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Strengthening of National Research Capacity on Policy, Conflict Resolution, and Reconciliation / PEACE

WP1: Strategy Report



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Background & Context

The project idea was initiated as an outcome of the conference titled "Conflicted Resolution " organized by AAUP in April 2017(PEACE) with the participation of national and international researchers. The conference proceedings stressed the need to enhance the Palestinian universities' capacities for peace and conflict resolution research. Therefore, the AAUP took the lead and initiated the "PEACE" project in cooperation with the other Palestinian universities (Hebron University- HU, Islamic University of Gaza -IUG I), and the international universities (Fredrich Schiller University - FSU, University of Granada - UGR); the AAUP has gotten the Erasmus fund for this project.

PEACE is an international cooperation project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education program of the European Union during the period 15 October 2018 – 14 October 2021. The project seeks to support the modernization, accessibility, and internationalization of HEIs in Palestine by addressing five cross-cutting aspects of university governance.

Objectives of the project (CBHE)

1- General objective:

The project supports the modernization, internationalization, and research quality of the HEIs in Palestine. More specifically, it contributes to strengthening the role of the HEIs in political decisions and policy-making processes through the development of the HEIs' research capacities and potentials in fields related to conflict resolution and reconciliation.

2- Specific objectives:

-- Developing researchers' skills and capabilities on conflict resolution and reconciliation.

-- Strengthening strategic partnerships and networking with the leading conflict resolution centers, political strategists, and institutions.

-- Promoting interdisciplinary research related to conflict resolution and reconciliation (e.g. political science, international relations, politics, law, etc.)

This report is the first deliverable in Stage 1 (Preparation Stage & Development of Institutional Research Strategy) and finalized by the consortium members. A team from the partner universities cooperatively produced this report as a tangible result of Work plan 1 led by Hebron University.

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VERSIONING AND CONTRIBUTION HISTORY

Version	Date	Revision description	Responsible partner
V1	27.8.2020	Creation of the document	HU
V2	9.9.2020	Updated	AAUP
V3	2.11.2020	Updated	FSU
V4	---	Updated	IUG
V5	28.1.2021	Updated	HU

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INTRODUCTION:

This report is subsequent to the situational analysis report and the comparative analysis report prepared by Hebron University on behalf of the consortium to analyze the field of research on conflict resolution and reconciliation in Palestine. It also builds on the findings highlighted in the aforementioned reports. Therefore, those are the integral parts of this report and are included as annexes.

The strategy report draws the roadmap for the advancement of research in this field. The strategy and actions developed here are not limited to the current project and go beyond it aiming for sustainability and collective efforts to advance the field.

The comparative analysis report defined main gaps between the state of research in conflict resolution and reconciliation in Palestine, Germany, and Spain. The strategy developed here revolves around short-term and long-term actions on local, national, and international levels to bridge the gaps listed below in this project.



BACKGROUND:

In Palestine, the literature on conflict resolution and policy dates back to the late 1960s, making it a novel field of research compared to literature in the research centers in Germany and Spain.

An attempt towards a general analysis and sorting of the literature scanned during the first phase of the project led to many interesting findings on the potential for advancing this field in the future. The findings included were not limited to language limitations, minimal specialization in conflict resolution (mostly conflict description and historical analysis) as a minimal investment of the government and research institutions in the field.

The above analysis was followed by a comparative analysis between Palestine, Germany, and Spain. The analysis led to identifying main gaps, including but not limited to:

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GAPS:

1. Language barrier: The reliance on Arabic in both reception and production limits the span of the viewed materials. In Germany and Spain, the wider range of languages used in research and production widened the range of literature in the field.
2. The novelty of the field as a standalone field of research, hence the lack of a Palestinian academic vision of unified terminologies. Meanwhile, the main terminologies agreed upon or debated in the literature were scanned by Granada University and Friedrich Schiller University.
3. Limited research infrastructure for humanities in general and conflict resolution and reconciliation in particular. The number of research centers in Palestine was limited compared to the number of centers in Spain and Germany.
4. A limited number of academic expertise in Palestine in the field of conflict resolution and reconciliation.
5. National strategies funding focuses on technology and innovation as the main priority compared to humble to non-evident support for humanities research. A thorough look at the European Union strategy and the national strategies derived from it to support research reflected the deficiency in Palestine's similar strategies.

