Chapter 1
Towards a Theory of Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding

Interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding (IDP) is an important approach that places the practice of dialogue at the heart of peacebuilding. It fosters the (re)building of trust relations and enhances social cohesion. It increases awareness about how to improve human interactions, both locally and globally, by recognizing the importance of integrating religious identities into intergroup dialogue. IDP builds on a century-long history of interreligious dialogue and merges it with the latest developments in the scholarly understanding of peacebuilding. IDP thus integrates into the peace movement the millions of people worldwide who have been involved in one form or another of interreligious dialogue.

The theory of IDP is the outcome of a particular historical trajectory that has come to combine two genealogies: one theoretical and the other methodological. The first is linked to the growing subfield of interreligious dialogue within the academic study of religions. The second is related to the methodology of research-action, itself the fruit of more recent developments within a variety of applied sectors in many scientific disciplines, including the applied academic study of religions as well as the peace and conflict resolution studies. Both genealogies will be analyzed later in the chapter after the presentation of our theory of IDP. Since theorizing builds upon actual practices of interreligious dialogue, we will start with a succinct outline of cornerstone developments in this arena.

Historical Overview of the Practices of Interreligious Dialogue

It can be argued that the practices of interreligious dialogue are both ancient and modern.¹ For our purposes in this chapter, we will
focus on the latter. In what seems like a rare case of academic consensus in the study of religions, scholars point to the two-week World Parliament of Religions that took place in Chicago in 1893 as the modern beginnings of interreligious or interfaith dialogue. This modern practice is characterized, in part, by two aspects: a broad diversity in the religious composition of its main participants as well as an emphasis on understanding each other rather than converting one another. In other words, communication for better understanding was prioritized over ‘winning’ theological arguments. Informal encounters between some participants followed the Parliament, especially in Boston. The need for cooperation on commonly agreed-upon issues soon emerged, leading to the creation in 1900 of the first interreligious organization: the International Association for Interreligious Freedom (IARF). It focused on religious freedom, bringing together a number of liberal wings of various religions in different parts of the world. They had discovered at the Parliament and during the course of subsequent encounters how much they each struggled to be recognized by mainline, orthodox groups within their respective religions.

The modern interreligious dialogue continued to grow in the following decades, albeit very slowly. Institutionally, it was not until 40 years later, in 1933, that the World Fellowship of Faiths’ First International Congress took place also in Chicago. It was called unofficially the ‘second Parliament of Religions’ under the legacy of the first Parliament held in that city. This gathering had also been stimulated by another recent event, the ‘Religions of Empire Conference’ held in London in 1924. Subsequently, when after the 1936 Congress, the World Congress of Faiths (Continuation Movement) was established, WCF became an independent body. The socio-political dynamics for the emergence of this international interreligious organization were very different from those that had sparked the first World’s Parliament of Religions in the United States almost half a century earlier, which left a few traces but no organizational legacy. In the 1930s, Britain was an empire, yet the vision behind the World Congress of Faiths was greatly influenced by the mystical experiences of its founder, Sir Francis Younghusband,

who stressed that the one aim of the Congress was to promote the spirit of fellowship. He ruled out certain misunderstandings. There
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was no intention of formulating another eclectic religion, nor of seeking the lowest common denominator, nor of appraising the value of existing religions and discussions respective merits and defects. It was not maintained that all religions were the same, nor equally true, nor as good as one another. The hope was to ‘intensify that sense of community which is latent in all men’ and to awaken a livelier world-consciousness. Sir Francis mentioned that through discussion and reflection, the conception of God grew greater and that by coming closer to each other, members of different religion deepened their own spiritual communion.4

To be sure, the World Congress of Faiths promoted a kind of intellectual and experiential dialogue that was very far from the activist language that was to develop another generation later, after most of the mainline Christian Churches embarked officially on the interreligious dialogue journey.

In 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC) was established. It was itself the result of intra-Christian dialogue started prior to WWII.5 Yet, it was not until the Roman Catholics opened an official office for the promotion of interreligious dialogue in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council in 1965 that the WCC followed suit by establishing its own office of dialogue with people of living faiths and, subsequently, ideologies.6 These two offices were key players in financing many interreligious dialogue activities worldwide, mostly theological in nature.7

It was partially in reaction of this form of dialogue oriented primarily towards theological understanding, whether official or unofficial, that other religious leaders, including lay people, of major world religions came to organize the World Conference on Religion and Peace that was held in Kyoto in 1970. This event was marked by a strong public reaction against the Cold War dynamics and growing militarization worldwide. It laid the grounds for what was to become the largest activist interreligious organization in the world, now renamed Religions for Peace – International. Its mission statement reads as follows:

Religions for Peace is the largest international coalition of representatives from the world’s great religions dedicated to promoting peace.
Respecting religious differences while celebrating our common humanity, Religions for Peace is active on every continent and in some of the most troubled areas of the world, creating multi-religious partnerships to confront our most dire issues: stopping war, ending poverty, and protecting the earth.

