction in the same way that intercultural competence does. In the analysis of frictions between the local and foreign peace workers in their respective projects, potential intercultural factors will be considered as well as personal and situational factors.

2.9 Acción sin Daño

Poorly designed and/or implemented peace cooperation projects can harm the peace workers themselves, the project's target communities and perhaps even larger parts of society. This is what the *Acción sin Daño como aporte a la Construcción de Paz*[12] (ASD) approach seeks to prevent. It is a locally developed, practice-oriented concept aimed at avoiding unintentional results in any kind of intervention in conflict. A comprehensive handbook on ASD has been compiled by the Colombian *Universidad Nacional* in cooperation with the *Synergia* foundation, the Swiss and German agencies for development cooperation – COSUDE and GIZ – and the United Nations' Development Programme (Vela Mantilla et al., 2011, p. 6).

ASD is a take on the do-no-harm dogma advocated by Mary B. Anderson, but tailored to the Colombian context (Vela Mantilla et al., 2011, p.8). Crucially for the present paper, ASD complements the do-no-harm approach by factoring in the visions and missions of actors who

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[12] Action without harm as a contribution to peacebuilding

implement peace or development programmes and stressing the importance of a *continuous* reflection of actions and their impacts (ibid.).

Vela Mantilla et al. offer a comprehensive five-stage-plan for the reflection and recognition of potential undesired outcomes and impacts at different stages of the implementation of programmes and projects (see figure 1). A central characteristic of this application of the ASD strategy is the emphasis on the interrelations between an action, its context, and the involved institutions. The personnel, both local and foreign, thus plays a significant role: Firstly, they are part of the implementing organisation and act under its regime, secondly they have some degree of leeway in the project's implementation, and thirdly they are in immediate contact with the project's context, which means they simultaneously inform the implementing organisation and act as their proxies in the field.

Stage 1

Understanding the organisation/institution
What can ASD-CP contribute to the organisation/institution?
Which elements of ASD-CP can be identified in the institution/organisation?
How can strengths and weaknesses in relation to ASD-CP be determined?

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Stage 2

Understanding the context of the action
Which elements of the context are relevant for the institution's/organisation's action?
How can dividing/connecting factors be identified?

↓

Stage 3

Understanding the interrelations between the context, the organisation/institution and its actions
What effects can the context have on the organisation/institution?
What effects can the organisation/institution have on the context through its action?
What questions can guide the action towards ASD-CP?

↓

Stage 4

Based on the interrelations: Identifying alternatives that reduce negative effects and maximise positive effects
How can the actions reinforce the dignity, autonomy and liberty of the target group?
How can consequences of the way that the programme's/project's resources are used be identified? How can an exit-strategy of the programme be prepared and/or assessed?

↓

Stage 5

Systematising and learning from the experience
How can the lessons learned be taken up and appreciated?
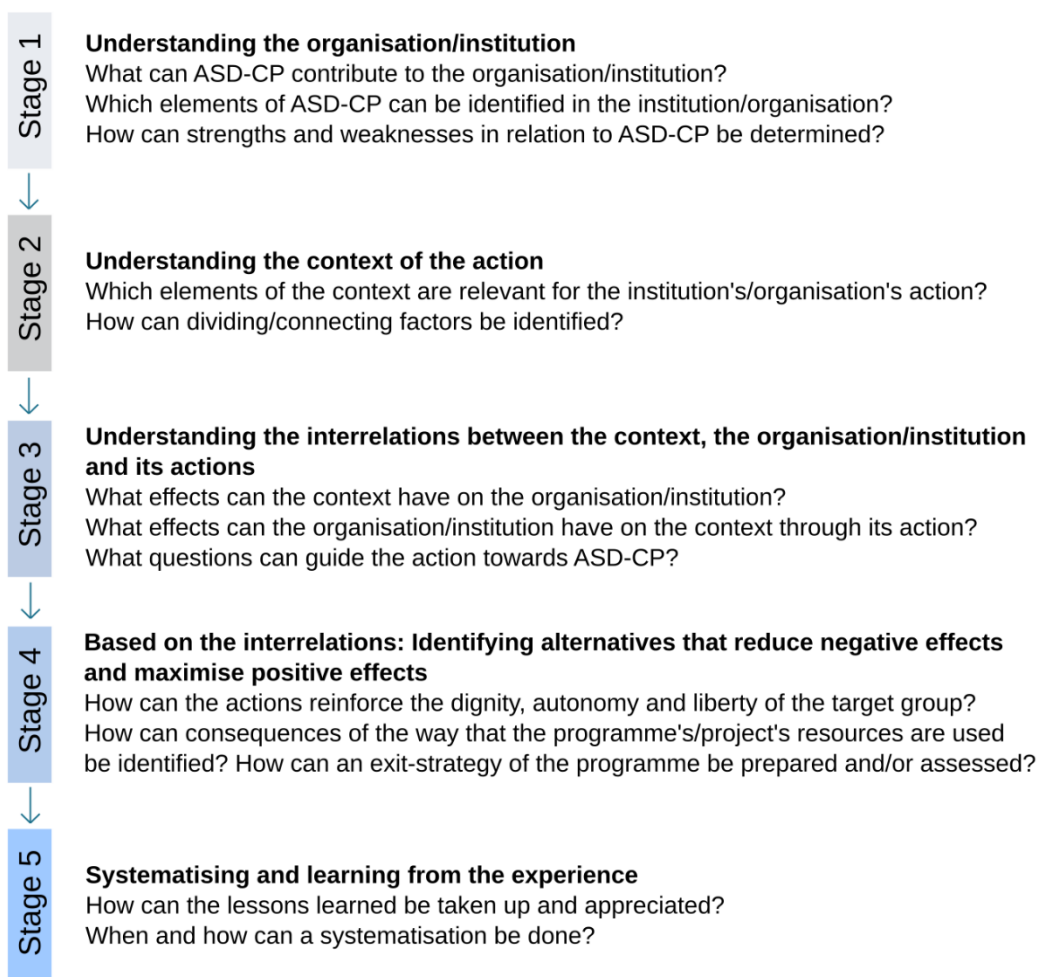When and how can a systematisation be done?

Figure 1: 5 Stages of ASD-CP for programme/project implementation. Adapted from Vela Mantilla et al., 2011, p. 38.

ASD-CP is relevant for this paper in two ways. Firstly, it constitutes a guideline and a practical tool for the evaluation of the modes of German-Colombian cooperation. Secondly, it is a useful tool for the refinement of the research procedures presented in chapter 3. Research must not be understood as something detached from the object of its interest; through the interaction with the cooperants and their projects it could have tangible consequences on the ground. The investigation for the paper at hand has been assessed following the ASD-CP principles. This process is detailed in section 3.7.

3 Methodology

The research conducted for this paper attempts to shed light on the dynamics among the Southern and Northern staff of Colombian peacebuilding initiatives. Despite this rather narrowly defined research object, the interdisciplinary approach increases the complexity of its study. While certainly complicating the researcher's task, the use of theoretical concepts from different disciplines allows for a richer analysis and hence a more profound understanding of the issue at hand. The trade-off is a limited number of cases that can be included in the research. The contact restrictions in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic further complicate the research process and limit the researcher's options to gather data. As a result of these technical obstacles, the complexity of the research object, and the institutionally imposed limitations on the scope of the paper hand, this work should be considered exploratory.

3.1 Case Selection

The two organisations selected for the analysis that unfolds in chapter 4 are local peace initiatives in the sense that they were founded out of local necessities and are directed by Colombian professionals. Each of them currently employs one European cooperant, deployed by a German agency, but apart from that their staff is of Colombian nationality. This configuration was a prerequisite for the selection of the organisations. While FMF is supported by *Bread for the World* (BftW), an ecclesiastic agency, the network is supported by a secular programme, the CPS. In both cases, the German donors supply personnel support as well as financial backing for the receiving organisations. Access to the aforementioned organisations

was facilitated by the director of Podion, a Colombian NGO with over 30 years of experience in connecting local organisations with mostly German development agencies.

3.2 Research on Personnel Cooperation in Peacebuilding Contexts

The research conducted for this paper is clearly not the first attempt to study the modes of operation of German personnel cooperation in peacebuilding contexts in the global South. Prior studies have been conducted by Roxin et al. (2015) on behalf of DEval[13], and Paffenholz et al. (2011) by order and account of the CPS programme. Respectively, they offer insights into German personnel cooperation in general and German personnel cooperation in peacebuilding contexts specifically. It is evident that both of these studies are more extensive than the one at hand, covering multiple implementing organisations and making general claims on entire programmes or even modes of development cooperation. The works of Roxin et al. and Paffenholz et al. serve as reference for this thesis in two ways:

Firstly, the methods employed in the two large-scale studies provide an orientation for the research of intra-organisational dynamics at FMF and the network. Paffenholz et al. combine the analysis of primary and secondary data with semi-structured interviews in a very extensive evaluation of the CPS (2011, p. 133). This approach falls into the category of "combined" interviews, that is to say interviews complemented with other research methods (Valles, 2014, pp. 53-59). Roxin et al. employ a similar method, interviewing cooperants and receiving organisations in the global South. These interviews are complemented by case studies of selected examples of personnel cooperation (2015, p. ii).

Since the research for this paper is limited to two cases, no claim for representativity can be made. The quantitative components employed by Roxin et al. and Paffenholz et al. will therefore be omitted. Instead, the analysis in chapter 4 is explicitly based on qualitative research, conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews and participant observations. The interview as scientific method is useful to learn about the interviewee's point of view on certain facts, but these facts themselves need to be researched by other, more objective means (Valles, 2014, p. 54).

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[13] German Institute for Development Evaluation

This is where the studies of Roxin et al. and Paffenholz et al. fulfil their second function for this paper; the insights into the self-conceptions of European cooperants in receiving organisations in the global South generated by them constitute a framework for the research on social dynamics within FMF and the network. By embedding the results of the interviews in the body of existing literature on German personnel cooperation, the potential pitfall of taking interviewees' opinions as facts is avoided.

3.4 Interviews as Sociological Method

The interviews cited throughout this thesis have been conducted between April and July of 2020 (see appendix 4). Their formats are varied; interviews 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10 and 11 are individual interviews, whereas interviews 6, 9, 9.2 and 10 are group interviews. One characteristic shared by interviews 1 through 11 is their virtual nature. In most cases the platform of choice is the video conferencing tool *Zoom*, and in one exception a group phone call via *WhatsApp*.

The individual interviews have been conducted either with the German cooperants at FMF and the network or the respective organisations' executive staff. They serve the double purpose of gathering information about specific organisational structures and of documenting the interviewees' attitudes and opinions. Furthermore, interviews are generally not only to be understood as a direct means of gathering data, but also as a "passport" to certain situations, in which the interviewer's observations might be a valuable secondary resource next to the content of the interview itself (Valles, 2014, p. 54; Gobo, 2008, p. 191). Following the ethnographic tradition, the data to be analysed is mostly gathered through observation (Gobo, 2008, p. 5).

Ethnographic interviews have the potential to "reveal the cultural meanings used by actors, and to investigate aspects of the culture observed" (Gobo, 2008, p. 191). Thus, the ethnographic interview tends to take place in a more spontaneous and informal fashion than conventional discursive interviews (ibid.). This method can yield answers that exceed the preconceived framing of a traditional interview by allowing diverse perspectives to be expressed (Valles, 1999, p. 196) An open interview design does not mean asking broad questions, which can result in generic answers and a hardly insightful conversation dynamic (Gobo, 2008, pp. 192-193). Rather, the strategy in these interviews should be to ask specific questions about topics that arise throughout the conversation to obtain in-depth information (ibid.). This applies

specifically to the group interviews with senior or executive staff and the cooperants of FMF and the network.

In interview 6, with the Colombian and German staff of FMF, as well as in interviews 9 and 9.2 with the binational staff of the network, similar questions are discussed (see appendix 1 and 2). Some questions are asked to the cooperants and representatives of both receiving organisations, while other questions address more specific topics only relevant in the context of the respective institution. Either way, since the small sample group of only two organisations does not justify any significant quantitative insights, comparability of the interviews was not an issue.

Besides the previously mentioned set of questions, the interviewees of both organisations are confronted with two polemic statements about personnel cooperation. The first statement is taken from the 2011 evaluation of the CPS by Paffenholz et al. In the introduction of the comprehensive document, the authors claim that

> *"[t]he CPS strategy is based on the conception that these cooperants possess qualifications, knowledge and resources that are not locally available"*[14] (Paffenholz et al., 2011, p. 3).

Here, the interviewees are confronted with the quintessential statement that the cooperants have qualifications, knowledge and resources that are not available locally. Considering that this assertion is taken from an external evaluation of the CPS, it shall not be considered to reflect the opinion of the implementing organisations, let alone the individual cooperants. The purpose of the confrontation with this statement is to observe reactions to a clearly Eurocentric conception of development cooperation. The second statement claims that

> *'cooperation between German Cooperants and Colombian professionals takes place among equals'.*

This affirmation is part of most self-portrayals of German institutions that implement personnel cooperation. Sometimes it is formulated as an aspiration, but in most cases, it is simply presented as the status quo. In confronting the interviewees with this affirmation, their reaction

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[14] "Die ZFD-Strategie basiert auf dem Verständnis, dass diese Fachkräfte über Qualifikationen, Wissen und Ressourcen verfügen, die lokal nicht vorhanden sind."

can hint to their personal perception of the quality of the relationship with their Colombian/European colleagues.