Both reports (the situational analysis and comparative reports) drew some recommendations to advance the field and are in line with the objective of this main project of "contributing to strengthening the role of HEIs in political decisions and policymaking processes seeking to develop HEIs' research capacities and potential in fields related to conflict resolution and reconciliation." as well as the other key objectives of:

- Developing researchers' skills and capabilities on conflict resolution and reconciliation.
- Strengthening strategic partnerships and networking with leading conflict resolution centers, political strategists, and institutions.
- Promoting interdisciplinary research related to conflict resolution and reconciliation (e.g., political science, international relations, politics, and law, etc.).

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The main recommendations included the following (and will be later used for developing the strategy):

1. Encouraging researchers to conduct or translate them to English or other international languages as well as publishing in international periodicals
2. Investing in social sciences research and finding research funding channels for HEIs.
3. A more in-depth capacity building through workshops and training for researchers in the fields of conflict resolution and reconciliation.
4. Further emphasis on research in the fields of "Conflict Resolution Managements" and "Reconciliation".
5. Creating a hybrid system in Palestine that combines the approaches used by Spain and Germany in reference to the Europe 2020 plan.
6. Building on the European Research Area (ERA) , sixth priority "International Cooperation", for joint research in the field of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation and access to the resources offered by the ERA.
7. Opening academic programs for postgraduate studies on conflict resolution and reconciliation studies in Gaza similar to what was opened at the Arab American University years ago, so that research and studies in this field become requirements for obtaining a scientific degree on either the master or Ph.D. levels.
8. Updating the study plans of humanities programs in Palestinian universities to have more courses that discuss issues of conflict resolution, reconciliation, and peace studies.
9. Establishing new research centers in the Palestinian universities so that they give priority to conflict resolution and reconciliation studies and operate within an integrated national strategy.
10. Exploring the possibility of opening joint academic programs with European universities that support this scientific field.
11. Holding annual international conferences in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to stimulate scientific research in this field.

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CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES:

Although many of the project activities were implemented, still certain shifting and delay took place due to the following challenges:

1. Like the rest of the other projects, this project was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; most of the activities were either delayed or moved online. All consortium meetings, students' training sessions, and the forum were held or to be held online as the pandemic hit Palestine and Europe in March 2020.

Moreover, some students and staff were infected by the virus and thus were unable to join or participate in the meetings and training sessions which led to a delay for many of the planned sessions.

2. The separation over the last decades between the two parts of the palestinian territory has led to a force split between residents living in the two areas; training sessions and meetings had to be duplicated and held online.
3. The lockdown delayed the forum planned for March 2020, and the training at Friedrich Schiller University planned for August 2020 to shift to 2021.



STRATEGY:

A key objective for this project is to develop a strategy to enhance the research in conflict resolution and policymaking. The findings of the first two stages of Work Package1 (WP1) support the activities designed for this project. This report will define the steps, mechanisms, and procedures to achieve the aspired outcome and draw future cooperation and development.

The strategy is built on both short-term and long-term objectives and actions. The consortium partners collectively designed the following actions:

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Short term actions

Based on the situational and comparative analysis mentioned above, the current research status proved a need for a preparatory stage for academics and researchers interested in this field. Thereupon, the development of training sessions, manual/handbook, a research hub, and a forum started during and after the finalization of work package one.

1. Training sessions:

Training sessions were initiated at an early stage of this project by training the field researchers on the main terminologies and research techniques to prepare for the data collection and analysis that was held on June 29th, 2019.

Moreover, training sessions for academics, researchers, and students on the core topics by the European partners and AAUP as an expert in the field locally are needed. This is derived from the need to bridge the gaps and introduce new approaches and opportunities by standing on the different approaches, techniques, challenges, and terminologies used by different institutions and research centers. Therefore, training sessions on the status quo of the discipline, historical background, different concepts, dealing with identity and religion in conflict resolution, dealing with socio-environmental conflicts, gender and conflict resolutions and the current challenges for Conflict Resolution in the international arena were held at both Granada University and IUG.

Upcoming training sessions will be distributed at various intervals of the project, and further advanced sessions will be planned by the different partners to support each other. The main topics for these training sessions include but are not limited to: research methodology on reconciliation and peace building, reconciliation and peace building field, and advanced conflict resolution.