Other activist organizations soon appeared, to address the needs of a growing interest at the grassroots level. In New York City, the Temple of Understanding developed from 1968 onwards an international peace agenda specifically linked to its geographical proximity to the UN headquarters. In India, the World Fellowship of Interreligious Councils started in Kerala in 1981 to address growing interreligious tensions. In Chicago, to celebrate the centenary of the first Parliament of the World’s Religions, a Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions was established in 1988, leading to a permanent office that continues to provide an umbrella space for interreligious dialogue organizations and individuals to meet every five years or so (Chicago: 1993; Cape Town: 1999; Barcelona: 2004; Melbourne: 2009). In San Francisco, following the organization of an interreligious event to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, Religions Initiative Inc. was established in 1995, marked by a grassroots approach greatly facilitated by the new internet technology.

This brief overview of major worldwide interreligious dialogue organizations is not exhaustive by any means, other organizations having appeared over the last 40 years or so. It gives a taste of the initially slow and then more rapid increase in organizational structures, itself a result of the growing need for cooperation across religious and spiritual traditions. No doubt, the steady growth in both the number of participants in interreligious dialogue activities and in the number of organizations worldwide is remarkable.

As the practice of interreligious dialogue grew exponentially over the last few decades, the need to clarify organizational approaches became obvious. Many critiques of interreligious dialogue activities noticed that while they may promote interreligious understanding, dialogue for interreligious cooperation on a variety of issues does not necessarily follow, especially in situations of serious social conflict and war. While it is easier to talk across perceived enemy lines when
abroad, upon return, the dialogue is often very difficult to continue because of local pressures against it. Irrespective of the degree of social harmony or conflict in one’s home context, this challenge exists whenever the home reception of the idea of interreligious dialogue and cooperation is negative. Whether it be for a major religious leader in tension with his own followers who oppose his participation in such meetings or for a young person who suddenly lived through a positive transformative interreligious dialogue experience she can not share readily with her local friends upon return, the challenge of continuing dialogue upon return home is almost always there. This reality raises the need to create and sustain more explicitly local interreligious dialogue activities and organizational structures to foster them.

The aftermath of September 11, 2001, only strengthened what can now be called a worldwide interreligious movement. This global endeavour actively promotes a closer link between older forms of dialogue for the sake of theological understanding and spiritual fellowship, and newer forms of dialogue for cooperation on a variety of issues both broad (peace or the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, for example) and narrow (local poverty alleviation or inter-parish visits, for example). At a grassroots level, hundreds if not thousands of interreligious organizations have emerged in the last quarter of a century. While they certainly need to clarify for themselves the purpose of their activities, a tension naturally arises between those organizational members who want to nurture the dialogue of mutual learning and search for common understanding and those who seek more ‘action’, more interreligious cooperation to foster peacebuilding. To be sure, the latter would hardly be possible without the former. Moreover, many religious institutions would not sanction the practice of various forms of activist interreligious dialogue if they had not first experienced the former. Finally, the reasoning that concrete action is more important than ‘only’ talking underestimates, and even neglects, the value of clear communication, which is absolutely essential for the development of better cooperation. Apart from discovering degrees of agreement or disagreement on particular concepts and ideas, the practice of interreligious dialogue leads to the realization that how we talk to each other crossreligiously is also a central concern of interreligious dialogue. In short,
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Interreligious dialogue and interreligious practical cooperation are not mutually exclusive; they rather reinforce each other. This point became obvious as more and more attention has been given to theorizing interreligious dialogue over the last few decades.

Defining Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding

In order to present our own definition of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding, it is necessary first to define interreligious dialogue. Over the last 50 years, the study of interreligious dialogue unfolded in piecemeal fashion as practitioners endeavoured to clarify what they meant by ‘interreligious dialogue’ within the context of their specific and respective practices and disciplinary fields of expertise. Chronologically, the following sample of definitions gives an idea of the variety of scholarly perspectives on interreligious dialogue, providing a general academic framework for the presentation of our own definition further below.

The most popular, yet indirect, definition of interreligious dialogue is probably the one published by Leonard Swidler in 1983 as Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Interideological Dialogue:

1. Dialogue to learn, to change, and to grow, and act accordingly;
2. Dialogue to share and receive from others;
3. Dialogue with honesty and sincerity;
4. Dialogue comparing ideals with ideals, and practice with practice;
5. Dialogue to define yourself and to learn the self-definition of others;
6. Dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions about someone else’s beliefs;
7. Dialogue to share with equals;
8. Dialogue in trust;
9. Dialogue with willingness to look at your beliefs and traditions critically; and
10. Dialogue seeking to understand the other person’s beliefs from within.
These rules hide a definition of dialogue which covers many important elements. Marcus Braybrooke (1992) explores some of them in his own words and adds important dimensions in the following excerpt from his book *Pilgrimage of Hope*, the first history of the development of modern interreligious dialogue:

There are various levels of dialogue and it is a process of growth. An initial requirement is an openness to and acceptance of the other. It takes time to build trust and to deepen relationships. This is why some continuity in a dialogue group is helpful and why patience and time are necessary—all of which are particularly difficult to ensure at an international level. Too easily, we find ourselves imposing our presuppositions on the conversation. […] We have to learn to enter another world that may seem alien and which has different presuppositions. We have to allow our deepest convictions to be questioned. […] It is important for those venturing into dialogue to be secure in their own faith. They need to beware of becoming marginalized in or alienated from their own religious tradition. Dialogue needs also to be of equals, that is to say of those with similar levels of scholarship and study. At its deepest, dialogue will raise questions of truth. […] Dialogue does not necessarily produce agreement and, if it is a search for truth, there is no desire for easy compromise. Sometimes it makes clearer where essential differences lie, exposing the various presuppositions or views of the world with which partners in dialogue are operating. Sometimes, it can be painful.10

