

The Role of Society in the Peace Process of the Basque Country

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Abstract

This article looks at a peacebuilding model used in Basque country. Despite ongoing acts of terror and forced silence, Basque society found peaceful solutions through cultural, social, and economic development. The following research, based on interviews and questionnaires, demonstrates a bottom-up approach to peace in the Basque region. In this case, peace was unsustainable from a law-and-order perspective; legal action was not enough to maintain order. This study demonstrates the significance of social networks and the level of trust built into these networks. It concludes with a reflection on the unique nature of the Basque journey towards peace.

Introduction

The Basque Country's history is intriguing for many reasons. Firstly, it is one of the most dynamic regions of Europe, with a unique cultural landscape of burgeoning enterprises. Secondly, the Basques are the oldest European people who still speak Euskera. Interestingly enough, they have no clear familial relationship with any other tongue (Woodworth 2001, 2008). Thirdly, they have experienced a history of violence that has lasted decades. This violent past has impacted nearly all Basques on the Spanish side. The violence has come in many different forms: killing, kidnapping, and exile, most notably (Clark 1984; Loyer 1998; Hammer 2007). Yet, the violence suddenly stopped on October 20, 2011 when ETA announced the definitive cessation of its armed activity; a participant in our study spoke to this momentous event that would transform Basque society forever.

...a new political time is ... emerging in the Basque country. We have an historical opportunity to find a just and democratic solution for the centuries old political conflict. Dialogue and agreement should outline the new cycle, over violence and repression. The recognition of the Basque country and the respect for the will of the people should prevail over imposition.¹

Without question, "peacemaking is difficult, fragile, and complex and emerges in multiple forms" (Bartoli 2012: 379). It doesn't happen overnight; it takes time and effort from many different actors. This beckons the following question: what factors led to peace and created order out of the complex system of violence in Basque Country?

Our hypothesis, verified in this research, is two-pronged: on the one hand, the Basque nation was intentionally transforming the environment through cultural, social and economic development over the past decade. As a result, the violence became increasingly foreign against the backdrop of a relatively stable, interconnected environment. On the other hand, the Basque society, though seemingly reticent,

developed subtle ways of pressuring the terrorist groups to postpone violent methods. This study will tease out these mechanisms for peacemaking in the Basque region. According to Spencer and Croucher (2008), a *spiral of silence* is an attitude of intimidation, fear, and self-censorship that prevents an open conversation about violence even after the abandonment of violence. We found this term to be quite relevant to the interviews and questionnaires with the Basque people. The subjects outwardly expressed their gratefulness for this research. Perhaps it gave them a space to be heard, and to not endure the oppression fashioned by the cycle of violence. But how does any society pursue peace-oriented goals in such a suppressed society? What was the mechanism of communication beyond spoken language? How did Basque civil society find new ways to transform the narrow confines of conflict? The conjecture is that the recent Basque economic prosperity acted as a shared asset and driving lever for non-verbal, peaceful communication, especially with families and close-knit circles. Then, ‘weaker links’ were formed with people from outside these closely connected clusters, thus spreading and transforming an unspoken recognition of the predominant public opinion. That being said, violence and its termination were, and still are, a hidden agenda in the Basque country. This is to say that there are still no formal accounts of the peace process to date. One of the interviewees in our study expressed it this way:

There is a lot of work to be done to bring out the truth, as people need to know the real story. Therefore I really thank you for your interest.

In this context, you see the methodological challenge at the forefront of this unspoken “truth”: what strategy might circumvent the ‘spiral of silence’ and produce undistorted data for those who fear the consequences of speaking openly?

To confront this challenge, we decided on a two-step approach. First off, we began interviewing people from our social and academic networks and, by way of a snowball method, were recommended other people to interview. In this way, the first cohort was non-representative of the Basque society. The interviews served a deep purpose, however; they acted as a pilot and allowed for analysis and construction for the second stage, which came as a questionnaire aimed at a broader population.

We wanted people to feel safe, as to avoid the “spiral of silence,” so we chose anonymity as the preferred method for attracting and gathering information. Thus, we would later place a survey on the Internet.

This, again, imposed challenges and limitations, as most of the Basque society did not have access to Internet; those that did had no way of knowing about our questionnaire. To resolve this natural dilemma, we focused on the possible-to-reach population. We also assembled data to help future studies aimed at a more representative sample of the society.

Unique Culture, Economic Development

As previously stated, the Basque Country is indeed unique. The ethnic background and the Basque language (the Basques are the last surviving people from a line of European prehistory) suggests that they are a remnant of Paleolithic Europeans; the Basque language, which descended from the Proto-Basque, is the only Pre-Indo-European language having survived the sands of time (Hualde 1993; Zuazo 1996). Additionally, the history of its struggle for independence (Astrain & Stephens 1997;

Llera 1999; Llera *et al.* 2007; Woodworth 2003) is dramatic. They have achieved rapid economic growth (Uranga 2002; Porter *et al.* 2004; Markuartu 2012) at the hands of a cooperative-based economic approach. In fact, in the Basque Country, workers own and manage the world's largest successful cooperative Mondragón² (Whyte 1991; Herrera 2004; Hollender 2011). Finally, we have seen an impressive streak of innovation as of late (Arancegui 2011; Espiau 2011; Alcalde 2012; OECD 2012). This has helped achieve relative stability in the Basque environment.

The above trends interrelate and reinforce each other, thus creating a unique Basque character. Dr. Juan Jose Ibarretxe Markuartu argues that both the demand for legitimacy in politics and the creation of a competitive model based on solidarity have advanced Basque self-government. However, the defense of Basque identity, culture, and language is not solely related to a legitimate political fact, such as the claim for an identity in the current globalized world; it is also directly related to the achievement of sustainable human development.

The drive for autonomy and independence has been part of Basque imaginary for nearly two centuries. It is known as 'fueros,' meaning recognition of pre-existing rights. The Kings of Castile guaranteed Basque autonomy (e.g. a separate tax system and political status), which was later banned by the liberal government after the Third Carlist War in 1876.⁴ It was at this time that the inspirational Basque independence leader and writer, Sabino Arana, known as the father of Basque nationalism, and the defender of the use of the Basque language, founded the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV).

In the 20th century the Republican government of the early 30s had given the Basque Country an autonomous status, which was subsequently denied by the Franco regime (1936-1975). This was a time of great cruelty. One such example is the aerial bombing of the Basque city of Guernica in 1937, which led to hundreds of civilian deaths (Southworth 1977; Patterson, 2007)⁵.

In 1959 ETA, a Marxist offshoot of the Basque culture preservation movements started its insurgency against Franco regimes by increasing pressure on the eradication of Basque culture, language, and remaining autonomy.⁶ This pressure would continue after the Franco era as well by the Statute of Autonomy, also known as the Statute of Gernika⁷ (Llera 1997; Astrain & Stephens 1997; Llera *et al.* 2007).

ETA, which initially focused its efforts against the Spanish government's representatives, impacted the Basque nation both physically and mentally. Specifically, they aimed at Basque independence groups such as the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), whose leaders were attacked and often killed (Loyer 1998). Its most common target was private business, however. From 1959 to 2011, ETA was responsible for killing 829 people, injuring thousands, kidnapping dozens (Hammer 2007), and becoming the most violent insurgent group on the European continent (Clark 1984).