The individual and group interviews are complemented by two participant observations (participant observation 1 and 2) conducted in a general assembly of most staff members of FMF, and in a project team meeting, respectively. The cooperant actively participates in both meetings. These observations expose the work routines of the Colombian-German teams and the (self-)ascribed roles of local staff members and cooperants. The researcher does not take an active role in these assemblies, besides a brief introduction of himself and his research project at the beginning of the sessions. Despite this passivity, it must be assumed that the researcher's presence affects the behaviour of the other participants to some degree. This possible distortion of group dynamics is factored into the analysis in chapter 4.

3.5 Data Processing and Analysis

The set of data compiled in the above described video calls is selectively used for the analysis in chapter 4. Some segments are densely packed with information, while in others the conversation drifts away from the topics relevant for the present investigation. The recording of the video calls for later revision proved highly useful, especially since some of them extended for up to three hours. In total, the recorded conversations have a duration of over 15 hours. Their repeated revision allows for a detailed analysis of multiple aspects of the conversation, verbal, and non-verbal behaviour at once. Hence, the analysis in chapter 4 considers not only *what* is said, but also how and in which context. Due to its extensiveness, the recorded material has only been selectively transcribed for the citations throughout chapter 4.

When potentially sensitive issues are addressed, for instance colonial structures in development cooperation, specific attention is paid to the choice of words, the form of expression (hesitant, confident, …). This hints to the speakers' attitude towards the issue and whether they are at ease with it or not. Furthermore, attention is paid to variations in an interviewee's response to the same issue in different communicative situations. If an interviewee exhibits uneasiness with a specific issue in a group conversation, it is interesting to observe how the same person behaves when the topic is brought up in individual interviews. Likewise, the displayed sense of

belonging – or lack thereof – in the same settings is a considered in the analysis of the gathered data.

In the observed team meetings (participant observations 1 and 2) particular attention is paid to the cooperant's reactions to suggestions from her Colombian colleagues and vice versa. If there are patterns in the reactions, they might point to general attitudes the Colombian and foreign personnel bear for one another. Another indicator for this can be the way they refer to each other in their presence or absence. Moreover, in selected group interviews, each participant's share of the dialogue is monitored to detect whether one of them adopts a dominant stance. Through the observation of these details, the group dynamics can be assessed beyond mere statements of the group members.

3.6 Alternative Research Methods

The combination of different interview and observation strategies is the result of practical considerations under the given circumstances. Throughout Colombia, nationwide contact restrictions in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic have drastically limited the access to local organisations which receive personnel from the global North as a form of development cooperation. Therefore, the investigation for this paper had to be conducted without physically accompanying the staff of FMF and the network. Before this background, all remaining options to gain insights into the dynamics between Northern cooperants and their Colombian colleagues must be embraced.

Despite acting from necessity rather than based on careful deliberation, the combination of the aforementioned methods proves to be quite fruitful. Complementing semi-structured interviews with participant observations allows for insights into the interviewees' attitudes, which, as Gobo points out, are not necessarily congruent with their actions. The "gap between the interviewee's declared state and his or her actual state" can thereby be bridged (Gobo, 2008, pp. 5-6, 192). Ultimately, the methods employed for the research of this paper are quite comparable to those of a non-virtual ethnography, with a greater emphasis on expert interviews and, unfortunately, less occasions for participant observations.

The approach chosen for the group interviews is a moderated discussion about the interviewees' regular work, which is meant to reveal routines, group dynamics and individual experiences. Certainly, it must be kept in mind that *talking* about something rather than *doing* something adds a layer of abstraction that might modify the group dynamic. It can be assumed that in a moderated group interview via video call, the participants are more aware of the researcher's observing role than they would be while carrying out familiar activities in their habitual work environment. The researcher is faced with the challenge of creating and observing authentic communicative situations in a more obvious interview setting. Two strategies are used to achieve this:

The first strategy is to ask the participants to narrate their work routines as individuals and as a team with the intention to evoke habits through memories. Memory contains the social context in which the memories were made (Bartlett, 1995). Furthermore, memories are recalled within the social environment, hence they rely on and reflect the social framework they were 'made' in (Bartlett, 1995; Halbwachs, 2013). The fact that "narrating takes place within a dialogue relationship which includes not only the narrator, but also the recipient who listens, records, intervenes by asking questions and generates expectations" (Jedlowski, 2001, p. 32) has two implications: on the one hand, the cooperants' peers participate in the interview, which should be conducive to the recreation of a workplace environment. On the other hand, the presence of the interviewer changes the constellation of the project team, and especially his (assumed) expectations may influence the way the participants recall and narrate their work routines. In this sense, the analysis of the cooperants' narrations and accounts of their work routines must be taken with a grain of salt.

The second strategy in the moderated group interviews is to address questions to the whole group, which forces the participants to negotiate who answers (first). This may reflect whether someone tends to speak for some or all of their colleagues, and how the latter react to that. By observing the project team as a whole as well as the behaviour of each individual in the group conversation some careful inferences about the group dynamic can be made, assuming that the situational dynamic in the group interview reflects the group dynamic in a common work situation.

3.7 Limiting Potential Negative Impacts

Two levels of analysis are considered in this paper. First and most exhaustively, the dynamics within the two selected organisations are analysed. Of second order, but not to be neglected, is the relationship between the researcher and the project personnel. This second level must be considered so that possible biases of the interviewed personnel towards the researcher and vice versa can be factored in, and potential negative effects of the research on the observed organisations can be deliberated and minimised. Biases towards the researcher might arise from the fact that he is of German nationality, which could make interviewees doubt his intentions when asking about their experience with German development cooperation. This issue can hopefully be avoided by establishing a rapport with the interviewees before addressing potentially controversial topics.

To address the issue of the investigation's impact on the involved organisations and individuals, the procedure has been adjusted to the ASD-CP principles, which have been described in more detail in section 2.9. The following paragraphs describe the reflections guided by the 5-stage approach of ASD-CP (see figure 1).

Departing from the comprehension of the action which is to be carried out – the investigation in German-Colombian peace initiatives – a self-reflection of the implementing body, in this case the researcher, is the first necessary step. This reflection must be continuous throughout the planning and implementation of the research, along two guiding questions: *How could the individuals involved in the study be negatively[15] affected by the researcher's actions? Could the researcher's actions have an impact on the project as a whole?*

To address these questions in any meaningful depth, it is essential to identify the relevant elements in the context of the investigation, as well as potential dividing and connecting factors. Relevant elements are the pressure to come up with results, the individuals who participate in the investigation – specifically their willingness to open up to the investigator – and the investigator's capacity to observe and identify relevant dynamics when they present

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[15] The specific focus on potential *negative* impacts serves the purpose of identifying weaknesses of the current approach. Addressing these weaknesses can improve the research project and strengthen it as an *action without harm as contribution to peace*, ASD-CP.

themselves. The main connecting factor is the investigation's potential to be perceived as the possibility to obtain an outsider's perspective. As such, it bears the potential for the involved organisations and individuals to reflect their work in a way that they could not from their insiders' perspectives.

Three dividing factors can be identified: (1) the potential perception of the investigation as a threat, exposing deficits of the involved projects or individuals, (2) mistrust in the impartiality of a German researcher who might favour his compatriots vis-à-vis their Colombian colleagues, and (3) the German and Colombian cooperants feeling played out against each other. If left unaddressed, the dividing factors could lead to negative effects of the investigation on its context or vice-versa. In the worst case, premature, incomplete or faulty conclusions could be drawn by the investigator, the working atmosphere in the projects could be worsened, and a negative representation of the projects could have repercussions for their funding and the staff's careers.

To be clear, these are absolute worst-case scenarios. They have been considered to highlight possible undesired impacts of the investigation and to guide the researcher's attention to the precautions necessary to avoid them. The most important aspect to be kept in mind throughout the research procedure is to approach the project personnel as professionals and experts in their field from whom much can be learned. Before addressing sensitive topics, it will be necessary to establish a rapport with the project personnel. Finally, the analysis of the research results shall be cautious and fair, avoiding premature conclusions. It shall not solely look for negative aspects and approach the scrutinised projects as potentially positive examples of North-South personnel cooperation. These principles should reinforce the dignity, autonomy, and liberty of the investigation's target group.

To further minimise the risk for the individuals involved in the investigation, their names – and on demand the names of their receiving and sending organisations – are omitted throughout the paper at hand. Prior to their participation, the interviewees have been informed about the procedure and agreed to the terms established in an informed consent form (appendix 3). They are given the chance to review the use of the material generated throughout the investigation and have the right to withdraw their consent to its use at any point prior to the submission of

this paper. As to the final stage of ASD-CP, the methodological reflections throughout this thesis, specifically in section 3.6, document the insights generated and facilitate the process of learning from the experience.

4 'Micro-ethnography' of German Cooperants and Colombian Professionals

Chapter 2 has situated development cooperation in its political, cultural, and social context, which also – perhaps especially – shapes the context in which Northern cooperants work with their local colleagues in Southern organisations. The following sections show that both sides are quite aware of the circumstances of their work, although they do not always act consequently. The goal of the observation of two 'mixed' teams of Colombian peace initiatives is to explore how Northern cooperants and their Southern colleagues cooperate under the given circumstances, in which situations and to what extent power asymmetries affect their interactions, and how this shapes the work of the receiving organisations.

In detail, the analytical steps taken in this chapter are the analysis of the roles of each cooperant in their respective receiving organisation, the analysis of the social background and position of both cooperants and some of their Colombian colleagues, the analysis of observed and reported dynamics within the 'mixed' teams and lastly the analysis of the obstacles for a true 'cooperation among equals' as identified by the interviewees. Before delving into these considerations, however, the first step shall be the analysis of the more immediate environment in which the two examples of personnel cooperation unfold.

4.1 Background

4.1.1 Fundación Mujer y Futuro

The first of the two organisations analysed for this paper is *Fundación Mujer y Futuro* (FMF), which literally translates to 'Woman and Future Foundation'. Founded in 1988, the foundation currently looks back on over 30 years of uninterrupted work for women's rights in the department of Santander, Colombia. Over the years, the foundation has grown to a staff of 31, which throughout 2019 worked on 10 different projects (Fundación Mujer y Futuro, 2020, pp.

8-9). FMF's organisational structure comprises a board of directors, a members' assembly, the director, followed by the project coordinators and project teams in hierarchical order (see figure 2). One of the project teams, which is working on 'Gender Justice', has been accompanied in a virtual reunion (participant observation 2). The foundation aspires flat hierarchies to reflect the democratic ideals upheld by its members, even though the implementation of this ideal significantly slows down important processes, as the director points out (interview 2). The board of directors is made up of FMF's founding members, who have passed some responsibility to the younger generation in 2016, but "there is nothing that does not go through their hands"[16] (interview 2, 51:29-51:32, author's translation).
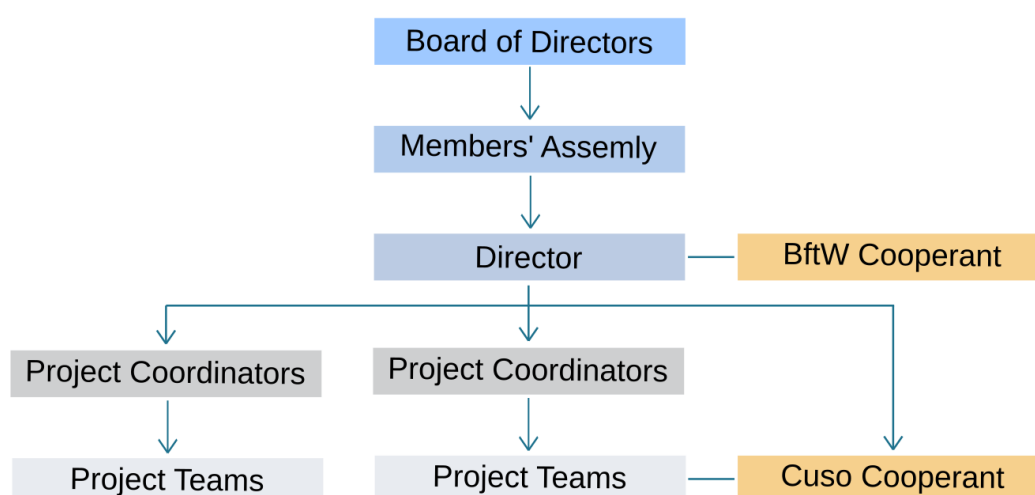

Figure 2: Organisational structure of FMF

The founding members, united through over 30 years of feminist activism all have academic backgrounds. One of them originates from Europe but has migrated to Colombia several years ago. All other founding members are of Colombian nationality and live in and around Bucaramanga, in the department of Santander (interviews 2, 5). The current director of FMF has a degree in philosophy and professional experience in public policymaking (Caracol Radio, 2018). Other staff members have degrees in psychology, law, and administrative professions (Fundación Mujer y Futuro, 2020, p. 8). From November 2018 until October 2019, FMF was

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[16] "no hay cosa que no pase por allá"

supported by a Southern cooperant deployed and financed by Cuso International. In 2018, the foundation was joined by a German cooperant who is deployed and financed through BftW. Prior to her deployment to Colombia, the cooperant's connection to Colombia had been limited to friendships with Colombian expats living in Germany (interview 5). However, she does have a diploma in area studies focussed on Latin America and ample professional experience in the administration and planning of German development cooperation and foreign policy (interview 1).

The foundation's work is guided by five strategic foci and seven principles. The former are gender equity, dialogue and organisation, participation, a life free from violence, and sexual and reproductive health (Fundación Mujer y Futuro, 2018a). The latter are defined as liberty, justice, political impartiality, transparency, laicism, equity, and equality (Fundación Mujer y Futuro, 2018b). In general, the foundation summarises its field of action as "activities of social development"[17], which comprise activities oriented toward peacebuilding (Fundación Mujer y Futuro, 2019, p 2). The director of FMF explains the peacebuilding component as a subtle, yet transversal issue across the above-mentioned strategic foci. "The perpetual work, peacebuilding, begins in the territories, and the first territory is the female body and their familial surroundings"[18] (interview 2, 17:45-17:57, author's translation). This definition of peace resonates with that of Royce Anderson (2004), stressing the importance of peace on the interpersonal and social level and its connection to peace on a higher, national level (ibid.). In the words of the director of FMF, "there is no peace in society if women continue to experience violence in their homes"[19] (interview 2, 17:20-17:25, author's translation).