To define what he called ‘interfaith cooperation and dialogue’, Marcus Braybrooke referred to Diana Eck’s often-quoted definition entitled Six Forms of Dialogue:

The first is parliamentary style dialogue. Secondly, there is institutional dialogue, such as the regular meetings between representatives of the Vatican and the International Jewish Committee for Inter-religious Consultation. Thirdly, there is theological dialogue, which takes seriously the questions and challenges posed by people of other faiths. Fourthly, dialogue in a community or the dialogue of life is the search for good relationships in ordinary life. Fifthly,
spiritual dialogue is the attempt to learn from other traditions of prayers and meditation. Lastly, there is inner dialogue, which is ‘that conversation that goes on within ourselves in any other form of dialogue’.11

A few years later, in 1991, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican published its own set of guidelines for interreligious dialogue, outlining four kinds of dialogue: dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange and dialogue of religious experience.12 Recently, Fadi Daou, a Lebanese-French Maronite priest who teaches at the Université St-Joseph in Beirut and heads the Middle East Council of Churches’ committee for Christian-Muslim Dialogue suggested an updated classification: the dialogue of civilizations, intercultural dialogue, interreligious dialogue and spiritual solidarity.13 These four are interrelated and demonstrate how encompassing the dialogue movement has become in its understanding of what dialogue is, and what kinds of complementarity are necessary to reflect the broad variety of dialogue.

Another author, Sami Aoun, has usefully emphasized that there is no ‘pure’ dialogue or ideal type. He has presented his own fivefold typology of ideological discourses underpinning interreligious dialogue: missionary, fundamentalist, ethical, consensual and institutional.14 The first four categories overlap to a large extent with the first three in Jane I. Smith’s eight models: persuasion, ethical exchange, theological exchange, ‘get to know you’, classroom, ritual, spirituality and cooperative.15

Another important thinker who has greatly helped clarify vital nuances in our understanding of interreligious dialogue is the Indo-Catalan philosopher-theologian Raimon Panikkar. He distinguishes between dialectical and dialogical dialogue:

The dialectical dialogue supposes that we are rational beings and that our knowledge is governed above all by the principle of non-contradiction. You and I admit it as a given, and if you lead me into contradiction I will either have to give up my opinion or attempt to overcome the impasse. We present our respective points of view to the Tribunal or Reason, in spite of the variety of interpretations
that we may hold even on the nature of reason. [\ldots] The dialogical
dialogue is not so much about opinions as about those who have
such opinions and eventually not about you, but about me to you.
[\ldots] In the dialogical dialogue the partner is not an object or a
subject merely putting forth some objective thoughts to be
discussed, but a you, a real you and not an it. I must deal with you,
and not merely with your thought. And of course, vice-versa, You
yourself are a source of understanding.\textsuperscript{16}

The influence of identity and power dynamics in spaces of interrel-
gious dialogue often transforms dialogical dialogue (implicitly
expected in many interreligious dialogue activities), into dialectical
dialogue (often linked to reductive value judgements). This situation
occurs especially among individuals whose intellectual culture is
shaped by modern rationality, which has privileged dialectic as
a preeminent form of rationality.\textsuperscript{17} Yet, according to Panikkar, this
dialectical dialogue is as fundamental and important as dialogical
dialogue because of its ‘irreplaceable mediating function at the
human level’.\textsuperscript{18} Therefore the two forms of dialogue are complemen-
tary. The tension between them is normal in human communication.
The danger resides in emphasizing one at the expense of the other.
On the one hand, the reduction of dialogue to only its dialectical
expression leads to the unfair imposition of judgement onto others,
with possible implications for reproduction of unjust power dynam-
ics. Yet this dialectical dialogue is a necessary human dimension when
it comes to passing judgements to form our own construction of self
and worldview. On the other hand, the reduction of dialogue to only
its dialogical expression can lead to in-depth understanding of others
without cooperation with them on matters related to political and
social exigencies, and even to daily community living. The first
attitude carries the risk of prompting universalist impositions on the
assumption of an alleged unity behind a particular aspect of reality.
The second can result in individual relativist apathy and collective
stagnation based on a perception of endless and irreconcilable diver-
sity. Finally, Panikkar’s distinction and balance between dialectical
and dialogical dialogue also helps define the concept of ‘dialogue’
when it is used in the expression ‘intercultural dialogue’.
Over a decade ago, Basset also pointed out how crucial interreligious dialogue is to the credibility of faith and believers’ testimonies.\(^{19}\) He described interreligious dialogue as a challenge as important in our postmodern times as that of secularism, atheism and nihilism in the emergence of modernity. In our post-9/11 era of shared responsibility for a more secure world, Basset’s description of the importance of interreligious dialogue turned out to be prophetic.