To see the whole picture, especially acknowledging that conflicts are made up of many different sides and perspectives, it is important to mention that there were also terrorist efforts from the Spanish government, especially in the 1980s. There is perhaps no better example than that of the GAL (Grupo Antiterrorista de Liberación), an illegal group, secretly formed by police officials, that was carrying out a campaign against supporters of ETA. This group killed 27 people, both women and children (Woodworth, 2003; Alonso 2010; Diditwister 2012). This violence is important to consider.

As previously stated, the frequent outbreaks of violence were predominantly hidden through what is called “the spiral of silence” (Noelle-Neumann 1974; 2004). The Basque people had trouble discussing these issues.⁸ In this way, the violence dragged out for decades, with little reprieve or interruption, thus leaving its violent fingerprint on the Basque social fabric.

Then, on September 5th, ETA declared a ceasefire. This was followed on October 22nd, 2011 by a termination of its armed activity. This paper focuses on what led to this pivotal moment towards peace. It will explore contributing factors to ETA’s abandonment of violence; specifically, the role civil society played in the movement towards peace.

Building Pre-conditions for Peace

Since the Gernika Statute (1979), the Basque Country¹⁵ has had autonomy in Northern Spain. In this way, Spanish *and* Basque are considered co-official languages of the region. Later, the Gernika Statute established a legislative body: the Basque Parliament, which is the body that chooses the president. Parliament deputies are elected from each of the historic territories in Basque Country. In general, the Parliament has power over various sectors of society, including agriculture, industry, culture, tax collection, policing, and transportation.¹⁷

Yet, the Gernika did not remedy all concerns of the Basque people. Today there is still controversy over whether the Gernika Statute gave enough autonomy to the region (see: Hills 1980; Gorka 2006).

The country finds hope, however, through political freedoms such as the powers of negotiation and the right to vote. (Abend 2005; Keating 2006; Gorka, *idem*). The Donostia-San Sebastián International Peace Conference in 2011 captures this formal space for negotiation and politics (see: Minder 2011).

Since the time of Franco’s rule, the Basque people have not supported violent methods for autonomy or even full independence. In a 2009 survey by the University of the Basque Country (EuskoBarómetro, 2009) it was revealed that 64% of people rejected ETA (completely); 13% identified as former ETA sympathizers (mainly during the Franco dictatorship); 10% agreed with ETA's ends, but not their means; 3% felt fear towards ETA; 3% expressed indifference; and 3% were undecided or did not answer. Another 3% were supportive of ETA, but still criticized some of their actions. Strikingly, only 1% gave ETA total support.

In this way, over the years, there was a stark contrast between society’s hope for peace (and repulsion against violence) and the violent methods used by ETA. Indeed, the region was experiencing conflict, both directly and internally.

From the dynamical point of view, an intractable conflict, such as the one in the Basque Country, can be characterized by the existence of a very strong attracting state (i.e. the attractor) to which the system returns to after being disturbed (Coleman, *et al.* 2007; Bartoli *et al.* 2010; Praszquier & Nowak 2012a). In a protracted conflict, the attractor, who holds the power, forces the people to adapt the thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, and narratives of the powerful. This creates a loop, in a sense, that sustains the conflict. We might even call it a violent cycle. These intractable conflicts create a specific socio-psychological infrastructure, which includes collective memory, an ethos of conflict, collective emotional orientations (Bar-Tal 2007), and shared narratives (Lane & Maxfield 2005). This is what conflict achieves. It should be noted

that peace, on the other hand, invites flexible and adaptive behaviors (Bartoli *et al. ibid*). This is a major difference between the two environments.

When we talk about achieving peace, timing is of the essence. In other words, the time must be ripe. If an end to conflict is forced upon an environment that is unprepared to support peace, conflict might recur. That being said, applying conflict resolution methods directly may bring a change in the short term, but not in the long term. Building homeostasis around peace requires a new, peace-sustaining environment. Thus, the essential challenge is to transform the socio-psychological context so that it becomes *peace-enforcing* (Lederach 2003; Miall 2004; Praszkiar & Nowak 2012a; Praszkiar & Nowak 2012b). This process encourages and supports inclusion of the entire social and cultural context (Lederach 1996, 2003) and engages and transforms relationships and interests (Miall 2004). This new environment makes destructive conflict counterproductive in the long term, thus transforming societal narratives from that of tragedy and destruction to that of success and growth (Praszkiar *et al.* 2010).

The Basque case, from a systemic perspective, might show unstable societal dynamics; yet, when looked at more closely, these dynamics were changed through several maelstroms. For one, the political situation in the whole region was changing; thus, the police actions created moments of intense pressure and release on ETA. In response to this ebb and flow of pressure, the civil society's efforts intensified and decelerated over time. This captures an interesting relationship between legal systems and civil society. In essence, ETA's actions controlled these dynamics; thus, the dynamics of the country altered as ETA's tactics shifted. These shifts are evident in the transitions from ceasefires to violence, and back to ceasefires again (e.g. in 1989, 1996, 1998 and 2006) — see figure 1.

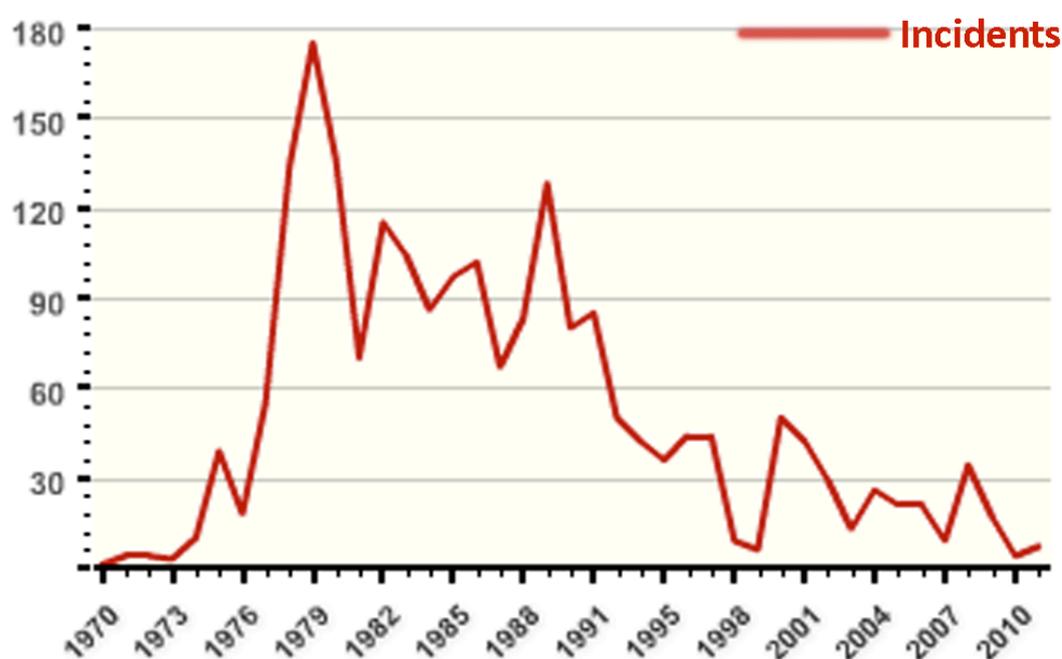


Figure 1. Attacks and ceasefires by ETA, 1979-2010

Source: Global Terrorism Database (START, 2011).