For FMF, development cooperation is a vital resource. A revision of the foundation's 2019 report reveals that the annual budget of roughly one million euros entirely stems from international partners (Fundación Mujer y Futuro, 2020, p. 9). A founding member points out that development cooperation has played this crucial role since the foundation first started working: "In fact, [FMF] was able to begin working […] thanks to international cooperation"[20]

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[17] "Actividades de desarrollo social" (Fundación Mujer y Futuro, 2019, p. 2)
[18] "El trabajo de siempre, la construcción de paz que se empieza desde el territorio, y desde el primer territorio, que es el cuerpo de las mujeres y sus entornos familiares"
[19] "No hay paz en la sociedad si las mujeres siguen viviendo violencia dentro de los hogares"
[20] "De hecho [FMF] pudo empezar a trabajar […] gracias a la cooperación internacional"

(interview 6, 0:01:59-0:02:14, author's translation). The largest donor in 2019 was Oxfam International, followed by the German BftW, the US-based Inter-American Foundation, Open Society Foundations and the German Heinrich-Böll Foundation, in descending order (Fundación Mujer y Futuro, 2020, p. 9). Exploring FMF's relationship with each of these donors would exceed the scope of this paper. It is worth to be noted, however, that these organisations appear to span a wide political spectrum, ranging from liberal to green ideologies, which suggests that FMF cannot afford to be selective with its financially relevant partners. The analysis at hand will be focussed on BftW, which is the only organisation that engages in both financial and personnel cooperation with FMF.

BftW has been the main supporter of FMF for several years, granting uninterrupted financial cooperation since 2013. The director speaks of a "relationship that has been constructed"[21] (interview 2, 27:35-27:38, author's translation) over these years. The first and perhaps most important mode of cooperation has been financial, enabling the realisation of several projects and interventions that promote social transformation in FMF's target communities. More recently, the foundation has also been drawing on BftW's support to consolidate its institutional structures. In the context of this mode of cooperation, FMF has solicited a cooperant from the North for the first time. Between the decision to solicit a cooperant and her arrival in Colombia in late 2018, six years passed (interview 10). This delay appears to be due to a personnel turnover at FMF and issues with the foundation's internal archiving system (ibid.). Since the cooperant currently active at FMF is the first European cooperant to join the foundation, it is to be expected that her position is not clearly outlined yet. This circumstance should allow for observations on how a cooperant is first integrated into a local organisation's work routines.

4.1.2 The Network

The name of the second institution, as well as the German partner organisation is omitted in this paper by request of the interviewed cooperant. It will therefore be referred to as 'the network'.

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[21] "una relación que se ha venido construyendo"

It is indeed a network of organisations committed to the promotion of a democratic culture of participation, which it considers a crucial step towards a peaceful society. This understanding of peace endorses the concept of positive peace (Galtung, 1969; Anderson, 2004). The network began as a project administrated by Podion, a Colombian NGO, in 2003. The project was well received by many Colombian peace initiatives and has been functioning more independently since 2007. Today it comprises about 80 member organisations from Colombia's civil society, all working along five lines of action: (1) 'peacebuilding and peace pedagogy', (2) 'communication for social mobilisation', (3) 'claimability, protection and restoration of rights', (4) 'territorial and environmental appropriation and defence', and (5) 'democracy and citizenship construction'.

The network is organised in regional nodes, which facilitates a regionally differentiated approach. Each node allocates one coordinator and one communicator, who together form the national board of the network (see figure 3). One node coordinator additionally holds the office of the technical secretary, and one node communicator holds the office of the national communicator for the network. The board is completed by two youth representatives, the cooperant, an external communications expert and, on occasion, other external consultants (see figure 3). The national board appoints the technical secretary, who takes on most administrative tasks of the network that are supported by Podion. He has been an important interview partner in the investigation for this paper, speaking from his ample experience with the network since 2003. His position within the network, as all other charges with exception of the cooperant's, are on a voluntary basis, meaning that the board members do not receive any remuneration for their work.
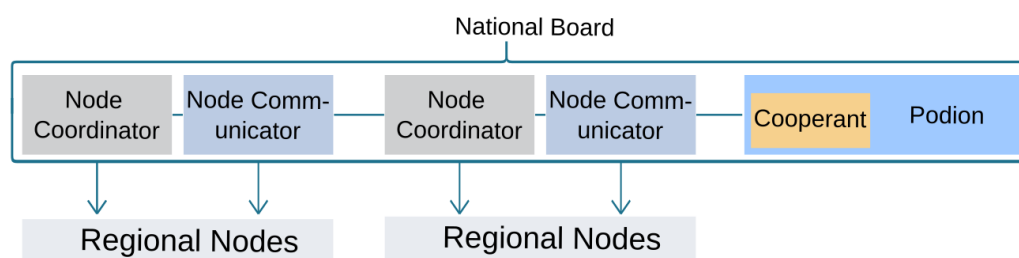

Figure 3: Organisational structure of the network.

Even after the network's undocking from Podion in 2007, the latter continues to hold an important function. Podion has been supporting and consulting local development initiatives of ecclesiastic and civil organisations and groups for over 30 years, cultivating close ties to German donors such as Misereor, BftW and Agiamondo. German resources were also the basis for the creation of the network, which to date continues to be financed by the CPS programme funded by the BMZ and catholic development agencies in Austria. Additionally, the network has also been supported with personnel from the year of its creation. The first Northern cooperant was deployed to the network in 2003 by a German agency that continues to provide personnel for the network until today. The funding for this mode of cooperation is provided by the German BMZ through the CPS. Podion was and continues to be the official receiving organisation of all cooperants deployed to consult and support the network, since the latter has never attained the status of a legal entity.

The cooperant who has been supporting the network since 2017 is a European citizen. He has professional experience in political advocacy work, as well as development cooperation both in the global North and South. Prior to his deployment to Colombia, he had no personal or professional antecedents in the country (interview 8).

From its hour of birth, the network was accompanied by European cooperants – in a certain way even before that. The first cooperant supported Podion in the process of building and consolidating the network, which then became a more permanent, yet still not formalised institution during the second cooperant's service in Colombia (interview 7). As a consequence, it is to be expected that the cooperant plays a more integral role in the network compared to the situation at FMF, where the cooperant's position has only recently been created. The observation of the Colombian-German team at the network can thus shed light on the social dynamics that evolve in a more consolidated relationship between a local organisation and a Northern cooperant.

4.2 Roles of the Cooperants in Their Respective Receiving Organisations

A cooperant's tasks and roles within their receiving organisation are not universally defined and must therefore be expected to differ between FMF and the network. However, there is a framework within which these tasks and roles are bound; this framework is set by the German

agencies that deploy personnel to the global South. Germany has been systematically deploying qualified personnel as cooperants since 1969. All missions have been regulated under the umbrella of the 'Development Worker Law' and implemented by different non-state organisations, such as BftW, in the case of FMF (BMZ, 2020b). The BMZ indicates that over 1500 cooperants are deployed each year (ibid.).

Cooperation with qualified personnel is based on a different logic than traditional forms of financial or technical assistance. This logic has been explored and put into writing by the *German Institute for Development Evaluation*[22] (DEval) in a large-scale study published in 2015 (Roxin et al., 2015). The study was conducted on behalf of the BMZ and takes into account the experiences of 37 implementing organisations of personnel cooperation. It is probably the most structured summary of what the implementing organisations consider an ideal model of personnel cooperation, illustrating its desired outcomes and impacts (see figure 4; Roxin et al., 2015, p. 10).

The general idea is that cooperants offer their professional and personal capacities to support the work of the receiving organisation in the partner country. Next to operative tasks – which only make up one fifth of the activities categorised by Roxin et al. – the cooperant is supposed to engage mostly in activities that build or improve the capacities of their receiving organisation. In theory, this should firstly strengthen the local organisation institutionally and within its political context. Secondly, the local organisation's target group should sustainably benefit from the cooperation in social, economic and cultural aspects. Thirdly, by extension of the target group's strengthening, society as a whole in the partner country should experience improvements of their living conditions (see figure 4). A somewhat parallel aspect of the programme theory that crystallises in the DEval study is concerned with the benefit for the development cooperation sector and civil society in Germany. For the purpose of this paper, however, this sphere shall be left aside.

For the receiving organisations, the model of personnel cooperation is attractive first and foremost because the cooperants are fully financed through the sending agencies. In addition to

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[22] Deutsches Evaluierungsinstitut der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit

the tangible benefit of having more personnel free of charge, the receiving organisations are also meant to benefit from the cooperant's outsider's perspective (see figure 4).
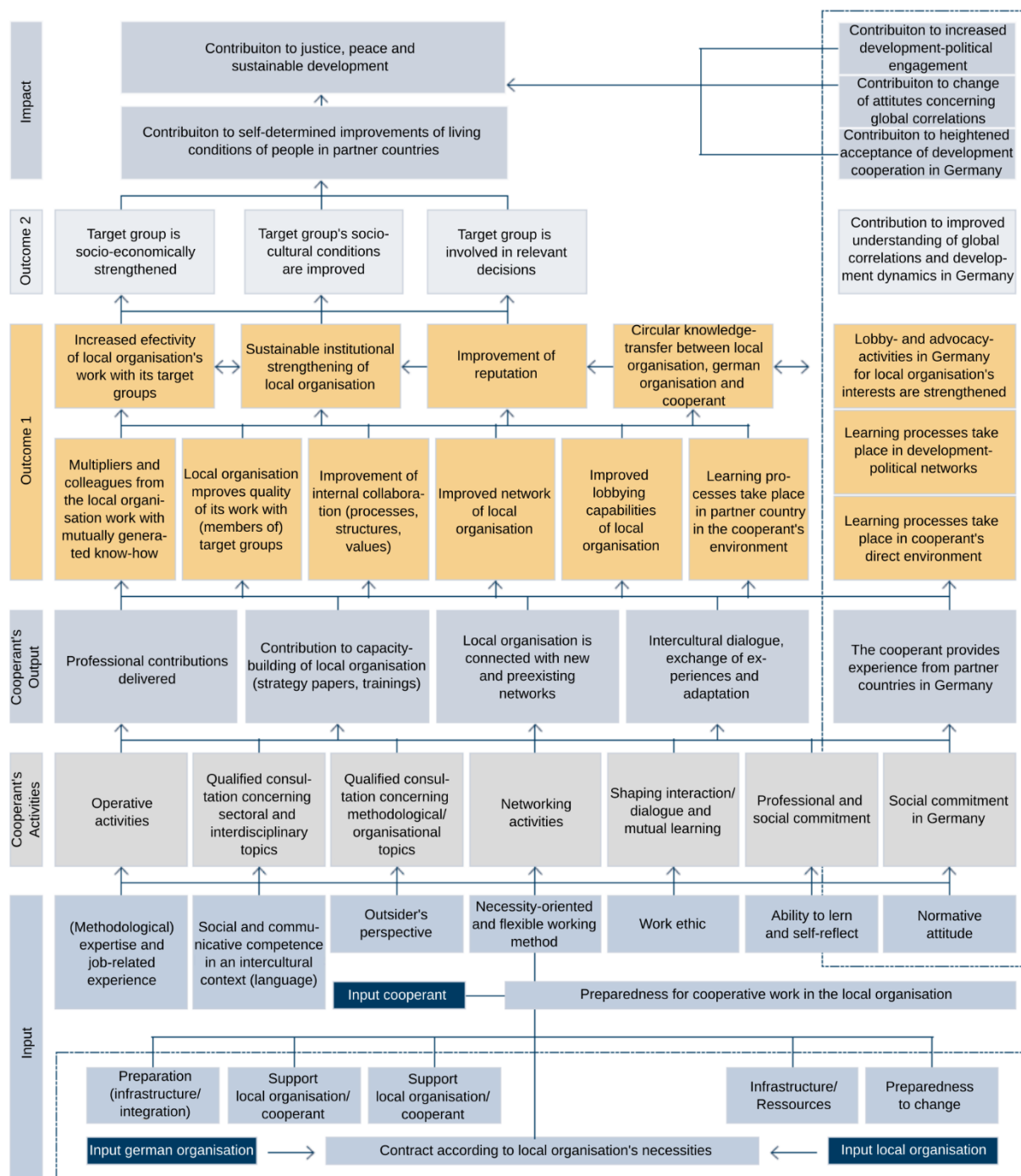

Figure 4: Programme Theory of German personnel cooperation. Adapted from Roxin et al., 2015, p. 11.
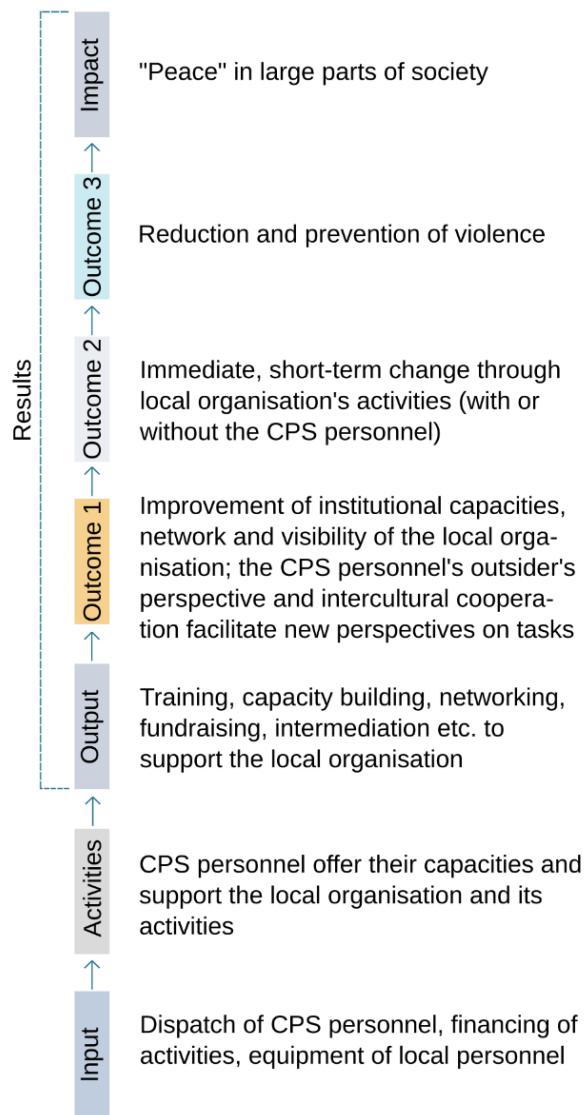
Figure 5: CPS Programme Theory. Adapted from Paffenholz et al., 2011, p. 9

Analogous to the larger scale programme theory of 'development workers' in their respective fields of influence, the evaluation of the CPS realised by Paffenholz et al. in 2011 introduces its own programme theory (see figure 5). This model resembles the previously described one both in form and content. One minor difference lies in a third level of outcomes that goes beyond the consequences of personnel cooperation considered in the DEval scheme. This third-level-outcome, the "reduction and prevention of violence" (see figure 5) is more specific to the CPS, but it does not challenge the logic of the programme theory for personnel cooperation in general. A qualified cooperant invests their abilities, and the outcomes is a sustainably strengthened local organisation, which can in turn better support its target group, which promotes the transformation of conflicts on a small scale and contributes to conflict transformation on a larger scale in the receiving country.