2. The Manual/Handbook

The handbook aims to support academics in the field to introduce the main concepts, history, cases, and provide supporting resources to facilitate the learning process. The main themes to be tackled include the foundations of conflict, peace, and reconciliation studies, main concepts, theories, application (from theories to practice), challenges faced in the

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field of peace-building and reconciliation, case studies, and resources for teaching and learning on conflict, peace, and reconciliation.

3. National Research Committee

The National research committee will be formed of academics and practitioners in the fields of conflict resolution and reconciliation and will be meeting quarterly to discuss the topics that need further research and development. This committee will also invite the European Partners to attend its meetings for advice and opinion. The report of this committee will be shared with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education as well as the HEIs to coordinate and work on researching the recommended topics.

4. Research Hub

The Research Hub at the PCRSC strives to be a comprehensive source of being an accessible database to the public and those interested in conflict analysis and resolution. Housed in the Policy and Conflict Resolutions Studies Center at the Arab American University in Palestine, the research hub will prioritize accumulating wide-range and extensive resources on the Palestinian Israeli conflict, while at the same time incorporate the extensive body of knowledge that exists in the field to promote interdisciplinary research and analysis in the field of conflict resolution, reconciliation, and peace studies. Consolidating existing local, regional, and global bodies of knowledge will be extended to further build new partnerships with research centers and organizations experts in the field.

The main feature of the research hub is the resource database which is composed of a user-friendly composite of literature in the field of conflict resolution and reconciliation as well as a compilation and mapping out of the different organizations and research centers working in the field of conflict. By facilitating access to a full range of research material in the field of conflict, the Research Hub aims to:

- Enhance a grounded and evidence-based policy papers to engage local governmental institutions
- Support local and international researchers, policymakers, and students of conflict studies through providing an accessible wide range of scholarly resources.
- Foster new collaboration in research and knowledge through mapping the community of researchers in the field of conflict.

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- Identify new areas of research and encourage local researchers to dig in this field.

The Research Hub offers multiple levels of engagement with research to provide an evolving picture of key questions in the field of conflict as well as mapping researchers working on different topics and the most current information on research projects and new findings in the field.

The Research Hub will branch out to several sub-branches:

I- The Archive:

The Archive will collect and catalogue primary resources that deal with the Palestinian Israeli conflict. Archives have several characteristics; some materials are retained for their historical value; the safeguarding of such material is extremely vital, especially in the Palestinian context.

The sources of such materials vary and may include:

- i) Governmental materials, be it supranational, national, regional, and local documents.
- ii) Religious institutions
- iii) Businesses
- iv) Voluntary associations
- v) Material culture families and individuals
- vi) Academic institutions

These materials encompass written documents, electronic resources and range in terms of their format; they may include:

- a) Photographic material
- b) Moving images
- c) Sound material
- d) Oral history
- e) Digital and analogue material
- f) Legal documents

II- Library - Academic Literature:

The Research Hub will house an extensive library in the field of conflict studies, conflict resolution, reconciliation, peace studies, and any other material relevant to research on issues that pertain to understanding and analyzing conflict.

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This literature includes:

Reference Sources (such as Encyclopedias), books, documents and articles.

III- Published Materials:

The published materials consist of two components:

1- **Annual Journal**: The Center's Academic Journal is an important component in the academic cycle, it provides researchers with the means to share their knowledge and contribute to the discussion in the field of Conflict Studies.

2- **Periodic Policy papers**:

The policy papers cater to the non-academic audience; they are published in response to pressing issues and questions for the purpose of promoting public debate, engaging with state institutions and the civil society.

IV- **Establishing Partnerships & Building Networks**: Establishing membership with relevant research centers and academics in the field allows the research hub to be an integrative establishment. Building and strengthening new and existing networks will be of great value. Forms of a partnership may vary and include:

- Conferences (academic) & Roundtables (policy oriented)
- Workshops
- Study visits

It is worth mentioning that this strategy is in line with the objectives of Work Package 3 of this project, "Networking and Reinforcing of National and International Cooperation."

5. Forum:

As an element of sustainability, an academic forum is designed through the cooperation of the consortium team and hosted by one of the consortium members each year. The Forum aims at bringing scholars in the field to engage with an evolving discipline and share experiences and

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lessons learned in the field as well as expanding and strengthening forms of partnership. Likewise, it aims at opening the door for creating Palestinian unified terminologies for conflict resolution and reconciliation.

The first forum is planned for June 2020 and is open for academics and students interested in the field.