Presumably, during the previous ceasefires, the socio-economic context wasn't strong enough to support peace; therefore the old attractor reinforced the conflict situation. Yet, the intense cultural and economic development in the first decade of the 21st century was powerful enough to welcome peace.

And so, on October 20, 2010, ETA's decision to abandon violence stuck permanently. In theory, in this new socio-economic environment, the anti-violence impulses (e.g. police actions and the pressure of the society) were enough to create a new and stable pro-peace attractor, which was reinforced by associated advantages and new narratives. As was evident during previous violence cycles, these positive forces created loops; but this time it was not a destructive and violent loop (or cycle); it was a loop (or cycle) of peace and development.

The Spiral of Silence

As stated previously, the 'spiral of silence,' coined by Noelle-Neumann (1974, 1991, 2004), refers to the mechanisms that tend to make people remain silent, especially in a situation when they feel that their views are in the minority. People, having a sort of a 'quasi-statistical instinct,' may imagine that they know the prevailing public opinion. In this way, the fear of isolation leads them to avoid any resistance. Theoretically, this makes sense. It would seem that going against the grain would only bring further isolation, or at least anticipation of isolation. This explains why the minority so often chooses against expressing their views, which, in turn, influences others to do the same (see figure 2)

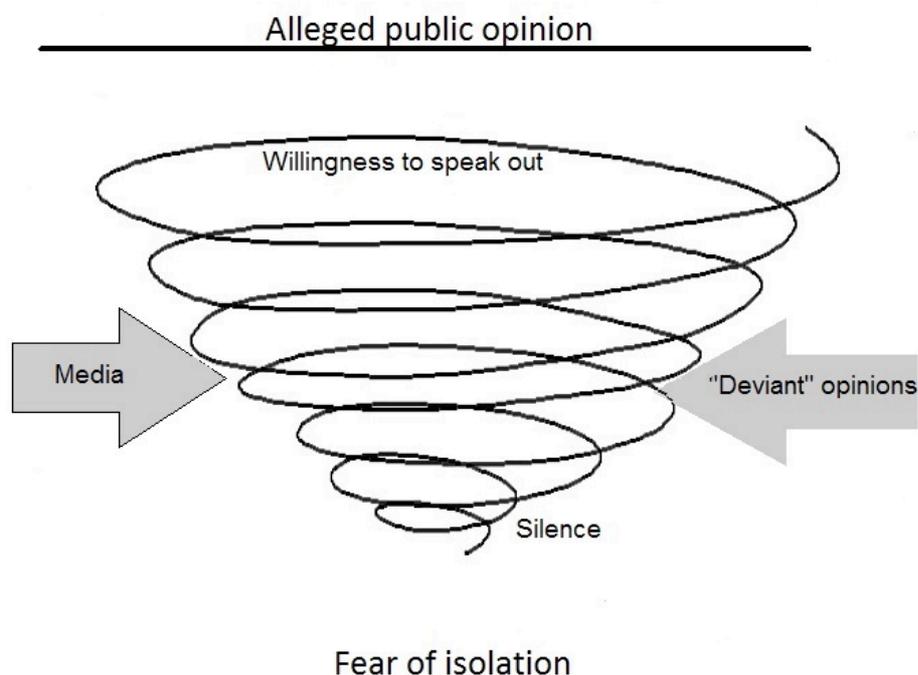


Figure 2. The downward spiral of silence (based on Noelle-Neumann, 1991; Griffin, 2011).

A survey, which included approximately 200 participants in France and Spain, confirmed the effect of the spiral of silence on the Basque people. It also showed that the closer participants were to the Basque homeland both geographically and culturally, the more reluctant they were to voice their opinions about ETA (Spencer & Croucher, 2008). Again, the spiral of silence prevailed. Now it is easy to imagine how and why the spiral of silence was negative. Quite simply, it oppressed the Basque people by discouraging them from speaking out against injustice and violence. But how might we view the spiral of silence in a different light?

Presumably, it contributed to the creation of new channels of non-visible communication. In other words, people learned to understand one another *between* words. This study aims to explain this creative way of communication that was used to circumvent the “spiral-of-silence” effect.

The ‘Spiral of Silence’ as a challenge for researchers

Considering the ‘spiral of silence’ and the unwillingness of many Basque people to voice opinions, we had to approach the research with delicacy; otherwise we would receive either no response or, even worse, censored or slanted responses. Bearing this in mind, the first pilot phase would be live interviews by way of recommendation. Next, we would construct an online questionnaire based on the information assembled from the pilot interviews.

There was an innate challenge: the lack of existing research related to the peace process in the Basque country. Intuitively, this existing research could serve as a departure point for constructing the questionnaire.²⁰ Unfortunately, we didn’t have much in this regard. In order to resolve this challenge, the initial interviews, in addition to a general (e.g. historical) literature analysis, would drive the question formulation.

After we had created the questionnaire, we would post it online and spread word (or create awareness) through different networks of people. The upside of this approach was that we expected to receive honest, in-depth comments on sensitive issues (e.g. on the still existing threat). The anticipated downside, however, was the limitation of the potential number and type of respondents.

Because of people’s general suspicion towards such sensitive topics, we decided to keep the questions simple and digestible, thus addressing consecutive issues deliberately and thoroughly. This is to say that we gave up the typical socio-psychological method of deconstructing each issue into several concrete questions.

After careful consideration of the above challenges, we aimed the study at paving the way for future research. In this way, we set out to analyze how the Basque people perceived the role of various actors in the peace process.

Questions and Hypotheses

There were a few questions we asked when approaching this study: (1) did society contribute to the peace process, (2) if so, to what extent, (3) what segments of the society contributed, (4) what had a greater effect, the legal and police actions or the will of the society (in other words, would the legal and police actions have been enough to create and maintain peace permanently), and (6) what factors could jeopardize peace and what factors could contribute to its reinforcement?

Our hypotheses were that (1) the civil society played a role in ending the violence and (2) legal measure were not enough to sustain peace. In this way, we hypothesized that

(3) the entire process was bottom-up (i.e. it came primarily from the people), not top-down (i.e. it came primarily from local authorities). Finally, we proposed that (4) the process was internal (it came from the Basque Country), not external (it came from the Spanish government). These final two hypotheses captures the idea that real-life social networks (not necessarily the virtual ones) contributed to the peace process.

Methodology

As stated before, the pilot study, based on literature analysis and real-life interviews in the Basque Country, was created to gain an understanding of the context. This preliminary research was to construct the online questionnaire for any willing Basque participants. Clearly language presented a challenge here. Due to limited resources, the questionnaire could only be prepared in English, which narrowed down the target population to English speaking subjects.

Interviews in the Basque Country

The script included both open and closed-ended questions relating to (a) the main factors that led to the renouncement of violence, (b) the role of various segments of the society involved, (c) the top-down or bottom-up development of the peace process, and (d) the stability of peace in the country.

Prior to the interviews several pre-pilot appointments focused on understanding the context were set up and an email that provided more information about the study was distributed. As previously discussed, the first group of participants was chosen through our professional network, and then others were recommended by the first group.

As a result of this two-staged process, nine interviews were conducted in Bilbao (April 14th - 20th, 2012). In this pilot stage, there were six male and three female subjects; eight of these participants held university degrees and one was a current student. Their professions were: geologist, peace activist, university professor (2), computer scientist engineer, entrepreneur, student, and journalist. There ages ranged from 22-65.