Having expounded the theoretical foundation of cooperants' roles and tasks, it is now time to turn to the two concrete examples chosen for this paper. First, the role and tasks of the cooperant at FMF shall be scrutinised.

4.2.1 The Cooperant's Role and Tasks at FMF

The tasks of the cooperant at FMF are contractually defined as (1) consulting in institutional development, (2) communication processes, and (3) fundraising from international institutions (interview 1). These assignments imply that the cooperant needs access to multiple organisational levels; communication processes are relevant both internally and externally, and institutional development can hardly be effective if it is limited to the foundation's executive suite without including the operative level. The cooperant's position in FMF's organisational structure reflects this; she reports to the direction but is also in contact with some of the project teams (see figure 2). The Cuso cooperant was qualified in communications, according to the BftW cooperant. However, their positions within FMF were not quite comparable; while the BftW cooperant works with the foundation' direction, the Cuso cooperant took on more operative functions (interview 11; see figure 2).

Particularly relevant for the analysis of the dynamics between Colombian and German staff in receiving organisations is the question who defines the cooperant's tasks. In the case of FMF, the answer is as complex as the triangular arrangement between FMF, BftW and the cooperant. In the process of soliciting a cooperant, receiving organisations generally solicit a specific profile. In this sense, and by defining their concrete necessities on the ground, receiving organisations make the first step in defining the eventual cooperant's tasks. The sending organisation then selects and trains a cooperant, usually without further consulting the receiving organisation (interview 8). BftW as sending organisation thus regulates the cooperant's tasks and functions in the receiving organisation to some extent.

The fact that both the sending and the receiving organisation define the tasks and functions of the cooperant at FMF results in some complications. One example of example for this is connected to the way BftW handles the deployment of cooperants and financial cooperation. The two modes are strictly separated, but organisations can receive both at the same time. The cooperant at FMF generally approves of this strategy because it obviates the concentration of financial power in her hands vis-à-vis the receiving organisation (interview 5). However, in her particular case she is sceptical about this rule because she considers it necessary to have an overview of FMF's finances in order to represent the foundation in negotiations with potential

donors (interview 5). In addition to this, the cooperant points out that working hand in hand with the foundation's director requires her to be involved in financial matters (ibid.). On the other hand, this clear division has helped to avoid potential conflicts of interest for the cooperant (interview 10).

Another example is that BftW makes it very clear that the cooperant's function is to *consult* the receiving organisation. This has caused some reluctance on the side of the cooperant when being asked to take on the task of social media communication for the foundation, which is a much more operative function (interview 5). She points out that in her first year in the institution she did not reject such tasks, but with more than half of her three-year-contract completed, she wants to focus on completing the tasks she was given by BftW (ibid.).

The previous examples expose that principles imposed by the sending organisation can be incompatible with local realities. However, the otherwise rather broad definition of the cooperant's tasks leaves some room for adjustment to local necessities. In fact, the cooperant at FMF reports that many of her current tasks are a result of her proactive engagement with her Colombian colleagues (interview 5). Within some guiderails, the tasks of the cooperant can thus develop in dialogue with the local staff of FMF.

The cooperant does not only fulfil tangible tasks in the receiving organisation, but also takes on a specific role. This certainly depends on the character of the cooperant just as much as on the local staff's openness to the cooperant's inputs. At FMF, the cooperant points out that the organisation can benefit from her outsider's perspective. She considers herself to be a critical voice in the otherwise often hasty process of decision making at FMF: "When it comes to turning something inside out, or to examine something, or considering alternatives, I am often the one [to do so]. And I think […] now they are stressed, because I am questioning something"[23] (interview 5, 0:57:29-0:57:50, author's translation). Here, the cooperant seems to endorse the programme theory delineated in the DEval study.

As much as the local staff must be open to the cooperant's point of view, the same has to be true vice versa. The cooperant asserts that she understands that her suggestions do not always

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[23] "Wenn's dann darum geht, nochmal was umzukrempeln, oder nochmal zu durchleuchten, oder nochmal ne Alternativen in Betracht zu ziehen bin ich da oft irgendwie diejenige. Und ich denke […] jetzt sind sie gerade angestrengt, weil ich was infrage stelle"

have priority in the foundation. In interview 10 she acknowledges that her ideas and proposals with the aim to internally strengthen the institution are of second order and that political and humanitarian work will – and should – remain FMF's priority. She stresses that her function as cooperant is not to lead, but to accompany the foundation in this work (interview 10). In practice, the cooperant specifies, this means to inspire innovation. However, the will to transform must come from within the receiving organisation (ibid., see figure 4).

4.2.2 The Cooperant's Role and Tasks at the Network

The three core tasks of the network's cooperant defined by the technical secretary diverge only slightly from those of the cooperant at FMF: (1) institutional strengthening on the national level, (2) strengthening the regional nodes and supporting their work, and (3) financial and logistical support for the activities of the network, such as its national and regional assemblies (interview 7). The first two points can be summarised as consulting tasks, while the third is of more operative character. Here, an important difference between the CPS and BftW's personnel programme must be pointed out. In contrast to the latter, the CPS combines direct and indirect financial support with the cooperant's 'soft' contributions in the receiving organisation. The direct contribution consists in a budget assigned to the cooperant deployed to the network and the receiving organisation. Besides this, one of the cooperant's tasks is to identify potential sources of funding for the network, which can be considered indirect financial support.

Each CPS cooperant deployed to the network signs a contract for three years, which several former cooperants have extended for another three years with prior approval of the receiving organisation (interview 7). The network's technical secretary estimates that on average a cooperant stays with the network for about six years, which gives them more than enough time to overcome initial difficulties that are common in each new work environment and can be expected to be even more challenging in the culturally diverse network. The technical secretary has observed that the cooperants' productivity tends to increase over time; he estimates that the first year is mostly devoted to building up the relationship of mutual trust among the network and the cooperant (interview 7). These observations are confirmed by the cooperant at FMF (interview 5).

Among the specific tasks of the network's cooperant are political advocacy and the promotion of the member organisations' visibility (interview 7.). Throughout the accompaniment of the network, the cooperant cannot expect to interact with each member organisation, but mostly with the national and regional representatives (ibid.). The national board comes together in the annual general assembly and two national board meetings each year, one per semester. Adding the biannual regional node meetings, this amounts to 15 annual meetings for the cooperant, although the cooperant points out that reality does not always coincide with this schedule. Regular phone and e-mail contact with the national and regional organs of the network top off the cooperant's duties.

Besides the CPS cooperant's tangible support of the network, the technical secretary mentions some more abstract advantages that the network can gain through personnel cooperation. For instance, he claims that the network's members who are in regular dialogue with the cooperant can learn professional skills from him (interview 7). Therefore, he explains, the network has specifically been looking for cooperants who have qualifications that are not found easily locally (ibid.). Here, the technical secretary seems to agree with the statement found in Paffenholz et al., according to which "German cooperants introduce qualifications, knowledge and resources that are not available locally" (2011, p. 3). He focusses on the added value provided by cooperants, passing over the Eurocentric undertones of the statement.

The technical secretary's assessment of the qualities that are unique to European cooperants must be taken with a grain of salt. It seems unreasonable to assume that the vibrant academic landscape of Colombia would not produce professionals who are competent and willing to fulfil the tasks now entrusted to the CPS cooperant. However, there is a set of advantages that Northern cooperants do have over their potential local competition for the job. Firstly, their familiarity with the donors' culture can facilitate the inter-institutional communication and pave the way for sustained financial cooperation. Secondly the cooperant's personal and professional network can be of use for the receiving organisation and enable relationships with new partner institutions. Last, but certainly not least, the receiving organisation does not need to bear the personnel cost for cooperants who are deployed and financed by foreign agencies – a key factor for many small or medium sized non-profit organisations in the global South.

The technical secretary states that the network has accommodated cooperants with different profiles in different ways (interview 7). He recalls a former cooperant's expertise in educational matters, which helped establish an online platform for seminars and workshops accessible not only for the network's member organisations, but open to a wider range of organisations (ibid.). The current cooperant, in contrast, is more proficient in the optimisation of institutional structures and dynamics, so his main tasks have been defined differently. These different profiles are not coincidental, as the technical secretary points out (ibid.). As with BftW, all requests for CPS cooperants include a profile formulated by the network according to its specific needs. The regional representatives are involved in the formulation of these profiles, so that the solicited cooperant can address the needs of the network on its multiple levels.

One noteworthy difference to the above-described process of soliciting a BftW cooperant is that Podion, the official receiving organisation of the network's cooperant, is consulted during the selection process. This is simply due to the long-standing personal relationship of Podion's director with the German implementing/sending organisation of CPS cooperants. In any regular case, however, the selection and training process for CPS cooperants is beyond the receiving organisations' sphere of influence.

Some insiders of German personnel cooperation are critical of this practice, acknowledging that professional qualification is not the only factor for successful personnel cooperation. For instance, Agiamondo's[24] personnel service director M. Detscher has pointed out that "[p]eople are often selected because of their professionalism – and if they are dismissed, it is for reasons of personality" (2019). In practice, however, the agency tends to prefer the convenience of not including the receiving 'partners' in its decisions. One of the cooperants notes that European sending agencies often are prone to take most cooperation-related decisions at their headquarter, despite invoking the importance of the cooperation principle 'among equals'. The selection criteria for cooperants usually comprise professional aptitude, social competences, and the financial and familial situation (Konsortium Ziviler Friedensdienst, 2016; Roxin et al., 2015, p. 134). Intercultural competence does not seem to be a criterion of its own; it is assumed that

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[24] One of the sending agencies evaluated in the DEval study and one of nine official implementing agencies of the CPS.

essential skills and competences in this field can be imparted during the cooperants' preparation (ibid.).

4.3 Dynamics Among Cooperants and Local Staff

Before the background of the institutional and regulatory framework of the personnel cooperation at FMF and the network, the observed and reported dynamics within each institution can be analysed. Self-perceived and manifested characteristics of the relationships have been gathered in the individual conversations with cooperants and their superiors. They are complemented by the researcher's observations during group interviews and participant observations. Combined, this data grants insights into the cooperant's sense of belonging to their receiving organisations and the relationships between the local staff and the cooperants.

4.3.1 Dynamics Among Cooperants and Local Staff at FMF

At FMF, the relatively small size of the organisation allows for plenty of personal interaction among the staff. Within the foundation, several sub-groups can be identified: Firstly, the senior members, who have been working together for more than 30 years and have the last word in the foundation's decisions as the 'board of directors'. Secondly, the project teams, which seem to spend the most time together, collaborating in emotionally involving activities which are likely to strengthen personal bonds among them (interviews 2, 3, 4). The cooperant is faced with the challenge to integrate herself into these groups in order to fulfil her task of accompanying the foundation. FMF has been working and expanding without the support of a cooperant until 2018 – for 30 years – and some of the Colombian personnel do not seem to have a clear idea of the cooperant's functions (interview 5).

The cooperant is very interested in the researcher's perception of her role in FMF. She makes an interesting comment regarding her position relative to the foundation: "… since I am no longer external – well, officially I am external, but after one and a half years, and everything I have done with them …"[25] (interview 5, 0:58:38-0:58:47, author's translation). This statement is indicative of the cooperant's self-perception, which is somewhere in between being part of

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[25] "… dadurch, dass ich ja nicht mehr externe bin – klar, offiziell bin ich extern, aber, nach anderthalb Jahren, und was ich alles mit denen gemacht habe …"

FMF and being a purposefully external consultant. Interestingly, she does not use the first-person plural when speaking about her shared experiences with 'them'.