Basset presents an elaborate historical typology of dialogue.\(^{20}\) In terms of Western heritage, he argues, the most ancient dialogues are literary in nature: they include dramatic, philosophical, polemic and didactic forms of dialogue. There are also several religious forms, such as the dialogue between master and disciples, God and messenger, as well as prophets and a variety of possible audiences. The three most recurring forms within Christianity are apologetic, theological and spiritual dialogues. These three are also common within both Judaism and Islam, with the addition of a juridical response. Basset points out that there is a ‘profound accord between the philosophical approach and the dialogical structure’.\(^{21}\) He argues that it is not until the nineteenth century that dialogue between people began to be considered in European philosophy as a fundamental structure of human thinking, under the influence of Feuerbach who opposed the Hegelian model based on a dialectic mode of thought within the mind processes of the individual person. Dialogical thinking was further developed in Germany by such philosophers as Edmund Husserl and his disciple Martin Heidegger, as well as Martin Buber. Initially, Buber’s famous book \textit{Ich und Du} was received more enthusiastically in German Protestant circles than in Jewish ones; it later helped bring the idea of dialogue into the Second Vatican Council, transforming the nature of both ecumenical and interreligious relations between the Roman Catholic churches and other religious communities worldwide. Another branch of the dialogical current that helped sustain these momentous changes came from France, with the personalism of Emmanuel Mounier, the concept of dialogical communication developed by Karl Jaspers and the Christian existentialism of Gabriel Marcel.

As a Swiss francophone Protestant theologian and expert practitioner of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, Basset integrates these
two main European philosophical currents into his own definition of interreligious dialogue: ‘an exchange of words and a reciprocal listening engaging on an equal footing believers of different religious traditions’.22 His definition is based on five essential elements: (1) the encounter of persons, (2) the exchange of words, (3) reciprocity, (4) alterity and (5) what is at stake.23 He therefore anchors interreligious dialogue in the fact that it takes place between persons who are motivated by their own religious convictions and by the encounter with persons of other religious traditions. Basset’s definition of interreligious dialogue is therefore eminently theo-philosophical.

A recent sociological approach worth taking note of is that of Anne-Sophie Lamine. Her analysis of the history and growth of interreligious dialogue in France during the twentieth century through the disciplinary lens of the sociology of religions uncovers the transformations of French laïcité on the ground. She noticed three transformational modalities. First, the diversification of religious identities in French society forces a rethinking of these identities, caught in a permanent tension between increasing identity affirmations and the recognition of alterity. Second, the spectacular increase in the number of interreligious organizations over the last 20 years points to the emergence of an interreligious movement. Third, religious institutions are also changing in contact with this new pluralist social reality. Lamine argues that all three modalities impact civil society and the relation between public and religious spheres. The increase in religious diversity and the ability to cooperate interreligiously has resulted in greater visibility for religious groups, especially for religious minorities. Public decision makers also call upon religious actors to participate and at times play leadership roles in public meaning-making and peacebuilding activities, especially after collective tragedies.24 Finally, Lamine summarizes her findings on a more theoretical note, with the short phrase: from plurality to recognition. She argues that the rapid increase in interreligious dialogue activities in France reflects transformations in the interpretation on the ground of what constitutes the model of ‘la laïcité française’, in a direction contrary to the popular image of a ‘closed’ or ‘rigid’ laïcité. Her findings coincide with and reinforce the case being made by several Western philosophers that pluralism rooted in recognition of
differences is the best option for a better and more harmonious living together (vivre-ensemble).\textsuperscript{25}

The seminal studies of Basset and Lamine attest to the remarkable rise of both interest in the study of interreligious dialogue as well as the very scope and variety of interreligious dialogue activities, especially in the Western world, during the course of the twentieth century and in the beginning of the twenty-first. Their research corresponds theoretically, albeit not methodologically, with those undertaken by lead researcher Diana Eck within the Pluralism Project at Harvard University.\textsuperscript{26} All three authors articulate different understanding of the concept of ‘pluralism’, which coincides with and reinforces the late twentieth-century emergence of pluralist models in political philosophy.\textsuperscript{27}

The overview of these definitions and classifications, although by no means exhaustive, sheds light on the progress done to date in the new academic subfield of interreligious dialogue. Yet, it does not relieve us from the responsibility to define what we mean ourselves, for the purposes of this book, by ‘interreligious dialogue’ – something which we already did in the introduction and to which we will return at the end of this section. We will now proceed by defining ‘interreligious’ and ‘dialogue’ separately.

The meaning of ‘interreligious’ depends on what definition of ‘religion’ one implies. For our theoretical goals, this meaning needs to be made explicit. So we chose, among many others,\textsuperscript{28} the postmodern scholar of religion Mark C. Taylor’s recent definition of religion to serve this basic purpose:

Religion is an emergent, complex, adaptive network of symbols, myths, and rituals that, on the one hand, figure schemata of feeling, thinking, and acting in ways that lend life meaning and purpose and, on the other, disrupt, dislocate, and disfigure every stabilizing structure.\textsuperscript{29}

By deduction, ‘religious’ is whatever relates to religion as defined above. As for ‘interreligious’, we define it as signifying the links and interactions between human beings, their thoughts and feelings, as well as their physical and immaterial constructions, when they pertain to two or more
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When these interactions pertain to the diversity of perspectives within what might be called ‘one religion’, we use the term ‘intra-religious’.