The questionnaire

These interviews informed the development of the questionnaire. Thus, the original interview script was modified and augmented, and then sent back to Bilbao for feedback from peace activists. After considering these comments and suggestions, the final version was uploaded to the Internet.

There was a two-block window to take this survey, from September 19th to November 19th, 2012. Those participating in the interviews and our professional network were asked to spread awareness around the questionnaire. As a result, participants from various political parties, including two with connections to the Abertzale Left (a political wing of ETA), engaged in the online questionnaire. Since the system provided full anonymity, the researchers did not have knowledge as to who, aside from the persons addressed directly, completed the questionnaire.

Results

The characteristic of the subjects

In total, there were 58 responses to the questionnaire, 40 male (69%) and 18 female (31%). Their ages ranged from: 27 – 70 ($M=45.09$; $SD=8.85$).

Education level	Frequency	Percent
High School	3	5.4
Bachelor	10	17.9
Masters	29	51.8
Doctorate	14	25.0
Total (without unfilled cases)	56	100.0
Unfilled cases	2	3.5
Total (with unfilled cases)	58	103.5

Table I. Education level

Clearly, the distribution of participants' education level represents a more educated segment of the society.

Current work	Frequency	Percent
Working in the social sector	10	20.4
Working in business	16	32.7
Academician	10	20.4
Journalist	2	4.1
Public service and social activist	1	2.0
Administration	1	2.0
Self-employed business	4	8.2
Lawyer	1	2.0
Public administration	1	2.0
Free-lancer	2	4.1
Worked for EU institutions	1	2.0
Total (without unfilled cases)	49	100.0
Unfilled cases	9	18.3
Total (with unfilled cases)	58	118.3

Table II. Current work

Note: the lack of blue-collar workers indicates that the sample is not representative of the whole society.

Table III. How the subjects are involved in the peace process

How involved in the peace process	Frequency	Percent
Directly	16	28.6
Indirectly	20	35.7
Observer	20	25.7
Total (without unfilled cases)	56	100.0
Unfilled cases	2	3.5
Total (with unfilled cases)	58	103.5

The subjects were involved directly, indirectly, and as observers in the peace process more or less in equal proportions.

Opinions on the Peace Process

Question: Do you think that the following segments of the society played a significant role in building the preconditions for peace? Social sector: associations, foundations, clubs, people's movements, etc.



Figure 3. The significance of various segments of the society on the peace process. This graph examines whether the peace decision was a bottom-up process.

To create a stronger visual presentation, the role of the social sector is highlighted in a separate chart:

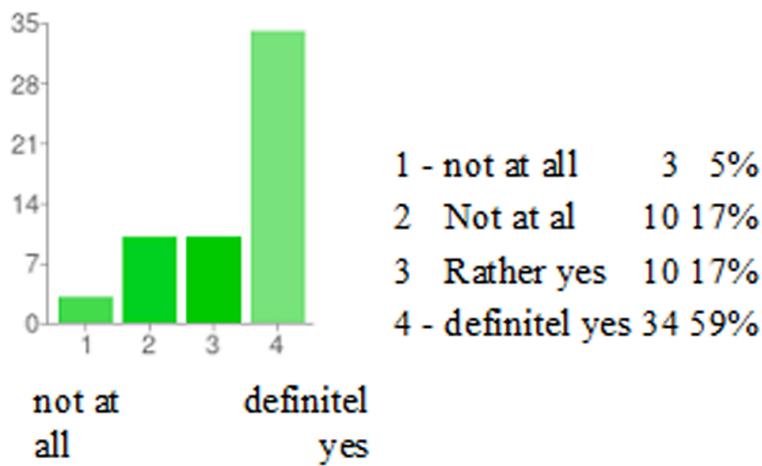


Figure 4. The role of the civil society in the peace process.

Was the peace process top-down or bottom-up?

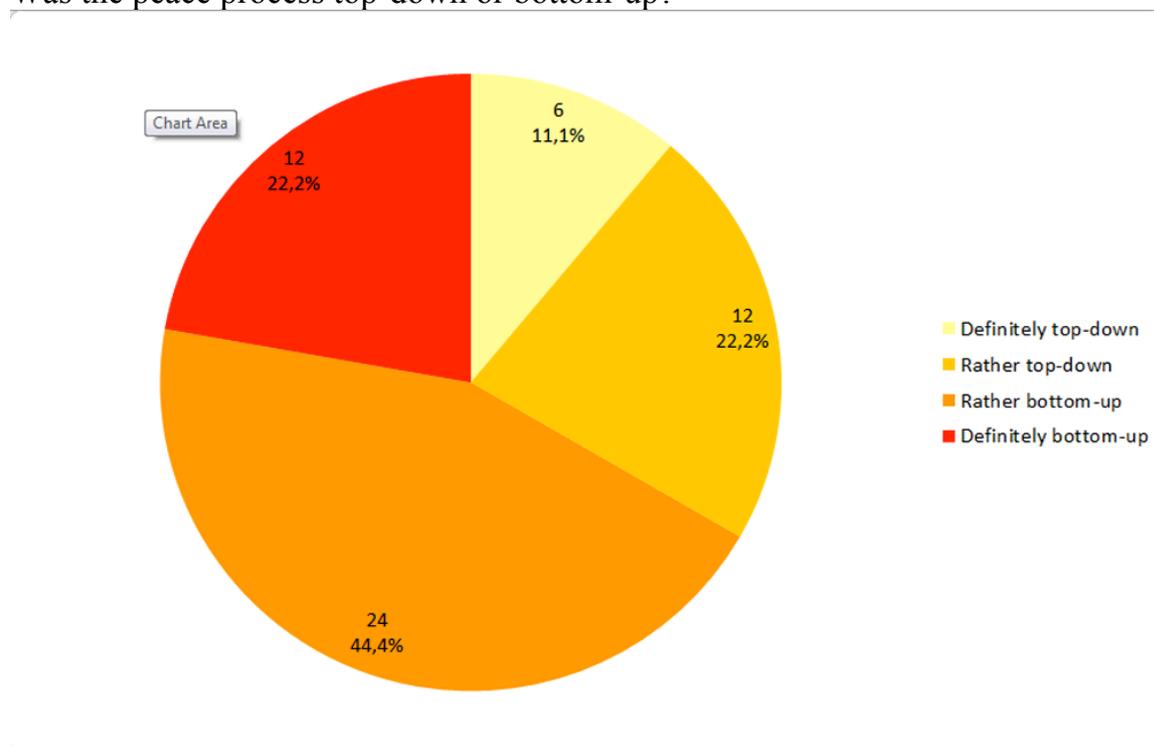


Figure 5. Bottom-up or top-down peace process.

What was the origin of the peace decision? Was it from inside the Basque Country or from outside?