In the context of her integration into FMF, the cooperant states that FMF is "an NGO [with] more than 30 women, all 'alphas', all very powerful, […] all with a qualification in their area, […] educational or personal, each person has their qualifications. So, to integrate means, in the first instance, […] to walk with them in each moment, and in a way … in the way I am, in the way I do things"[26] (interview 10, 0:44:00-0:44:58, author's translation). The cooperant's appreciation of her Colombian colleagues seems sincere, and she underlines that she does not consider herself superior to them: "When there is a visitor, I am the first to make some coffee, I have no problem with that"[27] (interview 10, 0:44:59-0:45:04, author's translation).

The cooperant's disposition to work with and for her Colombian colleagues is probably the most important contribution to a cooperative and equal relationship from her side. The foundation's director recognises and appreciates the cooperant's commitment (interview 2). She characterises the cooperant as "very sensible, she comprehends the organization's dynamics"[28] (interview 2, 37:56-38:04, author's translation). In fact, the cooperant seems to maintain a friendly relationship with her Colombian colleagues. Before the official beginning of the general assembly on June 1st (participant observation 1) as well as in the 'Gender Justice' project team meeting on the following day (participant observation 2) she initiates casual conversations, joking and laughing with her colleagues. During their reports, the cooperant appears to be listening actively, occasionally reacting emphatically. This shows, for instance, when she recapitulates one of the reports to assure that she has understood the message (participant observation 1, 1:25:08-1:25:27).

However, another communicative situation that arises during the general assembly displays a different facet of the interactions between the cooperant and the director of FMF. About one and a half hours into the general assembly the director proposes a 15-minute break. The

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[26] "una ONG [con] más de treinta mujeres, todas 'alfas', todas muy poderosas, […] todas con una cualificación en su área, […] de educación o personalmente, cada persona tiene sus cualificaciones. Entonces integrar[se] significa en el primer momento […] caminar con ellas en cada momento, y en una forma de … como yo soy, como yo hago las cosas."
[27] "Si viene un visitante, yo soy la primera que hace el café, no tengo problema con eso"
[28] "supremamente sensible, comprende las dinámicas de la organización"

cooperant intervenes with a short remark on the previous project group report. She recommends a local radio station that has uttered its commitment to work with local women's initiatives, implying that the project group should look no further and use the existing offer. The foundation's director interrupts her: "… and there is also [another potential ally]. Well, if you agree – if you agree – we will take this five-minute break, and we come back to talking about cross-sectional topics. [Addressing the cooperant:] I propose to you that one of those topics will be communication, ok? And we will take a quick look at it"[29] (participant observation 1, 1:27:47-1:28:04, author's translation).

When the 'communication' topic is finally brought up again – one and a half hours later – the director offers the cooperant a space to share her thoughts and observations of the strategy employed by the 'Gender Justice' project team. The latter suggest discussing the topic in the project team meeting scheduled for the following day, indicating that it is rather complex. The foundation's director seems surprised, saying that she thought the cooperant wanted to share her observations. The cooperant carefully points to the time – the assembly had been going on for over three hours at this point – but finally shares her opinion on the project's communication strategy.

In the observed situation, the cooperant appears to encounter difficulty in making herself heard in team discussions, which over time is likely to turn into a feeling of not being taken seriously. On a rational level the cooperant acknowledges that it is natural for FMF to prioritise the work with its target groups over taking measures for its institutional strengthening. On an emotional level the mutual interruptions with the director may point to a latent conflict between them. However, the virtual format of the interaction must be taken into account here, since the director in her function as moderator does not have more subtle alternatives to take back the lead in the video conference.

In a posterior individual interview, the cooperant confirms that she had felt like she was not given enough space in the general assembly (interview 5). She explains that her points are usually discussed at the end of the session. Incidentally, the cooperant herself proposed this

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[29] "… y también está [another potential ally]. Pues, si les parece, si les parece, hacemos estos cinco minutos de receso y volvemos a tomar temas trasversales. [Addressing the cooperant:] Te propongo que uno de los temas trasversales sea comunicación, ¿sí?, y lo miramos rápidamente […]"

agenda for assemblies. However, she observes that the first points on the agenda are often discussed at such length that her points tend to be cut short, especially in the unfamiliar video conference setting (ibid.). There seems to be some resistance against the cooperant's suggestions and her proactive efforts to engage with her Colombian colleagues, notwithstanding the fact that this is precisely the task she was hired for.

Throughout the observed interactions between the cooperant and her Colombian colleagues, two more situations arise that replicate the previously described dynamic. The cooperant makes suggestions or propositions that are met with little more than cautious non-rejection. The second incident concerns the possibility of applying for additional funding for Covid-19 related expenditures. It is brought up by the cooperant in the general assembly (participant observation 1) and the subsequent 'Gender Justice' project team assembly (participant observation 2). When asked directly about her proposal to solicit additional funds from BftW, the cooperant specifies that the general assembly (participant observation 1) had not been the first occasion for her to make this suggestion (interview 5). She points to her work experience with German donors of development cooperation and insists that the funds *are* available.

The cooperant seems frustrated about the fact that her Colombian colleagues do not seem to trust her qualified opinion. She concludes that "they have not quite understood"[30] (interview 5, 0:20:21, author's translation) that she has inside knowledge about the structures of German development cooperation. She adds that she has gotten quite used to the hesitant reception of her suggestions. "I have observed this often now: Many things are refused, […] and one month later you hear about it again, and it is done anyway"[31] (interview 5, 1:04:48-1:05:00, author's translation).

The third incident comes up in interview 10, when a dialogue develops between a former director and founding member of FMF and the cooperant. The cooperant reports that in internal evaluations, the Colombian staff of FMF has repeatedly asked for improved self-protection in the face of stressful and potentially traumatising experiences in their work with victims of gender violence. The cooperant points out that she has suggested several measures in response

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[30] "haben die noch nicht so richtig verstanden"
[31] "Das habe ich jetzt auch oft beobachtet: Vieles wird abgelehnt […] und einen Monat später begegnet dir das wieder, dann wird es doch gemacht"

to this, such as collective meditation. In her opinion these measures are crucial to strengthen the foundation, which is one of her core tasks. However, the suggestions were met with limited enthusiasm, and the cooperant expresses the suspicion that most colleagues only participated to do her a favour. The former director agrees with her that this should not be the motivation to participate in the activities. The cooperant suggests introducing future measures as compulsory activity through the foundation's direction. In her view, the implementation of self-protection activities is "a process of first changing their [her colleagues'] mindset"[32] (interview 10, 1:08:47-1:08:53, author's translation) – they have to understand that it is for their own good.

The cooperant specifies that she would like self-protection activities to be institutionalised, despite the additional bureaucratic effort this implies. She continues to describe her attempts to establish the measures in her colleagues' routines. Her first idea, regular sessions once a week, was not compatible with the project teams' irregular work schedule. The second proposal was to organise sessions in continuous coordination with the different schedules and to ask for personal contributions to cover the increased cost of the measures generated by this process, which was not met with approval either. The cooperant's diagnose is that planning ahead does not resonate with 'Colombian culture' due to a higher level of uncertainty about the future (interview 10). Likewise, she considers critical thinking and thoroughly examining things to be part of her role in the foundation, which she also ascribes to cultural differences (interview 5).

This spontaneous interaction sheds light on at least two interesting implications of North-South personnel cooperation. Firstly, it becomes clear that between a suggestion and an imposition there are several gradations. In principle, the cooperant acts according to her contractually defined function when she proposes the compulsory participation in self-protection measures. They can be considered an aspect of institutional strengthening, which is her first task as cooperant, and the staff of FMF has reportedly manifested the need for such activities. In response, the cooperant has drafted measures to the best of her abilities and tried to implement them in multiple ways as voluntary activities. Making participation in these activities mandatory seems to be the last alternative to discarding the whole idea.

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[32] "un proceso de primero cambiar el chip en su mente"

What makes this step problematic, however, is the fact that the cooperant finds herself in a position that allows her to modify the foundation's institutional policy. She could, in theory, use this authority to force something on the foundation's staff that has not resonated with them on a voluntary basis. Secondly, the cooperant's theory about cultural differences as the reason for the lack of demand for her suggestion reveals a difficult pitfall. Regardless of one's position in the debate about national cultures, something about this statement seems off. In this situation, it cannot be discarded that the cultural background of FMF's staff has some effect on the behaviour experienced by the cooperant's, and it might even be considered plausible. However, such a line of thought can be misleading in other situations, where the actual reason for the non-approval of a suggestion made by the cooperant may have very different reasons. Since there is no way to say with certainty what really is due to culture and what is due to personal or situational factors, this explanation is not reliable.

The senior member of FMF agrees with the cooperant's cultural-difference-theory, which indicates that the argument itself has not caused any harm. However, if this leads to the conclusion that the best way to overcome the 'Colombian aversion to planning ahead' is to force things onto them, this will most certainly not be in the interest of the staff of FMF. This example illustrates the slippery slope of merely cultural explanations of people's behaviour, as well as the potential unintended consequences of arguments based on this line of thought.

These reflections are not meant to incriminate the cooperant at FMF in any way. In the further course of the interview, she clearly says that she makes *suggestions* to the foundation, or its direction, which will then decide on the issue. However, this anecdote should illustrate that European cooperants in the global South can easily find themselves in delicate situations where 'the right' attitude may not be obvious. Subliminal ideas of cultural superiority, either fostered by the cooperant or by local staff, can induce courses of action that go against the idea of *accompanying* and turn into *patronising*.

Among the Colombian personnel, the foundation's director acts as the cooperant's supervisor. In an individual interview with her it becomes clear that she is aware of the cooperant's frustration in the initial phase of her work at FMF; she states that she knows "that she [the

cooperant] expects more of us, but we are content with what she has been able to offer us"[33] (interview 2, 40:36-40:46, author's translation). Throughout all interviews, regardless of the cooperant's presence or absence, the Colombian staff of FMF speak well of her. There are no signs that might indicate that they are anything but sincere in their praise.

Before the cooperant's arrival at FMF, some members of the foundation seem to have had doubts about this mode of development cooperation. Apart from practical concerns, such as the language barrier, the director of FMF recalls that some of her colleagues were worried about having a representative of BftW, a crucial financial supporter, inside the foundation (interview 2). There were concerns about the intercultural challenge implied by personnel cooperation and reluctance to the idea that someone with a different cultural background would "intervene in a totally different world […] regarding the political and social context"[34] (interview 2, 0:34:35-0:34:50, author's translation). The director repeatedly points out that these were prejudices prior to the cooperant's arrival, not judgements of her actual work in the foundation. The cooperant's statements in interview 6 substantiates that her allegiance is with FMF; since her deployment to Colombia she has not been in direct contact with BftW. However, she takes on a mediating role, arbitrating between the perspectives of FMF as a local organisation and that of international donors. She points out that development cooperation implies a "mutual approach"[35] (interview 6, 1:29:55, author's translation), and that international donors find themselves in a process of constant readjustment, just like local organisation.

Even if most of the Colombian staff's initial doubts have dissipated throughout the one and a half years of cooperation, the disclosure of these concerns is relevant in two ways: Firstly, it might explain why the cooperant continues to be met with curbed enthusiasm despite her continuous and sincere effort to engage with the foundation and its staff. Secondly, it exposes a potential flaw in the research design of the present paper. After all, the researcher shares the cooperant's 'totally different' cultural background, and if the staff of the foundation has been hesitant with her, there is no reason why they should be unbiased towards a German researcher. This becomes quite evident in interviews 2 and 6, in both of which the director of FMF is

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[33] "que ella espera mucho más de nosotras, pero nosotras estamos contentas con lo que ella ha podido ofrecernos"
[34] "interviniendo en un mundo totalmente diferente […] en cuanto al contexto político y social"
[35] "acercarse"

noticeably hesitant to pronounce the term 'Eurocentrism'. In interview 6 this might be explained by the cooperant's presence, but in interview 2, the only conceivable factor is the researcher's 'Europeanness'. This must be considered at the moment of evaluating the interviews with Colombian staff of FMF and the network.

4.3.2 Dynamics Among Cooperants and Local Staff at The Network

One observation to begin with is how the network's technical secretary and the cooperant respond, in separate interviews, to the question of how many member organisations the network comprises. The technical secretary indicates that it is "slightly more than 100 organisations, some more active than others"[36] (interview 7, 0:03:04- 0:03:08, author's translation). The cooperant, in contrast, estimates the number of active member organisations at 85, of which about 40 continuously contribute to the network's activities, roughly 20 contribute from time to time and the remainder is described as rather passive (interview 8). These diverging statements offer a glimpse of the differences between the technical secretary's and the cooperant's different attitudes in the interviews. The latter seems to be realistic and transparent about the network's structures, while the former displays more optimism, perhaps even euphemism. These tendencies are corroborated throughout the group interview with both of them and will be taken into account in the evaluation of further statements.

As to the cooperant's degree of identification with the network, there is no clear indication. He mentions that he shares a considerable amount of responsibility for the programme, which requires a level of trust he has been able to build over time with the network's direction (interview 8). The technical director, when asked about his perception of the cooperants that have been supporting the network, states that "*they come* to strengthen the work that *we* do"[37] (interview 7, 0:28:23-0:28:47, author's translation, emphasis added). Given the cooperant's limited direct interaction with most of the Colombian members of the network, this expression of distance between him and his Colombian colleagues is not surprising. The cooperant himself comes to the same conclusion on his position within, or perhaps without the network, stating that other cooperants who are deployed to a more consolidated team are more likely to be treated

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[36] "algo más de cien organizaciones, unas más activas que otras"
[37] "vienen a fortalecer el trabajo que tenemos nosotros

like ordinary team members rather than being granted the autonomy that he enjoys (interview 8).