A good example of a definition of dialogue comes from the new programme on ‘Ethics and Religious Culture’ implemented throughout the primary and secondary school system in the province of Quebec in September 2008. This programme has three objectives, the third of which is to promote dialogical skills. It is interesting to note that ‘dialogue’ is the overarching concept, and that this programme distinguishes between seven kinds of dialogue: conversation, discussion, narration, deliberation, interview, debate and panel. It also presents five tools for elaborating one’s point of view: description, comparison, synthesis, explanation and justification. It adds four ways to question a point of view: preferential judgement, prescriptive judgement, reality judgement and value judgement. It also teaches students seven kinds of mistakes that can easily break a dialogue: personal attack, appeal to popularity, appeal to clan solidarity, authoritative argument, conspiracy, stereotyping and caricaturing. Finally, students are taught attitudes that promote dialogue, such as: respecting the rules set in a particular form of dialogue, expressing correctly one’s emotions and thoughts, listening carefully, paying attention to how our words affect the listeners, demonstrating openness and respect of other’s expressed emotions and thoughts, questioning ourselves more than others, thinking before presenting one’s ideas, verifying that one’s ideas are well understood by others and vice-versa and so on. At the heart of this educational programme lies the understanding, of how important dialogue as such is for all kinds of human interactions.

We argue that these pluralist models in which dialogue plays an integral part are also the results of a paradox inherent to the process of secularization. It has given rise, first in the West but increasingly so today in many other parts of the world, to two opposing and co-dependent phenomena. On the one hand, secularization processes led to both the relativizing philosophically and weakening politically of absolutist religious discourses to make possible a philosophical and later institutional opening towards the other and search for dialogue rather than competition as a means of human communication.
On the other hand, secularization also prompted a rise in exclusivist religious discourses and right-wing ideologies. Both of these have contributed to the end of the Cold War and have become more prominent since September 11, 2001. They have also been widely evident throughout the post-communist countries in Southeast Europe. This process reflects a deeper binary opposition between two philosophical positions. The first position is a relativism in truth claims that is often imputed to interreligious dialogue because it emphasizes respect for the diversity of worldviews and forms of practice. The second position is an absolutism in truth claims that seek to impose unity of worldview at the expense of rights of conscience and belief. Balancing these two extremes is the most important challenge of dialogue today. Panikkar’s earlier notion of complementarity between dialectical and dialogical forms of dialogue brings greater clarity as to how this equilibrium can be reached.

On the basis of this brief overview of key elements in the history of the academic subfield of interreligious dialogue, we will conclude this section with our own definition of ‘interreligious dialogue’. As suggested in our introduction to this book, a narrow definition of ‘interreligious dialogue’ can be: human interaction and communication primarily between religious institutions’ leaders (often excluding or greatly reducing the participation of lay people and particularly women) for the primary purpose of clarifying theological/philosophical similarities and differences. This definition is what is popularly understood by ‘interreligious dialogue’. It however only reflects what Panikkar has called ‘dialectical dialogue’. A broader definition of ‘interreligious dialogue’ that aims to be more inclusive of the wide array of interreligious dialogue activities practised by people whom Marc Gopin calls ‘religious representatives’ or ‘spiritual peacebuilders’ can be: all forms of interactions and communication through speech, writing and/or any kind of shared activities that help mutual understanding and/or cooperation between people who self-identify religiously in one form or another. This broader definition includes both the dialectical and dialogical dimensions described by Panikkar.

The reference to a narrow and a broader definition enables us to not only point to the different meanings which we have encountered in the Balkans, as well as in other parts of the world where we have
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experienced interreligious dialogue first hand. It also allows us to recognize and articulate in our next section the need to integrate the conceptual approaches to interreligious dialogue that emphasize theory and the practical approaches that focus on cooperation on the ground.

A major function of interreligious dialogue is its contribution to peacebuilding, which we broadly define as *all social mechanisms a society develops in order to promote greater understanding and cooperation towards peace*. Since interreligious dialogue helps to increase social trust and integration, it generally contributes to a more peaceful society, with negative tolerance as a minimum expectation and positive tolerance and respect as a maximum ideal.

There have been various definitions of *peacebuilding* in scholarly literature. According to Mohamed Abu-Nimer, this is ‘an umbrella term that includes the full spectrum of conflict resolution and transformation frameworks and approaches, including negotiation, conciliation, mediation, facilitation, alternative dispute resolution, problem-solving workshops, education and training, advocacy and nonviolent resistance, among others’.33 This more technical definition however does not directly include dialogue as a form of human interaction that promotes peacebuilding.

A more useful definition for our present task is that of *religious peacebuilding* developed by David Little and Scott Appleby, who use this term to describe ‘the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence’.34 This definition too does not include all interreligious dialogue activities since the purpose is centred on resolving and transforming deadly conflict. However, to the extent that all interreligious dialogue activities, at least in theory, start with the intention to promote an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence, Little and Appleby’s definition therefore includes most forms of interreligious dialogue activities. This point is further strengthened by the two authors’ acknowledgement that religious peacebuilding also includes ‘the efforts of people working at a distance from actual sites of deadly conflict, such as legal advocates of religious human rights, scholars conducting research relevant to crosscultural and interreligious dialogue and theologians
and ethicists within the religious communities who are probing and strengthening their traditions of nonviolence’.35

This last definition of religious peacebuilding is particularly useful because it implies that peacebuilding activities can be carried out by different actors of various religious or non-religious worldviews, from grassroots to top positions in various forms of hierarchies across the many sectors of society. But when are these activities considered specifically as interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding (IDP)? If during a specific activity no one discusses their religious identities and links them directly to the project that brings them together, then this peacebuilding activity is not interreligious in nature even though some or all of its participants have a religious identity, in one form or another. However, if religious identities are put forward, the peacebuilding activity becomes a form of IDP.