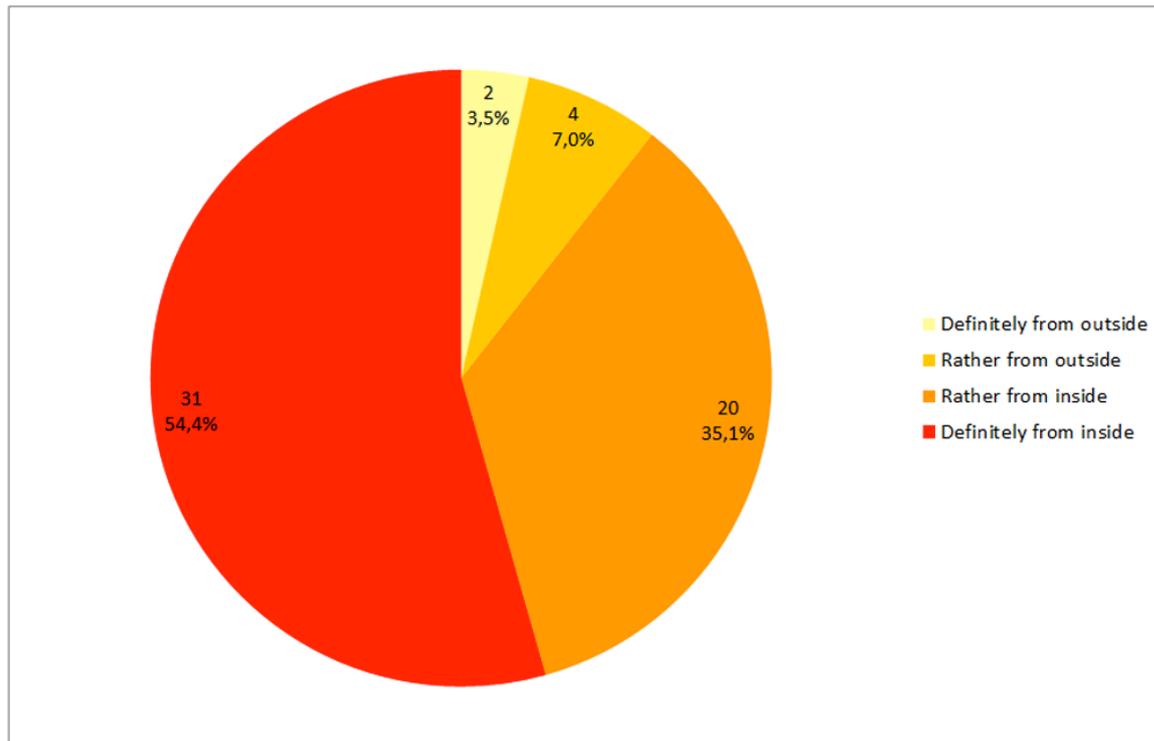


Figure 6. The origin of the peace decision: from outside or inside the Basque Country?

Were the social networks significant to the peace process? (Social networks: a network of friends knowing friends; also, relatives and co-workers; connections; relationships on Facebook, twitter, and other social media networks; etc.).

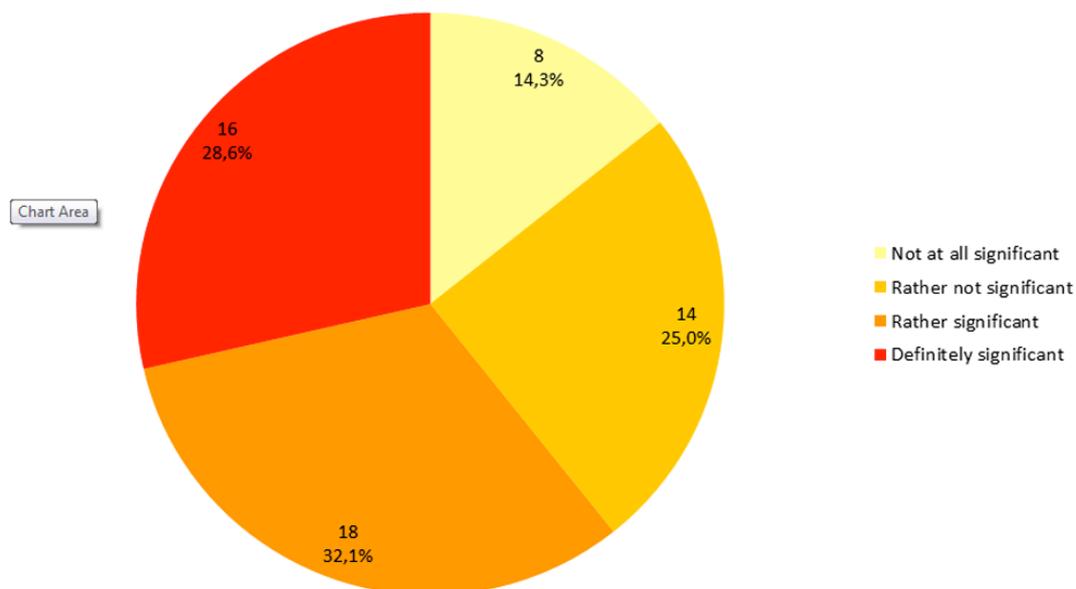


Figure 7. The significance of social networks.

How much do you think people trusted others in those social networks?

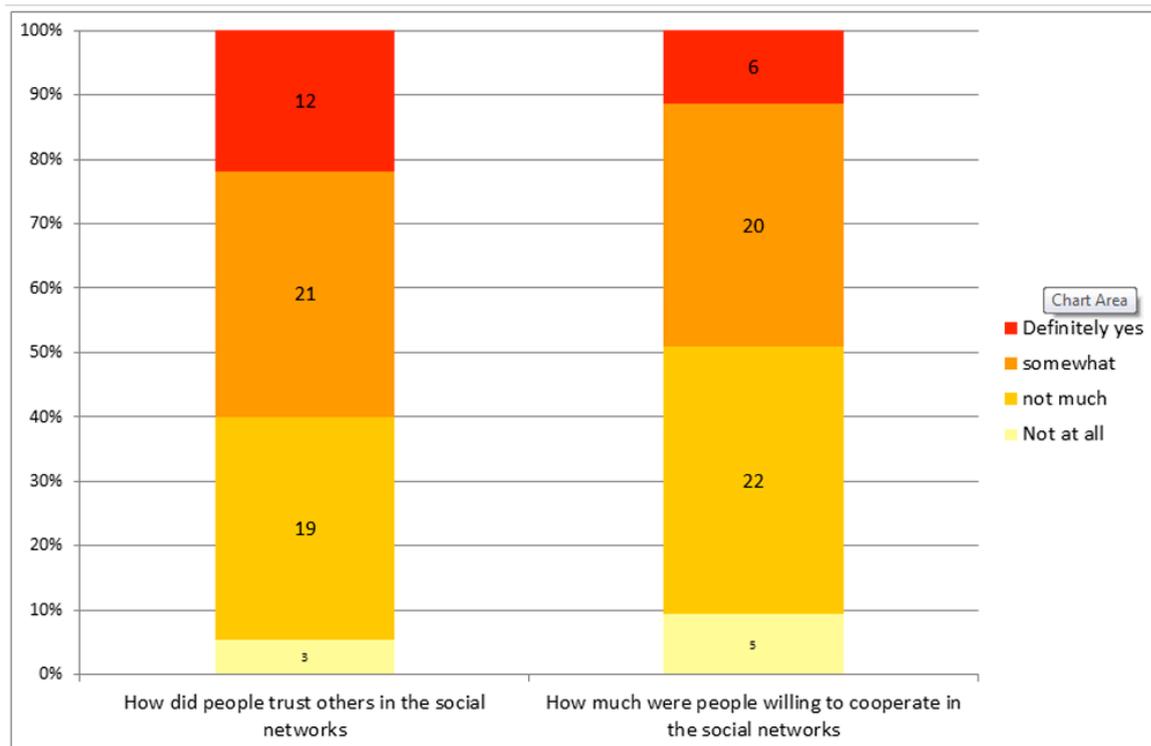


Figure 8. Trust and cooperation in social networks.