Participant observations during assemblies or larger reunions of the network were not possible. This is partly due to the fact that the cooperant does not interact with his Colombian colleagues as regularly and closely as the cooperant at FMF. Hence, the observations of social dynamics between the cooperant and his Colombian colleagues are limited to interview 9, in which both the cooperant and the network's technical secretary take part. In this setting, it is likely that the participants are more aware of the interviewer's presence and function, which may make for less authentic interactions among them. Nevertheless, some relevant observations can be retrieved from this interview, as well as from the individual interviews with the technical secretary and the cooperant.

In the aforementioned group interview, the cooperant exhibits a proactive attitude. To open questions that are not expressly addressed at either of the two, he tends to answer first. On several occasions he speaks up first, but instead of leading with his opinion, he encourages the technical secretary to answer first (interview 9). Similarly, the cooperant repeatedly encourages the technical secretary to complement or correct his statements, pointing out that the latter looks back on 15 years of experience with the network as opposed to the three years he himself has spent with the institution. This behaviour shows consideration for his colleague's opinion, which appears to be sincere, but at the same time it lets the cooperant moderate and guide the conversation. Throughout the interview, however, the technical secretary's share of speaking time surpasses the cooperant's by about 50% (interview 9, 9.2).

When the technical secretary brings up that between 2015 and 2017, when the network was without a cooperant, he had assisted in more regional meetings, the present cooperant intervenes with a question. He enquires whether the technical secretary would like to continue participating in these meetings, making clear that his presence should not be an impediment for the secretary's attendance (interview 9). This intervention indicates that the cooperant is rather mindful of how his presence may affect the local staff's routines, and he makes an honest effort to not affect them negatively.

The relationship between the cooperant and the technical secretary is respectful and seems to be shaped by a mutual appreciation (interviews 7, 8, 9). During the interviews conducted for this paper, no other relations between other Colombian staff and the cooperant could be observed. However, the cooperant recounts one disagreement with a Colombian colleague that went on for several months and apparently did not come to a satisfying conclusion for either of them. The contentious issue, according to the cooperant's narrative, was an overlap in both parties' perceptions of their respective functions in the network. However, the cooperant suspects that the conflict had other dimensions beside the professional.

> "I think it is not easy when you arrive as a foreigner, male, tall, and there you have a person, [female] Colombian, she is already there – you are new – she is already there, […] she is a woman, she is Colombian; this introduces a somewhat other dynamic, honestly speaking"[38] (interview 8, 0:19:21-0:19:42, author's translation).

Three features, or factors, can be identified in this conflict: disagreement in professional matters, gender, and culture. Knowing only one side of the conflict, a more in-depth analysis is hardly feasible. The anecdote does illustrate, however, the overlapping dimensions of conflicts that can arise in development cooperation with personnel. In his account of the situation, the cooperant highlights the intercultural aspect of the conflict. In interview 9, he and the technical secretary mention cultural differences, on the one hand in the context of the Colombian staff's interaction with the cooperant, and on the other hand across the different regions that are represented in the network. Despite their observations and remarks on interculturality, the issue has never been addressed internally (interview 9.2).

The cooperant remarks that he does not see the explicit need for this conversation because he considers the members of the network to be respectful of cultural differences and united through their commitment to a shared cause (interview 9.2). Drawing any definitive conclusions from the limited insights into the network and its functioning about the cooperant's evaluation would be premature. It shall be noted, however, that in the interviews that were conducted with the network's staff, the cultural diversity that comes with development cooperation appeared to be

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[38] "Ich glaube es ist nicht einfach wenn du als Ausländer, Mann, großgewachsen, kommst, und dann hast du eine Person, Kolumbianerin, die ist schon da – du bist neu auch – die ist schon da, […] die ist eine Frau, die ist Kolumbianerin; da kommt ganz ehrlich gesagt auch so ein bisschen eine andere Dynamik rein"

regarded more as a difficulty than as potential. In this assessment, they coincide with the local and foreign staff of FMF.

In the group interview with the network, an interesting discussion arises from the question whether 'cooperation among equals' can really take place in North-South development cooperation. On the surface, it seems that both the cooperant and the technical secretary are not only convinced that this form of cooperation is theoretically possible, but also that the cooperation in the network is of such nature. The technical secretary affirms that "[vis-à-vis] the cooperant and the entities that support [us], we see ourselves as partners. […]. This has helped for the cooperation to be more horizontal"[39] (interview 7, 0:27:16-0:27:40, author's translation). The cooperant points out that "sometimes one wants it to be among equals, but the systemic reality is configured in a way that does not let us reach a cooperation among equals yet, be it internal or external"[40] (interview 9.2, 0:11:43-0:11:56, author's translation). In most cases, however, he sees himself as a consultant "on a par"[41] (interview 8, 0:02:45, author's translation) with his Colombian colleagues. The cooperant and the technical secretary of the network agree that the most important factors for equality are the approach and the values of the involved institutions and individuals (interview 9).

The potential effects of instances of cooperation which lack these attributes are not unknown to the cooperant and the technical secretary. The former recalls an incident in which he was personally confronted with the staff of one of the network's member organisations who did not consider themselves to be on par with him. During a workshop held in a rural area, the attendants kept referring to him as 'doctor'. He describes the situation as follows: "There is a North-South dynamic which makes me quite uncomfortable. […] There is this discrepancy … and I like to work with equals, and I try to pronounce that we are equals, I am not a doctor, don't call me doctor"[42] (interview 9.2, 0:03:53-0:04:31, author's translation). In the cooperant's experience, this perceived distance between him and local colleagues is most pronounced in

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[39] "[frente] al cooperante y a las entidades que apoyan nos vemos como socios. […] Eso ha ayudado a que la relación sea más horizontal"
[40] "A veces uno quiere que sea entre iguales, pero la realidad sistémica […] está configurada de una manera que aún no llegamos a una cooperación entre iguales, sea interna o externa"
[41] "auf gleicher Augenhöhe"
[42] "hay una dinámica Norte-Sur que a mí me incomoda bastante. […] Hay como esa discrepancia … y a mí me gusta trabajar con iguales, e intento pronunciar que somos iguales, yo no soy doctor, no me digan doctor."

rural areas. He interprets his experience of an example of the centre-periphery gap (interview 9.2).

The technical secretary of the network recalls a similar experience, where colleagues from a rural area did not consider themselves equal partners to him, despite their shared nationality. He endorses the cooperant's theory, claiming that the perceived power asymmetry grows with increasing distance from the urban centres of Colombia. His explanation for this phenomenon is the long-lived political centralism in Colombia, which he believes to have left a durable imprint on the rural population's self-perception. He therefore stresses the cultural aspect of perceived or expected power asymmetries (interview 9.2). In the further course of the interview, the technical secretary adds that the same perceived chasm can also be encountered within urban areas. Even within the network, the cooperant points out that the parity between national and regional representatives is not always given (ibid.).

These examples of self-ascribed inferiority encountered in rural areas of Colombia demonstrate that domination is not necessarily a top-down mechanism. It can just as well function the other way around, when the disadvantaged party internalises its alleged inferiority to the representatives of the centre, the North, the West, or whatever it may be called. For this internalisation and subsequent self-subordination to happen, the asymmetric relationship must have persisted for an extended period. Today's development cooperation did not come into existence out of a vacuum of relations. It evolved through various stages, some of which were clearly paternalistic (see the introduction to development theory in section 2.1). But the relations between the North and South date back much further, to times when they did not claim to aspire 'development', but to 'civilise'. The long and continuous history of German involvement in Colombia calls for the consideration of colonialism and its legacy in modern development cooperation (García Estrada, 2006).

In fact, the issue of colonial legacy comes up in the conversation with the network's technical secretary and the cooperant. The latter mentions its relevance for the perceived power asymmetries in Colombia and other countries of the global South today. He remarks that there is "a very strong discourse"[43] (interview 9.2, 0:06:52-0:06:54, author's translation) around

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[43] "es un discurso muy fuerte"

colonialism in Latin America. In his personal experience, this has meant that some people meet him with mistrust and confront him with claims for reparations that the North owes to the South (interview 9.2). The cooperant reflects on the allegation that the North continues to impose concepts of development from its Eurocentric stance and acknowledges that this criticism must be kept in mind in the process of structuring development cooperation (ibid.).

The cooperant stresses that he believes that self-reflection and identity play a significant role in how contemporary development cooperation deals with its colonial legacy. He points out that "there are some actors who are more conscious, some actors who push, who pronounce that more needs to be done, like … pay, settle the existing debt"[44] (interview 9.2, 0:29:02-0:29:17, author's translation). This resistance to North-South cooperation, based on the historic injustices that overshadow the relations in some cases, is a major challenge to today's development cooperation, according to the cooperant. However, he seems convinced that this obstacle can be overcome by intensifying development cooperation and by promoting the dialogue between Northern agencies and Southern organisations. In doing so, he postulates, a rapprochement of the two sides could be achieved, increasing the understanding for local needs on the one side and decreasing mistrust on the other.

This stance appears to be based on the assumption that power asymmetries between North and South, East and West, centre and periphery, are a thing of the past, and no longer present in contemporary development cooperation as long as the involved organisations and individuals have the right approach, despite his above-cited critique of the "systemic reality" within which these actors find themselves. The cooperant's personal opinion on calls for reparations shines through his statement that some organisations from the global South are too insistent on the colonial debt (interview 9.2). The network's Colombian technical secretary seems to endorse this parenthesis rather than the previous statement, pointing out that more radical positions oftentimes obstruct the work of organisations in the global South. He advocates for "overcoming those […] radical discourses of some organisations"[45] (interview 9.2, 0:31:23-

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[44] "hay algunos actores que están más conscientes, algunos actores que empujan, que lo pronuncian, […] que hay que hacer más, como … retribuir, […] saldar la deuda existente.
[45] "superar esos discursos […] radicales de algunas organizaciones"

0:31:31, author's translation). He clearly does not endorse the definition of development cooperation as "transformative reparation" (Uprimny-Yepes and Guzmán-Rodríguez, 2010).

In general, the technical secretary is more careful in taking an explicit stance on the colonial legacy of development cooperation and its significance for the network's cooperation with Northern agencies today. He mentions that content and shape of cooperation used to be determined by the Northern agencies. However, "the relationship with the agencies has been facilitated, and it is no longer seen that the agencies impose things to the same extent, instead they are the product of a negotiation"[46] (interview 9.2, 0:27:57-0:28:12, author's translation). His statement can be interpreted in different ways. Of course, he might just be convinced that contemporary development cooperation is mostly free of power imbalances. Considering the previously addressed euphemistic tendencies of the technical secretary and the fact that he speaks in the presence of the cooperant and the interviewer – both of which he possibly sees as representatives of the global North – the positive evaluation of North-South development cooperation might be a product of conscious restraint on his part. An observation of the cooperant substantiates this interpretation:

> "[T]he donors have a great responsibility because they, with regards to the funds – let's be honest – have a lot of influence, right? And there is a power asymmetry sometimes, it must be said, because those who depend on the funds, well sometimes they do not dare to speak out everything. There are some who are very empowered and they do it, and this is good, it is correct, [but] there are others who also depend strongly who do not dare, […] they do not want to clash with the donor"[47] (interview 9.2, 0:29:53-0:30:16, author's translation).

Therefore, the cooperant concludes that Northern partners in development cooperation bear the additional responsibility to reflect on the mode of cooperation, even if it is not explicitly solicited by their Southern counterparts. He adds that the receiving side shares the responsibility

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[46] "Se fue facilitando ese relacionamiento con las agencias, y ya no se ve tanto como que las agencias imponen las cosas, sino que es el producto de una negociación"

[47] "los donantes tienen una gran responsabilidad, porque ellos, con el tema de fondos – seamos sinceros – influyen mucho, ¿no? Y hay una asimetría de poder a veces, hay que decirlo, porque él que depende de los fondos, pues a veces no se atreve a decir todas las cosas. Hay unos que están muy empoderados y lo hacen, y es bueno, es lo correcto, hay otros que también dependen mucho que no se permiten, […] no quieren chocar con el donante"

for dealing with the colonial elephant between them, since cooperation must be constructed collectively (interview 9.2).

There are cases in which Northern organisations live up to this ideal of shared responsibility by consulting Southern organisations and adapting their strategies to local necessities. The network's technical secretary was invited to participate in a German donor's evaluation, the results of which determined which regions and aspects the CPS should focus on (interview 9.2).

The cooperant welcomes this practice, pointing out that the more intense the dialogue, the better Southern organisations can get to know the structures of their Northern counterparts. His experience with Podion, a well-established Colombian organisation in close contact with several German development agencies, shows that this knowledge is crucial for mastering to manoeuvre the structures of German institutions. "I see that [the director of Podion] already knows a lot about the dynamic of cooperation in Europe, therefore he knows very well how to navigate this system, he knows the rules"[48] (interview 9.2, 0:10:12-0:10:23, author's translation). This observation is interesting in two ways: On the one hand, it confirms the theory that with a sustained dialogue, more doors are opened for Southern organisations. On the other hand, it exposes that even 30 years of such dialogue do not give the Southern 'partners' a significant say in the *making* of the rules, so apparently the most that Southern institutions can hope for is to see through them and find ways to benefit from that.

It is evident that an equal relationship between sending and receiving institutions cannot simply be achieved by sustaining a long-time cooperation. On the personal level, the same seems to be true. Even though the network has been supported by CPS cooperants since its creation, some of its Colombian members continue to put the cooperant on a pedestal. The cooperant himself engages in a critical reflection on his role, which certainly marks an important step towards overcoming colonial undertones in development cooperation. The confrontation with 'partners' who uphold the idea of the inferior South seems to have precipitated this thought process. Personnel cooperation enables such thought-provoking encounters with the staff of partner organisations in the global South, which substantiate the sending agencies' declared goal of

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[48] "[El director Podion] lo veo que mucho entiende ya cómo funciona la dinámica en Europa en temas de cooperación, por eso él se sabe mover muy bien dentro de este sistema, y conoce las reglas"

"contribut[ing] to change of attitudes concerning global relations" (see figure 4). The question why the power asymmetry between European cooperants and the personnel of local organisations continues to exist despite the earnest attempt to overcome them is addressed in the following chapter.