We therefore define interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding (IDP) as *all forms of interreligious dialogue activities that foster an ethos of tolerance, nonviolence, and trust*. Our theory of IDP is constituted on the basis of three principles: self-conscious engagement in IDP, self-critical attitude whilst engaged in IDP and realistic expectations towards IDP results. The first principle of self-conscious engagement in IDP refers to the need to be aware of the fact that one’s religious identity is actively involved in the dialogue process that contributes to peacebuilding. The second principle of self-critical attitude while engaged in IDP points to the importance of being critically aware of our own biases and limitations. Such attitude opens others to mirror our own behaviour, thereby increasing the chances for a more honest dialogue. The third principle calls on the need to be aware of the fact that IDP is a long and uneven, step-by-step process. It is directly related to Marc Gopin’s fundamental notion of ‘incremental peacebuilding’.36 Together, these three principles constitute a foundation towards a theory of IDP.

The way we have defined IDP above is somewhat different from David Smock’s concept of ‘interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding’, the title of his 2002 edited book where he provides a clear rational for the link between the two:

The main assertion of this book is that interfaith dialogue can be used as an effective tool to advance peacebuilding, but anyone who
has engaged in interfaith dialogue in situations of serious conflict recognizes how difficult it is to organize and conduct meaningful interfaith dialogue. [...] The fact that this book focuses exclusively on interfaith dialogue does not imply that interfaith dialogue is the only means by which religious organizations can contribute to peace. Faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other religious organizations very effectively contribute to peace through conducting training on conflict resolution.37

Smock clearly outlines the importance of interfaith (or interreligious) dialogue as a means towards peacebuilding. However, we suggest that linking the two more explicitly in the expression ‘interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding’ puts ‘dialogue’ at the centre stage of peacebuilding. Whether grassroots or top level, interreligious dialogue activities generally contribute to peacebuilding, even if the actors involved are not aware of this broader aim. Our broad generalization relies on the assumption that dialogical encounters tend to be better than no interactions at all, even though they may often be limited in effective outcomes towards peacebuilding aims.

On this point, it is worthwhile remembering the cautionary remarks of Richard H. Solomon, the current President of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP):

Interfaith dialogue can enhance mutual awareness, foster joint activities, and even transform relationships between members of warring groups. If we are to capitalize on religion’s ability to ameliorate or reconcile the very conflicts that it has helped to inspire, we must heed both the caveats and the endorsements. We must not let ourselves be carried away by unrealistic expectations or dismayed by unavoidable failures.38

Unfortunately, many unrealistic expectations have accompanied the rapid increase of IDP in the Balkans in the last 20 years. One of these is the expectation that because an interreligious dialogue activity is presented with the aim of promoting peacebuilding, the result of such an activity must somehow directly and significantly contribute to peace where the activity takes place, in a way that is discernable to
its participants. Certainly, the direct impact of any peacebuilding activity, let alone an interreligious one, is notoriously difficult to assess. These cautionary remarks can be mitigated if one follows instead Gopin’s call for ‘incremental peacebuilding’. After all, that is also how the subfield of interreligious dialogue emerged at the intersection of the academic study of religions and theology over the last quarter of a century. The following examination of its emergence will ground our IDP theory within a particular disciplinary landscape and help explain why conceptualizations of interreligious dialogue are to be seen as incremental theoretical steps within the growing field of peacebuilding.

The Study of Interreligious Dialogue: A New Subfield at the Intersection of the Academic Study of Religions and Theology

Theories and methods in the study of interreligious dialogue have recently developed into a subfield within the older field of the academic study of religions, often called religious studies, among other names given to this broad interdisciplinary field of study. This subfield may be relatively new, yet the practices of interreligious dialogue it aims to study, as seen above, have a long history.

In disciplinary terms, where can we best situate the study of interreligious dialogue? In the context of our own research and IDP theory, we argue that the study of interreligious dialogue is best situated at the intersection of, primarily, the academic study of religions and theology and, secondarily, the applied academic study of religions as well as peace and conflict resolution studies. Both dimensions will be examined in turn.

The relation between the academic study of religions and theology has been marked by tensions that reflect a particular Western history in terms of church-state dynamics, leading to the gradual separation between the ‘realm of the God’ and the ‘realm of Caesar’, leading to the gradual loss of the ‘sacred canopy’ (to use the eloquent notion of Peter Berger) status of religion and the concomitant compartmentalization of the whole social life into different spheres. These historical
processes have been reflected in the development of various secular ideologies in competition with older Christian religious worldviews. The discipline of sociology, for example, emerged in nineteenth century France as a replacement of theological interpretations of social realities. Generally, the academic study of religions emerged as a scholarly discipline in West European universities in the late nineteenth century.

The development of an academic study of religions has gone hand in hand with the secularization process that has accompanied the modernization and democratization of Western societies from the late eighteenth century onwards. In other parts of the world more recently engaged in democratization processes, including the Balkans, scholars in religious studies seek to define how the academic study of religions can be promoted at home without it becoming another area where a new and more sophisticated form of Western cultural imperialism gets implemented by intellectuals who use overwhelmingly secular and scientific languages to think about religion-related issues. There are also opponents to the initially Western academic study of religions who argue for the primary importance of theology, understood as a confessional approach to academic scholarship on matters of religions. They strive to approach their own tradition with the same rigor and academic concerns as those found among non-confessional scholars in the sciences of religions. These ongoing debates have always been present in the modern Western academic study of religions. In the last years, for example, they resulted in a split between the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature, which until recently formed together the largest annual gathering of scholars of religions worldwide.