Did the recent intensification of police actions against ETA contribute to its abandonment of violence? Would peace be possible without the society’s influence?



Figure 9. The intensification of the police action and the society’s influence.

Is the current peace durable? What is the influence of the economic development?

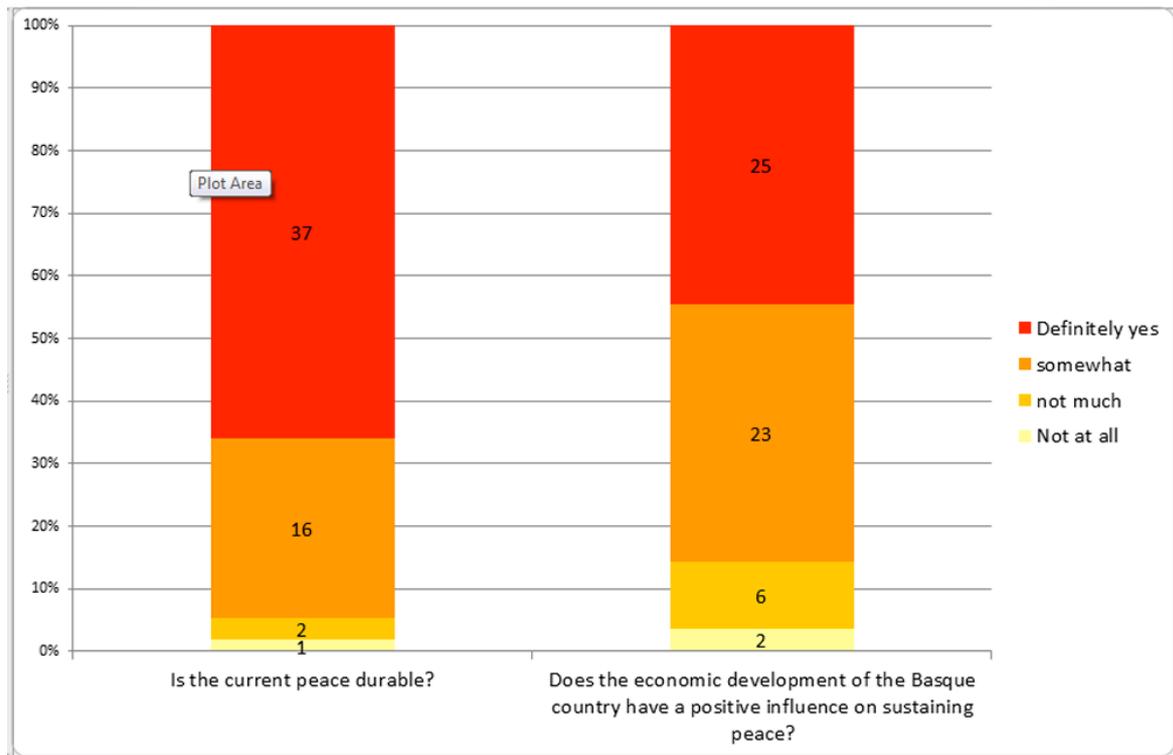


Figure 10. Durability of peace and the influence of economic development on it.

Is dealing with the past a precondition for sustaining peace? Do you think that the multiple identities available to citizens in the Basque Country will play a role in shaping a peaceful and cooperative future?

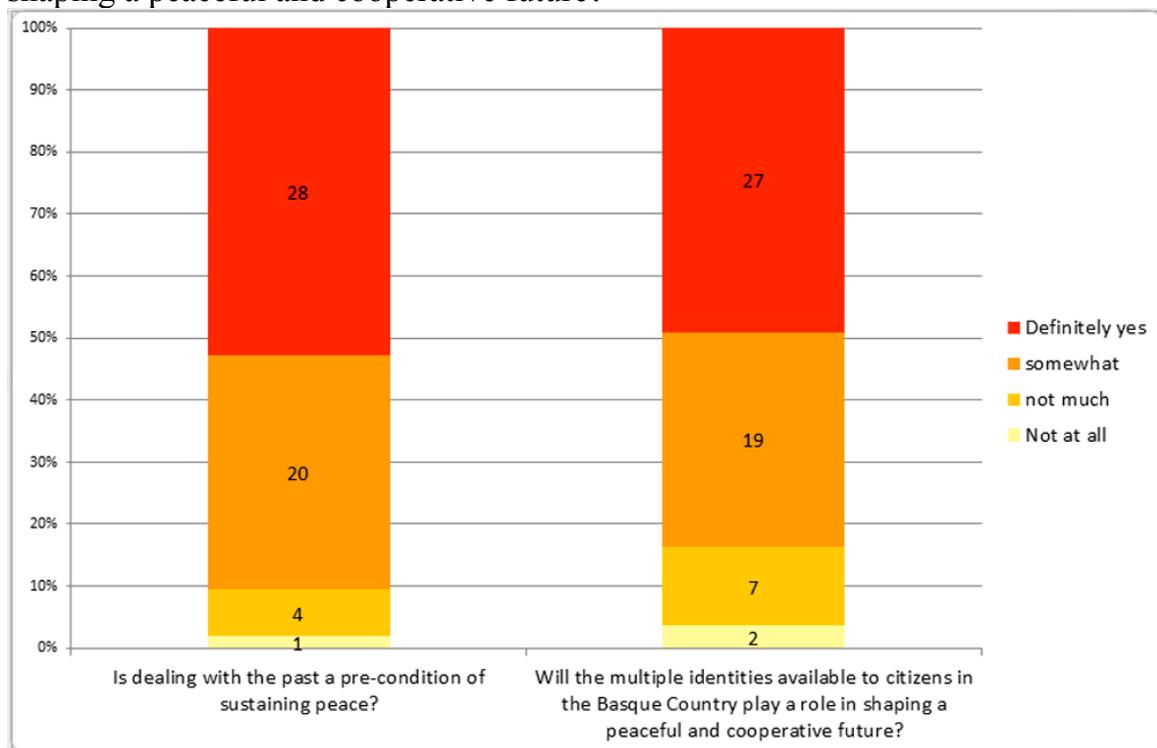


Figure 11. The influence of dealing with the past on the sustainability of peace and the role of Basque multiple identities.

Correlations

Spearman's rank correlation coefficients were calculated to test fourteen (14) possible dependencies, i.e. between groups of questions, or between the question related to the sector of the society which contributed to the peace process and conviction on the top-down / bottom-up development of the peace process, or the belief that social networks played an important role in this process. Several low and moderate-level correlations were identified. Only the correlations with a Spearman coefficient higher than $\rho=0.3$ ($p \approx 0.01$) are presented below.

The higher the role of the social sector was ranked, the more the participants were convinced that the peace process was bottom-up ($\rho(52) = 0.41$, $p = 0.002$). Also, the higher they graded the role of social networks in the peace process ($\rho(54) = 0.47$, $p = 0.000$), the higher the level of trust in those networks ($\rho(54) = 0.47$, $p = 0.000$).