The long-term objectives:

While all of the short- term objectives/activities are planned to be implemented during the project lifecycle, the following are more on future planning that might occur during the project and be maintained afterward:

1. Establishing a new center of conflict resolution studies in Gaza. Based on what was monitored during the data collection on conflict resolution studies, the studies issued by the institutions of the Gaza Strip indicate that most of them are related to the issue of reconciliation, and there are no institutions that attach importance to the field of conflict resolution in general. On the other hand, The Arab American University in Ramallah took the initiative to open the first specialized center in this field, and by virtue of the geographical division of the Palestinian territories, it is important for a university in the Gaza Strip to launch a similar center that has a clear research agenda to study conflict resolution and reconciliation, and to provide the necessary theoretical foundations for the participation of students and professors in scientific contributions in this arena.

2. Establishing a new joint master degree related to the field.

One of the steps that ensures the continuity of interest in the field of conflict resolution is for the partner universities, in cooperation with other Palestinian universities, to establish a related joint master's program to this field provided that the program is based on the academic experiences of the universities participating in the project; participants will receive training in conflict resolution over the three years span of the project. It is also important that the study plan includes a set of interdisciplinary

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courses, with special attention to the English language, to enable the program students to gain exposure to the scientific knowledge production in this field.

3. Developing the courses outline/curriculum

Most Palestinian universities offer bachelor and master programs in humanities, and accordingly it is possible to work through the initiative of partners to propose new courses within the existing programs to cover some aspects of conflict resolution studies, especially in political science, international relations, sociology and history programs. Efforts can also be coordinated to develop plans for some existing courses as some program courses are offered on conflict resolution, conflict management, peace and reconciliation, and other topics related to conflict resolution. The experience of European universities participating in this project can be used to develop course plans or propose new ones.

4. Encouraging the Palestinian universities to offer new elective courses in the field of conflict resolution through the Ministry of Higher Education.

One of the steps that makes a difference in terms of increasing awareness of the field of conflict resolution is to cooperate with the Ministry of Higher Education in order to propose optional courses at the Palestinian universities, so that these courses provide students with an introduction to this field, its branches, and its study curricula while linking it to different university majors. It is possible to start first with proposing a single course to be adopted by all Palestinian universities as an optional course, as the Palestinian universities have previous experiences in coordinating efforts to offer new optional or compulsory courses.

Based on that, the Palestinian universities participating in the project must arrange for a meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education to discuss the optional course and the formation of a joint committee in the presence of a representative of the Ministry to develop a vision about the course, its contents, basic readings, objectives and outputs. Another meeting must be held, at the beginning of the academic year 2021/2022, with the rest of the Palestinian universities to inform them about the course proposal and research and get their approval.

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5. Establishing a peer- reviewed Journal.

Establishing a refereed journal specialized in conflict resolution and reconciliation is considered a qualitative addition to Palestinian academics, as it contributes:

- Providing a platform for scientific publishing in this field on the local level.
- The field is expected to attract researchers from several countries around the world, and this will increase their background size.
- Since the language of the journal will be English, it is expected that the journal will become a scientific platform for Palestinian researchers and their integration in global knowledge production.

There are two basic conditions for the success of a peer-reviewed journal: the first is to ensure attracting high-quality research, and the second is the journal's financial stability. With regard to the first condition, this could be done by developing a revised proposal for the journal idea that attracts young researchers, meets their interests and reaches the level of their expectations in parallel with the formation of a scientific committee of Palestinian and international scientific and research experiences to sponsor the process of setting the research agenda and keep on track with its conduct and publication.

As for securing financial support for the magazine, several options can be explored, including relying on technical and administrative tasks undertaken by postgraduate students at universities to reduce costs, and launching them electronically. The beginning will be by displaying these tasks on university websites, collecting fees for publishing, and then obtaining support from the Ministry of Higher Education to scientific research.

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CONCLUSION:

This project proved to be the cornerstone of embracing the importance of research in Palestine's conflict resolution and policy. The collaboration of the five HEIs on national and international levels led by AAUP facilitated the analysis of the field's status quo and identification of needs and crowned by a strategy to further develop the research and researchers' capacities and acquaintances.

The five partners, under the leadership of AAUP, will be working collectively to achieve the short-term objectives of this strategy, and collaborate on achieving the long-term objectives. Erasmus National Office in Palestine is supportive of this field on the agenda of the national strategy, and writers represent a key element to the success of those collective efforts; these efforts will be combined with all of the above actions and strategy elements detailed in this report.

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