Nowadays, scholars within both the academic study of religions and theology recognize that they are not neutral; every scholar carries a set of assumptions about notions of time, intellectual constructs and subjective priorities over choice of language, research concerns and ideological interests fostered by a specific worldview with more or less direct links to particular networks of institutions, be they explicitly religious and/or academic. By the end of the twentieth century, the distinction between these two disciplinary approaches to the study of religions had often become so blurred, in part because of the growing
use of so many shared theories, definitions and methodological tools, that Margaret Miles, the then president of the American Academy of Religion, the largest organization of scholars in the study of religions, came to argue that:

the terms ‘theological studies’ and ‘the study of religion’ are distinctions without a difference. Theological studies, thought of as exploring a religious tradition from within, must also bring critical questions to the tradition studied. And the study of religion cannot be studied or taught without understanding the power and beauty, in particular historical situations, of the tradition of the author we study. Nor can religious studies avoid theology – the committed worldviews, beliefs, and practices of believers – by focusing on religious phenomenologies. Both theological studies and the study of religion must integrate critical and passionately engaged scholarship. I use, then, the providentially ambiguous term ‘religious studies’ to integrate the falsely polarized terms, ‘theological studies’ and ‘the study of religion’.

Miles’ last point is particularly important because it provides a potential avenue to help resolve this perceived polarization between the academic study of religions and theology, a distinction that is still very much alive in Southeast Europe, the region of our immediate focus in this book. Strong debates are currently underway in most of the post-communist societies, as to whether there is a place for Christian theology and Islamic studies in the local universities or whether it is preferable to introduce a more academically minded approach to the study of religions.

As one of us has previously argued with regard to Bulgaria after the fall of communism, the academic study of religions ‘got caught in the crossfire between theologians and sociologists’. The former, from their position of a newly gained authority, claimed that the study of religion should be done exclusively in the form of Orthodox theology, while the latter insisted that the study of religion was unimportant in the context of the extremely secularized Bulgarian society. This struggle was reflected in the choice of names for the field, from ‘Orthodox theology’ to ‘sociology of religion’ in particular. These, in
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turn, mirrored the comprehensive struggle for control over the religious institutions and over the discourse on religion (i.e. who speaks on behalf of religion and who are the legitimate interpreters and guardians of the respective religious traditions). This situation is arguably generalizable to the whole of Eastern Europe, where ‘traditional’ theologies compete with non-confessional approaches. The ‘politics of religious studies’ thus raises a number of issues, the major one being the question as to what theoretical, methodological and pedagogical approaches should be prioritized in this part of the world.

Often, an insider/outsider dichotomy has been put forward as a basis for distinguishing between theology and religious studies. However, as Alles has argued, it is ‘misleading to distinguish theology and the study of religions in terms of insider and outsider perspective. The aim of the study of religions is knowledge about religions. The aim of theology is to formulate religious truth’. Moreover, this distinction bears little relevance to the practice of interreligious dialogue, where both perspectives are present at once, often ambiguously intermingled. As it seems, people engaging in interreligious interactions are mostly ‘insiders’ speaking from within a specific religious tradition yet seeking knowledge and understanding of other religions as well.

Another important issue relates to the ways in which the academic study of religions influences the theory and practice of interreligious dialogue. As has been argued specifically with regard to Eastern Europe, the academic study of religions can raise the awareness and appraisal of the cultural and religious plurality in the increasingly diversified post-communist society. It can thus contribute immensely to the development of productive interreligious, and broadly intercultural, understanding, communication and interaction at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of society encouraging the acceptance of diversity as a positive challenge rather than as an ominous thread.

Equally important are the ways in which Christian and Islamic theologies also influence the theory and practice of interreligious dialogue. All theologies have an in-built relationship to outsiders, which is more or else explicit, depending on the nature of a particular
theological stance. Whatever the assumptions and positions regarding the ‘other/s’ might be, these theologies on religions other than their own have developed exponentially in the second half of the twentieth century under various names such as ‘world theology’,50 ‘theology of world religions’51 or comparative theology.52 These developments, as attested by the subtitle in W. C. Smith’s book on world theology Faith and the Comparative History of Religion demonstrate how the development of Christian and Islamic theologies, by attraction or opposition, have gone hand in hand with the development of the academic study of religions; in fact, the two are interdependent of each other. We could go even further and argue that both sides of the modern study of religions coin (the academic study of religions and theology) symbiotically relate to, and reflect the challenges posed by, the secularization and democratization processes.

Discussions about the impact of theology or of the academic study of religions on the theory and practices of interreligious dialogue in the last 50 years have brought to the surface the need for greater clarity as to what the subfield of the study of interreligious dialogue has to accomplish, in the Balkans as well as anywhere else in the world. One way to go about it at the level of the practices of interreligious dialogue in particular is to argue that IDP also needs to be conceived of at the intersection of the applied academic study of religions and peace and conflict resolution studies.