Moreover, the more that participants believed the social sector played a significant role in building the preconditions for peace, the less they were convinced that violence was abandoned only because of successful police actions (negative correlation: $\rho(54) = -0.46$, $p = 0.000$). It is interesting to add that this might contradict the majority opinion of society.

Obviously, there was a negative correlation between the conviction that the peace process was bottom-up and the belief that the abandonment of violence would have been possible without the majority of society expressing public opposition against violence ($\rho(51) = -0.38$, $p = 0.005$).

Additionally, the higher the participants ranked the cooperation in social networks, the lower they evaluated the role of the recent intensification of police actions in the abandonment of violence ($\rho(51) = -0.30$, $p = 0.027$), and the more likely they were to believe that society played a role in the cessation of.

Furthermore, those convinced that the multiple identities available to citizens in the Basque Country played a role in shaping a peaceful and cooperative future were also convinced that there was a strong cooperation in the social networks ($\rho(49) = 0.37$, $p = 0.008$).

Finally, those who thought the economic development of the Basque Country had a positive influence on sustaining peace rejected the idea that abandonment of violence would have been possible without the majority of society expressing public opposition against violence (negative correlation: $\rho(53) = -0.30$, $p = 0.024$).

Thematic findings: qualitative accounts from the interviews and the questionnaire

To provide additional defense, it seems that the voices of the Basque people (those who participated in the interview) complement the statistical view discussed above. Below are citations from the interview and open-ended sections of the questionnaire (e.g. "Please comment on questions..."). Interestingly enough, a majority of participants filled the open-ended boxes. To be precise, 84% responded to questions such as, "What do you think were the main factors leading to the renouncement of violence?"

Interviews

We found that most people interviewed were engaged and eager to express their opinions. In some cases, personal stories were presented to illustrate opinions and beliefs. These were not requested by the interview, but rather voluntary reflections.

In the open-ended part of the interview, participants were asked to suggest possible factors (or forces) that contributed to the peace process. From this line of questioning, six (6) interlocutors mentioned recent intensifications in police action, eight (8) mentioned the role of civil society, two (2) discussed the international situation after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and the March 11, 2004 train bombings in Madrid after which many people averted from terrorist attacks, and one (1) discussed the thriving Basque economy. Most participants confirmed the role of civil society in positively impacting the peace process. One participant said that the academic sector was, and still is, avoiding the core Basque issues of ETA previous attacks and the current changeover to peace:

[There was] no academic research coming from the academic sector; university was not a place where dialogue could take place; not many research initiatives.

The other sectors mentioned included church, trade unions, and journalists, but, according to the participants, none of these played a significant role.

As for the bottom-up versus top-down development of the peace process, seven (7) participants identified a bottom-up approach to peace, while two (2) suggested a top-down mechanism. Strikingly, all participants chose internal over external influence as core to the success of the peace process.

When asked about social networks, the respondents were rather ambiguous; they refuted the claim that virtual social networks, such as Facebook, had any influence. Yet, they argued that real-life social networks did, especially those between families of diverse political opinions. One participant shed some light on why these real-life networks played a role in shaping the peace process:

In the Basque Country the level of social capital is very high; tradition of solidarity and cooperation.

Another highlighted the difference between the ETA and IRA family structures:

Basque families are totally interrelated; it is not about ethnicity – families are often mixed, e.g. father is Spanish, mother is Basque. At the same time in the same family you may have some supporting ETA and some – against. Families were, though, never destroyed, and people were meeting at special events. Normally – not talking about the problem, rather indirectly. It was obvious though what were the opinions; however, family members were seeing and respecting differences. ‘Not talking’ didn’t mean that the reality wasn’t there, creating a pressure to stop violence. In Northern Ireland it was different: if you were an IRA supporter you were only surrounded by IRA supporters, no other different voices around; so not really experiencing the consequences.

Nearly all subjects indicated that there was a high level of trust in social circles and readiness for cooperation. Indeed, cooperation was (and is) seen as a Basque staple that encouraged the development of cooperatives.

Additionally, most subjects were hopeful that peace will remain in Basque Country, though they did highlight two potential threats: (1) the release of prisoners who participated in terrorist activity and (2) any failure in addressing the grievances of the families of victims.

In many cases the role and consequences of violence were mentioned spontaneously. For example, one of the participants emotionally said, “We should never forget that too many people died in this process; and left their country too, with serious problems to come back.” This was not in response to one of the questions on the script; it was an organic and spontaneous confession. Another shared a personal anecdote regarding the violent methods of ETA:

I was threatened; my brother was killed in late 80s; this subject was persecuted by the political branch of ETA, as he talked about it openly. ETA was a real mafia; it was a political mafia! A real mafia targeting people, asking for money; my brother was asked for money and refused; some people gave money, as they were scared, wanting to preserve their own life or the life of their family members; many people against their will were supporting ETA paying them ransoms, just to secure their lives. This was a black period, still not yet opened. Nearly all Basques were living under the threat and were force to pay [ransoms] and so in that way nearly everybody contributed indirectly to ETA. And one of the reasons of the continuing silence was that people were kidnapped, treated like beasts. When they kidnapped someone from the lower class they were treating him like a dog, not even talking to him even once; treating him like a beast. In the meantime, when a son of a big [important] businessman was kidnapped, they were treating him very well. Another low-level kidnapped officer from a rural place – was treated like a beast. This ideology has nothing to do with socialism or bringing social justice – it was just nationalistic. [---] They do still have their arms. They are still not deeply convinced. These people have not made a deep self-analysis of what happened in their region. The whole population didn't openly admit that they live under the threat. Franco's political prisoners were also threatened; this was an armed gang, a real mafia; many people had to leave the country. They do not believe in ballot, they believe in bullets.

Quotes from the questionnaire

Victims:

There have been thousands of [variously affected] victims (more than 800 were killed). That means that all the people living in the Basque Country have had, at some point of their lives, direct or indirect relation with some of the victims (or their family members).

Police action vis-à-vis the civil society's influence:

Police action is important, but it's impossible to fight people's will only by this means. Under Franco's regime, police action was strong and ETA survived and was very strong, because they had a lot of people's support.

The role of the social sector:

The will of peace of the Basque society has been very important. The society has been pushing for peace, and for the end of the violence, and for dialogue, even during the worst days when violence and exclusion were dominating the scenario. It has been in the forefront of the efforts for peace, marking the way for peace to governments and political parties.

Social movements have lead politicians to make decisions.

I think society was getting bored and disgusted about the situation; politicians perceived it and acted consequently. This happened especially in the political parties, which 'supported' violence.

I think that peace decision was initiated from the Basque Country, and to say more, from ex-members of ETA.

The 'spiral of silence':

It is true that the majority of the society was against ETA. It is not true, however, that the majority used to express this opinion openly. It didn't happen that way, unless you think that to go to a demonstration, with thousands of other people, is equal to express your opinion against ETA openly. I don't think so: many of the demonstrators remained in silence once they were back again.

It was very difficult to talk about ETA and terrorism in the social networks. It was a social taboo, except in the media and only with some of the speakers

Social networks:

I think the Basque society is very small and very plural. It's very usual to have relatives, friends and co-workers of all political sectors. That has been a very important key to maintain cohesion in the Basque society, avoiding serious breakdowns in the coexistence.

At the same time, I think social networks have a very huge impact in the thinking of the Basque society. Ideas as dialogue, rejecting violence and plurality have spread more through these networks than through traditional media.