4.4 Obstacles to Cooperation Among Equals

Throughout the interviews with the Colombian and German staff of FMF and the network, some elements and conditions of personnel cooperation were identified that obstruct the aspired equality. First, the critique expressed by the cooperants and their local colleagues shall be addressed, followed by an evaluation of the social dynamics observed in group interviews and participant observations that point to further obstacles. Lastly, the programmatic framework of personnel cooperation provided by BftW and CPS will be reviewed in the light of the exposed obstacles to a cooperation among equals.

4.4.1 Obstacles Identified by Colombian Staff and European Cooperants

Both the staff of FMF and the network are quick to mention the importance of politics in development cooperation. A Colombian member of FMF remarks that since the early 2000s, political factors have been playing an increasingly important role for organisations dependent on international funds. She describes that on the one hand, many Northern actors in development cooperation have shifted their focus towards other continents, leaving a shortage of funds for the countless organisations in Latin America, while on the other hand, changes in the Colombian government also caused a shift in the development cooperation discourse (interview 6). Her observation exposes an evident, but nonetheless often overlooked quality of international development cooperation: by definition, it unfolds between two nations, and thus depends on policies of the sending and the receiving state.

On the sending side, development policy can take sharp turns in regional and topical foci. Geographically, a shift of attention towards the African continent can been observed (Klingebiel, 2013, p. 10). Thematically, the development policies of most European states have been adapted first to match the Millennium Development Goals, and then the Sustainable Development Goals (Grimm et al., 2009, p. 4). In late April of 2020, the German BMZ

presented yet another reform strategy for Germany's development cooperation, which calls for a number of innovations at the expense of discontinuing many existing partnerships (BMZ, 2020e). These re-orientations affect receiving organisations such as FMF, which are bound to one region and have been dedicated to one issue, namely the defence of women's rights, for the last 32 years. In the environment of ever-changing emphases of Northern development policies, FMF finds itself obliged to continuously search for new partners as existing ones shift to other regions or goals. A member of FMF astutely refers to the "fashions" of development cooperation to which some organisations feel forced to adjust (interview 6).

The effects of these short-lived ebbs and flows of international development cooperation have been critically analysed by McMahon (2017). She observes a characteristic cycle of NGO activity in post-conflict settings: An initial peak of international attention and funding leads to a boom of local and international NGOs. However, when the issue disappears from the headlines, the funding from international donors declines, leaving behind a struggling agglomeration of local initiatives (McMahon, 2017, pp. 28-31). The countless local organisations that have not survived the downturns of the cycle described by McMahon were not included in the investigation conducted for this paper. The two cases of FMF and the network have both been able to accommodate in the unsettled environment of international development cooperation.

A senior member of FMF stresses that the foundation has always stuck with its core topics despite the short-lived emphases of international development cooperation. She explains that FMF has of course not been static throughout the decades, adding new lines of work, but only in accordance with the foundation's principles (interview 6). The director stresses that much work remains to be done, because women in the foundation's region of influence continue to suffer structural discrimination (interview 2). In order to keep supporting its target communities, FMF has engaged in many different partnerships (interview 6). The network, throughout its 17 years of existence, has preferred partnerships with ecclesiastic donors, which proved to be more durable than private donors or direct relations with foreign governments. The latter are identified as potential obstacle to the network's work (interview 9.2).

On the receiving side of international development cooperation, the state plays a different, but nonetheless crucial role. Colombia's recently granted membership in the OECD has the potential to change the country's position on the playing field of development cooperation. In this context, and in order to match the status that comes with this membership, Colombia may renounce its position of a receptor of foreign funds and pursue a strategy of local ownership of development initiatives instead (García, 2018). For organisations such as FMF, which as of 2019 relies exclusively on foreign funds, this shift is existentially threatening.

Currently Colombia does not seem to find itself in a position where it could define the focus of international development cooperation. Evidence for that is the scarcity of statements of the Colombian government about the goals of international development cooperation[49]. The volatility of international development cooperation is openly acknowledged by the APC: "cooperation […] is defined punctually on the basis of interests shared by the partners, without preconceived ideas"[50] (APC, 2014, p. 25, author's translation).

Even if the Colombian government does not define the content of development cooperation, it does determine the terms. The staff of FMF criticise that when the government changes, so do the conditions under which civil society organisations operate. For instance, under the administration of Álvaro Uribe Vélez access to foreign development cooperation partners was reportedly hindered (interview 6). This affirmation is backed by the scholarly observations of Borda Guzman (2007). According to the expert on international relations, the shift to a framing of the Colombian conflict as a 'war against terrorism' in the early 2000s also marked a turning point in Colombia's foreign policy, blocking international actors actively or passively involved peace initiatives.

Besides the political, the interviewed staff of the network and FMF, and especially their cooperants, identify some intercultural obstacles to equality in development cooperation; the conflict between the network's cooperant and a Colombian colleague described in section 4.3.2 is only one example. The intercultural dimension in personnel cooperation adds one more layer

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[49] The 2018 version of the annually published report of the Presidential Agency for International Cooperation, APC repeatedly uses the term "sustainable development", but the multiple dimensions and the buzzword-character of this notion disqualify it as a proper definition.
[50] "la cooperación […] se define puntualmente a partir de los intereses compartidos de los socios, sin ideas preconcebidas"

of complexity to conflicts that may arise in a cooperant's work environment. Both at FMF and the network, intercultural friction has been experienced especially in the adaptation phase of the cooperants (interviews 5,7). At FMF, some of the Colombian staff had quite strong reservations about personnel cooperation prior to the current cooperant's arrival because they feared that the intercultural dimension could hinder the work with a cooperant. The foundation's director remembers that "the whole intercultural issue mostly brought up […] feelings of a challenge"[51] (interview 2, 36:18-36:23, author's translation).

The cooperant confirms that it took about a year to understand how and why her Colombian colleagues act in certain ways in certain situations, and to reflect on the cultural specificities she observed and encountered (interview 11). Even after one and a half years with the foundation, the cooperant continues to perceive some intercultural barriers that sometimes lead to the rejection of her qualified suggestions (interview 5). Whether this friction in the professional relationship between the cooperant and her Colombian colleagues is a result of intercultural nature is difficult to say with certainty. Her perception of the issue is the only indicator; the Colombian staff of FMF have not expressed their opinions on the matter.

Intercultural obstacles to a 'cooperation among equal partners' can be overcome by sustained collaboration. Political obstacles are not quite as tangible and may even seem impenetrable for the personnel of local organisations and their cooperants, but in theory they could be smoothed out by policies that earnestly focus on the needs of actors in the global South. However, there is a dimension to the power asymmetry observed in personnel cooperation that is more deeply rooted in the complex interrelations of today's globalised world. A senior member of FMF hints to it by pointing out that to date it has been nearly impossible for the foundation to accumulate capital of its own (interview 6). The cooperant at the network addresses it more directly by pointing to the sustained financial dependency of Southern actors in North-South development cooperation (interview 9.2). The problem is hidden in plain sight in the very concept of the global South and North – the structural inequality that traces back to the colonial exploitation of the same parts of the world that now 'receive' development cooperation in return.

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[51] "todo el tema intercultural generaba […] más sensaciones de reto"

4.4.2 Obstacles Observed in Group Interviews and Participant Observations

It cannot be ignored that today's North-South relations are historically contingent on the colonial exploitation of natural and human resources which, in Latin America, began over 500 years ago and continue to exist in many sectors to date. This exploitation can be obfuscated by a narrative of *cultural* superiority of the global North (Amin, 1989).

However, it is not cultural superiority, but material exploitation that constitutes the root cause of the global South's need for development cooperation *and* the power asymmetry that shapes it. The relations between 'givers' and 'receivers' of development cooperation – personified in cooperants and their local colleagues respectively – must be seen in this context to understand why 'cooperation among equals' is so difficult to put into practice.

In the interactions observed during the investigation for this paper, there seem to be two ways in which the structural filters down into the personal relationships between European cooperants and their Colombian colleagues. Firstly, on the side of the cooperants, there is a tendency to locate the reasons for partner organisations' supposed inferiority on a cultural level. This is most obvious in the case of FMF, where the cooperant attributes her colleague's reluctance to plan ahead to a quirk of 'Colombian culture' (see section 4.3.1). In this line of thought, reminiscent of modernisation theory, the obstacles for the organisation's development are located *within* the Southern organisation. This naturalises the supposed inferiority of the South while structural and interrelational reasons are overlooked.

Secondly, on the side of the receiving organisations, different degrees of internalisation of the alleged inferiority of the South and the alleged superiority of the North can be observed. During a meeting of one of FMF's project teams, a Colombian member casually remarks that a foreign spokesperson would be beneficial to a campaign because people have a "collective imagination that [the foreigner] has more authority"[52] (Participant observation 2, 2:36:27-2:36:32, author's translation). The argument is uttered by a trained psychologist, and the formulation of her argument does not suggest that this is her personal opinion. Nevertheless, she deems the perceived superiority of foreigners to be effective throughout FMF's target group.

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[52] "el imaginario que [el/la extranjero/a] tiene mayor autoridad"

The accounts of the technical secretary and the cooperant of the network unveil that also the personnel of local organisations can succumb to the narrative of the North's inherent superiority (see section 4.3.2). In both cases, nobody questions the power ascribed to representatives of the North. This naturalisation indicates that the asymmetry between North and South has been internalised by actors from both poles, which on the one hand speaks for the power of this narrative, and on the other hand engraves it even further into the relationship. Hence, if left unaddressed, the structural impediments to a 'cooperation among equals' appear to reproduce themselves in North-South personnel cooperation.

4.4.3 Programme Theory of BftW and CPS Before the Backdrop of the Observed Obstacles

Lastly, the implementing organisations' efforts to address the obstacles identified throughout sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 will be analysed. The DEval analysis conducted by Roxin et al. (2015) offers important insights into the implementing organisations' strategies. Generally, the evaluation builds on the assumption that the criterium of partnership is largely met in North-South personnel cooperation. This is attributed to the definition of personnel cooperation as a "solidary service" and the cooperants' disposition to learn from their receiving organisations (Roxin et al., 2015, p. 134, author's translation). The cooperants' self- and role perception is characterised as the most important requirement for a 'cooperation among equals' (ibid.). Sending organisations are said to ensure this condition by selecting and preparing cooperants accordingly, "sensitising [cooperants] for their service in the partner country" (ibid., author's translation). Moreover, Roxin et al. recommend a regular dialogue about role perceptions of cooperants.

The preparation seminars provided by Agiamondo cover a wide range of professional and personal qualifications. Some specifically address structural inequalities and challenges that arise from the peculiar position of Northern cooperants as integrated, yet external consultants to Southern organisations. The seminar programme for 2020 includes workshops on the 'Do No Harm' principle, constructive consulting, intercultural challenges, plurality and prejudices, critical whiteness, and roles and realities (Agiamondo, & Dienste in Übersee, 2019). According to the short description, some of these seminars explicitly address structural power asymmetries (ibid.). They are open for prospective cooperants of various sending agencies, including BftW,

which usually covers all costs connected to the participation (interview 11). However, the workshops mentioned above are electives, not mandatory.

In the case of the BftW cooperant at FMF, whose preparation report was made available to the author, the focus of the preparation seminars seemed to lie on professional qualification rather than the critical reflection of her role as a Northern cooperant in the global South. Colonialism is mentioned as a marginal component of one workshop, but no in-depth discussion of colonial legacy and its importance in contemporary development cooperation has taken place (interview 11). The cooperant at the network does not recall the issue being addressed during his preparation either (interview 9.2). Intercultural topics were on the agenda, but he points out that even three months of preparation cannot anticipate the actual confrontation with challenges posed by cultural differences (ibid.). Hence, in the cases of the interviewed cooperants, the sending organisations did not provide sufficient room for reflection on structural obstacles for a 'cooperation among equals'.

5 Conclusion

The analysis of two cases of peace cooperation between Colombian organisations and Northern cooperants deployed by German agencies confirms the ambivalence of this practice. On the one hand, the cooperants' professional contributions can advance the resolution of local conflicts and strengthen peace movements. On the other hand, the relations between the cooperants and their Colombian colleagues are shaped by a larger conflict. The local conflicts addressed by peace cooperation tend to be more acute and tangible for most of the involved actors; they impede peace even in its most narrow definition. The imbalance of power between the global South and North is much less palpable; it is engrained in our reality in such a way that outlining its effects is almost impossible.

Actors of development cooperation in general, and peace cooperation in particular, must consider the local, tangible and urgent conflicts as well as the more abstract conflict that arises from and perpetuates itself through the global imbalance of power. The review of institutional documents and policies shows that postcolonial structures are on the radar of the implementing agencies, but as in so many matters, a disparity between theory and practice is evident.

In personnel cooperation, cooperants appear as representatives of the global North who work in direct contact with their colleagues from the global South. In these 'mixed' teams, professional and personal relationships are knit that have the potential to transcend prejudices and theories of intrinsic deficits, and thereby transform the underlying conflict between the global North and South. At the same time, these relationships unfold within the framework of North-South development cooperation, which can filter down into the personal sphere. The analysis carried out in chapter 4 shows that personnel cooperation has the potential to overcome or to protract the latent conflict rooted deeply in postcolonial relations. In practice, a bit of both seems to be happening simultaneously.

The case of FMF grants insights into the process of negotiating a cooperant's tasks and role in the receiving organisation. Within a certain framework defined by the sending agency, the Colombian foundation enjoys relative autonomy in the de-facto employment of the cooperant. This gives the receiving organisation the freedom to task the cooperant with what it deems most relevant for its own work. When these tasks collide with the purview defined by the sending agency, tensions can arise between the Colombian staff and the cooperant. The latter is rather open to take on responsibilities that go beyond her contract. However, she continues to prioritise the tasks defined by BftW and appears to be frustrated when they are deferred. The tension on the personal level is toned down by the mutual appreciation of the professionalism and strong commitment to women's rights shown by the Colombian staff of FMF, and the proactive attitude and patience of the cooperant.

At the network, the cooperant had various predecessors, which gave him a more clearly defined starting point. He also finds his tasks in the receiving organisation to differ from the job description, but in contrast to the situation at FMF, his core function of consulting the network on institutional strengthening is more requested.

A more critical aspect of the cooperants' function in their receiving organisations is the financial contribution they provide either directly or indirectly. The analysis of the two cooperants' roles in their respective receiving organisations in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 indicates that their proficiency with the Northern donors' cultural conventions is an important asset for the receiving organisations because it facilitates the access to funds. This may create a dependence

on Northern cooperants for individual organisations in the global South and perpetuate the 'soft' dominance of Northern partners in the sense that their cultural conventions continue to shape the terms of development cooperation. The affirmation that 'knowing the rules' is a factor of success for Southern actors in development cooperation corroborates the impression that those rules are defined by their Northern partners.

The intercultural facet of peace cooperation is most noticeable in conjunction with other factors of stress or friction in the international project teams. Narratives of cultural deficits in Colombian professionals have been observed in interactions among the team at FMF when the cooperant feels personally undervalued. It can be assumed that frustration is a nurturing ground for culturalist assertions. At the network, the cooperant reflects on the intercultural dimension of a conflict with a former colleague, as well as an instance of 'self-discrimination' by the cooperant's Colombian colleagues. The latter indicates the internalisation of a lesser position vis-á-vis actors from the global North. Despite these observations, the cooperants of both organisations clearly maintain respectful relationships with their Colombian colleagues and superiors.

It is evident that well-concerted peace cooperation can create positive impacts on a local level. Cooperants can support the implementation of locally planned initiatives and contribute to the institutional consolidation of receiving organisations. Furthermore, they can be smartly employed to channel international attention to otherwise marginalised conflicts, which may favour their transformation. Even sharp critics of the established practices of development cooperation, such as Patrice McMahon, do not deny its contributions to the transformation of specific local conflicts. Examples of the successful transformation of local conflicts by the means of peace cooperation have specifically been documented in Burundi and Colombia (Paffenholz et al., 2011).

Despite these positive results of peace cooperation in the transformation of local conflicts, both Northern cooperants interviewed for this paper have perceived some form of resistance to their service. It can be assumed that this is not to be understood as a resistance to their work in particular, but to their embodiment of the global North. McMahon and other scholars criticise

the broader impact of Northern actors in Southern peacebuilding contexts, as they can perpetuate global inequalities in power.

It is not surprising that the cooperant's realisation of their own involvement in the underlying, or overarching conflict happens during their service. Insights like these require the prolonged engagement with a conflict, and a safe space to pursue honest reflections (Lederach, 2014). The fact that the cooperant at the network utters reflections on his own entanglement in postcolonial relations and the way they affect the transformation of seemingly unrelated local conflicts are quite valuable. When peace is defined broadly, peacebuilding must be an integral exercise. FMF clearly recognises and pursues this in its work, but international peace cooperation in practice fails to live up to this ideal. Building peace on the local level is undermined by solidifying unequal power relations on a global level. Working for peace does not require the embodiment of absolute peacefulness. However, a reflexion of one's own position in a conflict, and especially one's entanglement with the conflict that is to be transformed, is indispensable.

Even though the two cooperants interviewed for this paper were left alone with this crucial task, their self-reflectiveness and sensitivity to interpersonal relations appears to have allowed them to reflect on their position. If personnel cooperation can enable such reflections on a personal level, it does in fact contribute to an "improved understanding of global correlations" as specified in the programme theory for personnel cooperation (figure 4). It would of course be desirable for these insights to be tied back into the programmes of North-South personnel cooperation themselves. As of today, postcolonial tensions appear not to be sufficiently addressed in pre-departure preparation, so that a reflexion of the ambivalent role of a Northern cooperant in peace initiatives in the global South may only happen during or after their deployment, or, in the worst case, not at all.

Besides these organisational factors, there are some structural impediments to constructive peace cooperation, as well as protracted colonialisms, that can be perceived on the state, organisational and personal level, on the receiving and giving side alike. In personnel cooperation, the attitudes and the degree of self-reflection of the involved individuals determines whether these hurdles can be overcome.

Of course, the ultimate objective should not be to implement constructive development cooperation *despite* structural impediments, but to adjust the structure of international relations so that they no longer impede constructive cooperation. Cooperants from the global North often find themselves amid the effects of the ongoing exploitation of the global South. They may be able to contribute to the transformation of some of the resulting conflicts on a local level, but at the same time they appear as representatives of the global North. In this light, it is not surprising that the cooperants at FMF and the network experience difficulties in establishing 'equal' relationships with their local colleagues, when the context of the relationship is so deeply shaped by inequality.

North-South personnel cooperation is a promising instrument that bears the potential to bridge conceived gaps in culture or development – under the right conditions – via the construction of interpersonal relationships over periods of several years. It seems to be increasing in popularity vis-à-vis technical or financial cooperation, especially, but not exclusively in peace cooperation. In addition, the fact that South-South cooperation is being embraced by both Southern and Northern actors indicates that the course is set for a rethinking of development cooperation beyond colonial assumptions.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the insights gained through the analysis of social dynamics among the Colombian-German project teams, some recommendations can be made to the sending agencies. Firstly, the colonial legacy of development cooperation must be explicitly addressed in the preparation of cooperants. Power asymmetries are not a thing of the past; they clearly continue to shape contemporary development cooperation. Even though sending organisations may have the best intentions, their actions are bound by the structural framework created by political and economic interrelations of a postcolonial world. This needs to be acknowledged and made transparent to the cooperants. Awareness of one's own position in a conflict is a prerequisite for its constructive transformation; acknowledging and understanding power-asymmetries is a prerequisite for their resolution.

Intercultural competence and the awareness of postcolonial structures should be a core criterion in the selection of cooperants and a core component of the pre-departure preparation. Certainly,

an introductory seminar on these topics is not sufficient to reflect on ideas of (cultural) superiority and is not likely to change attitudes internalised over a lifetime. It may, however, give prospective cooperants the tools to reflect on experiences they make throughout their service, for instance the confrontation with people who have internalised their own supposed inferiority. Throughout their service in the receiving organisation, cooperants can be confronted with situations and points of view that collide with their world views. It might prove fruitful to offer a space to reflect on these experiences and to guide cooperants to a re-evaluation of their own position in the conflicts they encounter in their private and professional environment after one year in the receiving organisation. This could facilitate better relationships with local colleagues throughout the rest of the service. A weekend seminar, possibly in a virtual format could provide this opportunity for reflexion and activation of the tools handed to the cooperants in their pre-departure preparation. BftW already appears to be experimenting with a 'coach-programme' that offers cooperants an optional accompaniment during their service abroad.

Receiving organisations could facilitate the integration of cooperants by briefing their local personnel on the potential benefits of sustained intercultural contact. This simple practice might shift Southern professionals' perception of cooperants from the global North. When the latter are seen as an opportunity rather than an obstacle, local professionals might embrace the opportunity to get to know different points of view and innovative approaches rather than avoiding the 'difficult' discussions with someone who is just 'different'.

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7 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Questions asked in the group interview with FMF

1. What experiences have you had with international cooperation?
2. What is the importance of *German* cooperation for the work of FMF? …
3. … and for the work of your specific project [within FMF]?
4. Do you identify any problem with international cooperation?
5. In your opinion, is colonial history being reflected adequately and sufficiently in international cooperation?

Appendix 2 – Questions asked in the group interview with the network

1. What experiences have you had with international cooperation?
   → positive?
   → negative?
2. How was the absence of any cooperant between 2015 and 2017 perceived?
3. Is a 'cooperation among equals' possible in the North-South context?
4. In your opinion, is colonial history being reflected adequately and sufficiently in international cooperation?

Appendix 3 – Informed Consent Form

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO PARA PARTICIPAR EN UN
PROYECTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

FORMATO DE CONSENTIMIENTO

_____

Nombre del investigador: Felix Bornheim

Proyecto: "Dinámicas de la cooperación colombo-alemana con personal en iniciativas de paz"

_____

¿EN QUÉ CONSISTE EL PROYECTO?

Este proyecto de investigación se realiza en el marco de una tesis de maestría del programa "Conflicto, Memoria y Paz" bajo la dirección de la *Universidad del Rosario*, Bogotá, y la *Universidad Católica Eichstätt-Ingolstadt* (Alemania).

Se trata de un análisis externo de la cooperación colombo-alemana para la paz, enfocado en dos proyectos de cooperación donde colaboren profesionales de ambas nacionalidades.

PROPÓSITOS DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN

(1) Documentar/analizar las experiencias y posiciones de miembros del personal alemán/local en dos proyectos colombo-alemanes para la paz.
(2) Observar dinámicas entre cooperantes alemanes y sus colegas colombianos en su rutina laboral.
(3) Evaluar las prácticas de la cooperación con personal para la paz y formular recomendaciones para el mejoramiento de la cooperación colombo-alemana.
(4) Publicar la tesis en el repositorio de la *Universidad del Rosario* y en el repositorio de la *Universidad Católica Eichstätt-Ingolstadt*.

¿QUÉ IMPLICA SU PARTICIPACIÓN?

(1) Participar en una (o si se requieren más) entrevista(s) grupal(es) con sus colegas del proyecto.
(2) Diligenciar una breve encuesta sobre sus experiencias en su trabajo.

DATOS RECOLECTADOS

(1) Sus declaraciones durante la(s) entrevista(s) grupal(es).
(2) Los datos de la breve encuesta sobre sus experiencias en su trabajo.
(3) Observaciones del investigador durante la(s) entrevista(s) grupal(es).

Todos los datos referentes a los participantes serán registrados y sistematizados de manera anónima. En el texto final no se mencionará su nombre; se hará referencia a "el/la cooperante" o "el/la profesional local". Sin embargo, se mencionará de forma explícita el nombre del proyecto del cual Usted hace parte.

DERECHOS Y CONDICIONES DE SU PARTICIPACIÓN

Su participación es voluntaria; puede dejar de participar en cualquier momento sin ningún problema.

Usted es propietario/a de sus datos hasta el momento de la entrega de la tesis. Puede revisarlos en cualquier momento. Si decide retirar sus datos parcial o completamente, no serán mencionados en ninguna parte del texto final.

Con su participación usted puede contribuir a un análisis externo de la cooperación colombo-alemana para la paz en Colombia. Los resultados de este análisis podrían aportar al mejoramiento de los programas de cooperación, tanto para el personal de los proyectos como para los grupos beneficiados.

¿QUIÉN PARTICIPARÁ EN ESTE PROYECTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN?

El personal de dos proyectos de cooperación colombo-alemana para la paz.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD

Su identidad se mantendrá de manera estrictamente confidencial. Los datos primarios recolectados en el marco de la investigación no serán accesibles al público. Los datos utilizados en el texto final serán registrados de manera anónima en la mayor medida posible (véase "DATOS RECOLECTADOS"). Su nombre no aparecerá en ninguna parte del texto final.

RIESGOS

La presente investigación está siendo diseñada bajo consideración de los principios de la *Acción sin Daño como Aporte a la Construcción de Paz* (ASD-CP). Se consideraron posibles riesgos a nivel personal y comunitario. Mediante el registro anónimo de los datos de las y los participantes, se espera minimizar tales riesgos.

PREGUNTAS, INQUIETUDES, PROBLEMAS O QUEJAS

Si tiene preguntas, inquietudes o problemas relacionados al proyecto de investigación, por favor contacte al investigador

Felix Bornheim
al correo felix.bornheim@urosario.edu.co o al teléfono 30 58 51 43 41.

Si tiene preguntas, inquietudes, problemas o quejas relacionados a sus derechos como participante, o se siente presionado/a de participar o continuar en el proyecto de investigación, usted puede contactar a

Dra. Carolina Galindo Hernández
Profesora de la Escuela de Ciencias Humanas de la Universidad del Rosario,
al correo carolina.galindo@urosario.edu.co o al teléfono 2970200 Ext.: 3842.

FIRMA

Con su firma a continuación usted indica que ha leído y aceptado este formato, que sus eventuales preguntas han sido respondidas y que quiere participar de forma libre y voluntaria en este proyecto de investigación.

Una copia de este formato de consentimiento le será entregada antes de su participación.

_____   _____

Firma   Fecha

Appendix 4 – List of Interviews

Interview 1: Personal interview with the cooperant at FMF; 23rd April 2020.

Interview 2: Personal interview the director of FMF; 26th May 2020.

Interview 3: discarded

Interview 4: discarded

Interview 5: Personal interview with the cooperant at FMF; 4th June 2020.

Interview 6: Group interview with the executive of FMF and the cooperant; 5th June 2020.

Interview 7: Personal interview with the technical secretary of the network; 8th June 2020.

Interview 8: Personal interview with the cooperant at the network; 9th June 2020.

Interview 9: Group interview with the technical secretary of the network and the cooperant; 10th June 2020.

Interview 9.2: Continuation of interview 9; 11th June 2020.

Interview 10: Personal interview with a senior member of FMF; 17th June 2020.

Interview 11: Personal interview with the cooperant at FMF; 1st July 2020.