What could threaten peace?

The culture of violence, after those years of conflict, is a fact in the Basque society.

An increase of the social hopelessness.

I think it is a matter of time, but society must deal with many issues in order to get over our past: ETA prisoners; victims of terrorism; the construction of a truthful and inclusive narrative of the past; accountability for torture and other forms of ill-treatment...

The level of political wisdom of political and social actors will determine how long we will need to wait in order to address all these issues effectively.

Lack of commitment by the Spanish Government to make steps to solve the Basque prisoners' situation.

Conclusions and discussion

The quantitative results of the study verify the researchers' hypotheses. Those participating in the study viewed the peace process as bottom-up, internally-driven, and influenced by civil society. This was not the unanimous opinion, but it was the opinion of the vast majority. Additionally, the participants highly regarded the legal measures to bring down ETA violence; but participants believed they were not enough to resolve violence. In other words, civil society was necessary.

Similarly, the majority of participants confirmed the role of real-life networks, not necessarily social networks, in resolving the conflict. Again, this refers to family and community relationships. These networks, according to the participants, are predicated on trust. Strikingly, only half of the participants agreed that social networks are inherently cooperative, which seems to challenge the cooperative paradigm that drives Basque economic development. There is always a chance that this discrepancy is due to the research method. In other words, perhaps the questions lacked precision, and thus did not invite a relevant response.

In addition, the economic development was highly regarded by all and seen as one of the factors impacting the sustainability of the peace process. This is an interesting consistency.

Most of the respondents indicated that the multiple identities available to citizens in the Basque Country played a positive role in the transition to peace and will continue to play a role in creating a cooperative and peaceful future. In this same vein, they viewed dealing with the past (in particular, addressing grievances of victims) as a precondition for sustainable peace. This awareness is not just for those directly affected by violence. There was a sense of shared responsibility for the past and moving forward; thus, society as a whole carried the weight of the violence, not just the victims.

Additionally, there were interesting insights that spoke to various segments of society, specifically in regards to the role of youth. In the interviews, nearly all subjects were convinced that youth, as an independent faction (e.g. the youth or students organizations), did not play a significant role in the peace process, though some youth did in fact join the pro-peace social activities. When asked if youth

played a role in the peace process, 21% said “definitely not” and 36% “rather not,” which together makes 57%.

We found a discrepancy regarding the role of academics: nearly all interviewees said that academics didn’t play any role in the peace process, but 60% of questionnaire respondents claimed that academics either ‘definitely’ or ‘rather’ contributed to the process. This contradiction isn’t necessarily a negative thing. It might just invite further research on the topic, especially in defining academic’s contribution beyond research and publications. A future study might explore the role of academics as public intellectuals, consultants, and/or participants of a highly interactive process.

The perspective on journalists was divided: 52% of the respondents saw their role as important, while 45% did not. The interviewees’ opinion confirms the latter, additionally blaming journalists for avoiding the violence and peace issues.

These findings when paired with the literature analysis demonstrate how the Basque people developed an interactive way of coping with violence and threats, and sought positive solutions by building a cultural and economic peace-enforcing environment. They created a new attractor, in the language that exists between words, thus reversing stabilizers of violence. They achieved this “silent” communication through strong family bonds and an unspoken recognition of the prevailing public opinion.

Economic development, which positively influenced family life, became an increasingly consolidating force. As one interviewee said, non-verbal communication didn’t mean that there was a lack of pressure to support growth through the cessation of violence. Instead, these families and close-knit circles created an unspoken cumulation of national conspiracy aimed at building the preconditions for peace (though never giving up the desire for autonomy) and indirectly encouraging ETA to move towards peace. This may support the initial conjecture that Basque society found a way to circumvent the ‘spiral-of-silence-effect.’

In short, these correlations speak to a certain attitude (or social conviction) that the people play a part in shaping the fate of a nation. Those who believed in the role of the social sector also believed in the bottom-up mechanisms for peace. They also believed in the significance of social networks and building trust between participants of those networks. This echoes Carol Dweck’s theory (2000, 2006) that there are individuals who believe in the malleability of people and the world, and who are convinced that it is possible to effect change, not only in structures or procedures, but in people’s perspective and disposition. In turn, these people become carriers of a new concept; maybe that of peace. Our hypothesis is that those Basques who believed in social power would also fall into Dweck’s category of malleable believers and carriers of new concepts. Thus, these people, specifically, would further the peacemaking mission through social activities.

As previously mentioned, the limitation of this research relates to the sample, which was made up of those educated in Basque society. In the future, it may be worth addressing a random sample of the society. Surely, the spiral of silence might still exist in this broader study, but this only invites new and creative methods for circumventing it. In other words, the questionnaire might

require a special determination in ‘bringing out the truth’ (a phrase used by one of the interviewees).

In conclusion, the results of this research may serve as a departure point for further analysis, which may be increasingly important in the current political situation of the Basque Country.

Notes

1. From: *The Guardian*, 20 October 2011. Retrieved 19 December 2012, from: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/20/basque-ceasefire-statement-full-text>. Accessed February 23, 2014.
2. Mondragón was created in 1956 by an activist Catholic priest José María Arizmendiarieta who was aiming to get the Basque region out of poverty. Contemporary Mondragón is a network of more than 120 worker-owned cooperatives generating more than \$20 billion in annual revenue and employing 100,000 workers, making it Spain’s fourth largest industrial and seventh largest financial group (see: Hollender, 2011).
3. The former President of the Basque Country.
4. Through fueros, the Spanish law of that time.
5. Portrayed by the famous Picasso painting Guernica (see: Hofmann, 1983).
6. ETA: an acronym for Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, Basque Homeland and Freedom.
7. Spanish: Guernica.
8. “Personal relationships in the Basque Country continue to transcend the conflict”, Chapman (2005, p31).
9. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11191395>. Accessed February 23, 2014.
10. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/21/world/europe/eta-basque-separatists-declare-halt-to-violence-in-spain-and-france.html?pagewanted=all>. Accessed February 23, 2014.
11. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/spain/8833017/ETA-urged-to-declare-end-to-violent-action.html>. Accessed February 23, 2014.
12. Established in 1986; see: www.gesto.org/engl/i_index.htm. Accessed February 23, 2014.
13. Established in 1992; the name ‘Lokarri’ was registered in 2006, being a continuation of a social movement Elkarrri that was established in 1992; see: www.lokarri.org/index.php/en/. Accessed February 23, 2014.
14. Published in 3,000 copies; see: www.gesto.org/engl/bakehitzak.htm. Accessed February 23, 2014.
15. Euskadi in the Basque language.
16. Euskera in the Basque.
17. See the Statute at: http://www.basques.euskadi.net/t32-448/en/contenidos/informacion/estatuto_guernica/en_455/adjuntos/estatu_i.pdf. Accessed February 23, 2014.
18. Full name: The Political statute of the Community of the Basque Country; proposed by the aforementioned former president of the Basque Country, Mr. Juan Jose Ibarretxe; so far failed in the Spanish Parliament.

19. See the Abertzale information website: <http://www.basquepeaceprocess.info/?p=3934>. Accessed February 23, 2014.
20. Interesting to mention, that some of the interviewees attributed the lack of any academic materials on the peace process to the predominant national avoidance of this issue, also at the universities.
21. In a form of a Google excel document.

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