The Applied Academic Study of Religions, Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies

IDP is a theory with praxis that reflects the integration of our two respective interdisciplinary backgrounds. It emerged from our experience with the interreligious dialogue seminars we led throughout the Balkans. This combination of theory and practice has prompted us to think about, on the one hand, how interreligious dialogue can serve the peacebuilding agenda in local and international relations, and, on the other, how it can contribute to the articulation of theoretical concerns in the academic study of religions as a whole, and the applied academic study of religions in particular.
IDP is a concept that also integrates social theory and applied religion. Indeed, our conceptualization of interreligious dialogue as ‘theory with praxis’ helps overcome a frequent, and in the case of interreligious dialogue, unnecessary dichotomy between theory and praxis, as mentioned earlier. In this regard, IDP is a new concept that provides the subfield of the study of interreligious dialogue with a way to link itself both theoretically and practically with the fields of peace and conflict resolution studies.

This integration of theory and praxis through the use of IDP seems a necessary prerequisite to understanding how the healthy tension between theory and praxis, as well as the narrow and broader definitions of interreligious dialogue, play out at the various levels of interreligious dialogue, from top to middle to grassroots, as well as in the three dimensions of dialogue (intra-religious, interreligious and interworldview). The complex interplay between the variety of differences that exists within a religious tradition (intra-religious dialogue), across religions (interreligious dialogue) and between religious and non-religious, mostly secular, worldviews (interworldview dialogue) reflects facets of what Western philosophers have generally called for the last three centuries the challenge of religious pluralism and toleration. Yet, we argue that the concept of ‘religious pluralism’ is limited since it fails to recognize the equally important role of non-religious ideologies and worldviews in shaping the plurality of worldviews today.

Along this line, at the outset of a study on interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding specifically in the Balkans, we must acknowledge that all interreligious interactions in the region have taken place within a broader setting of differences that goes beyond the challenges of religious pluralism. With its complex resurgence of religious identity dynamics, today’s post-communist era in the Balkans requires an understanding of the aforementioned triple dimension of dialogue as well as the intrinsic urgency of thinking and practising theory and praxis at once.

As one of us has argued, for many decades, the absence of an applied dimension in the academic study of religions, at least in official efforts at theorizing this field to put it on par with other sciences marked a real difference with theology, which had always kept a form of applied studies in the form of practical theology, pastoral care and
spiritual development. More recently, the emergence of praxeology under the influence of liberation theology gave renewed impetus to the area of applied, practical or pastoral theology.

This historical idiosyncrasy in the development of the academic study of religions in comparison to theology and so many other scientific disciplines may be explained through a combination of three main factors. First, the ‘leaving behind’ pastoral work to theological seminaries was considered by some scholars the best way to ensure that the ‘science of religions’ would remain acceptable to scholars of other scientific disciplines unencumbered by ties with religious institutions and worldviews, at least explicitly. Second, the unique ‘enlightenment’ paradigm often forced scholars of religions to choose sides between religious faith and scientific rationality, or at least keep their personal faith private when they held on to one. Third, the increased secularization in many Western democracies changed the power dynamics between religious institutions and knowledge-producing ones (i.e. mostly universities). Indeed, the third quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the development of large public universities in many different Western countries, and the secularization process of previously religious ones, giving rise to an unprecedented number of religious studies departments outside traditionally theological institutions.

With the resurgence of the importance of religion in the aftermath of the Cold War in the perceptions of mainly Western or Westernized scholars and decision makers in the international community, especially after September 11, 2001, the expertise of scholars specialized in the academic study of religions has become useful to policy makers in a variety of social sectors, from the local to the global. The resulting requests on scholars of religions have directed many of them into various fields of applied sciences, from education and health to law and especially politics, thus prompting these scholars to abandon the ‘ivory tower’ stance. This reality is not new. Previous generations of scholars were often very active publicly. But because of an often negative judgement about such activities, revolving around the alleged loss of objectivity, its importance was probably underestimated in our historical accounts about the field’s development over the last century and a half. Today, such practice has become more acceptable.
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in the eyes of many colleagues. This new attitude opens the way for the new subfield of the applied academic study of religions.60

A second factor explaining the rapid increase in the public role of scholars of religions is the linguistic turn of the late twentieth century that demonstrated the centrality of personal subjectivities in the hermeneutical process at the heart of any scientific discipline. Consequently, the old judgement about 'loosing one’s objectivity', linked to a positivistic understanding of the role of a scholar in society, seems to have lost the weight it once carried. Scholars of religions now openly get involved as experts in various aspects of their societies, and their activities in a variety of sectors fall in the scope of the applied academic study of religions.

In a global world with increased interdependency (transnationalism, transdisciplinarity, etc.), there is a growing need to anchor various areas of the applied academic study of religions (religion and: law, politics, health, education, architecture, economics, ethics, etc.) in the inclusive practices of interreligious dialogue. The incorporation of such practices could balance, on the one hand, the normal tension between pluralist and exclusivist worldviews and, on the other, the ambiguities of various ideological assumptions in human perceptions of reality. By definition, there is no area of the applied academic study of religions that does not include some level or form of the practice of interreligious dialogue, whether this is acknowledged openly or not by the actors involved. Therefore, increasing our theoretical and applied understanding of this pragmatic imperative is vital to ensure that interreligious dialogue remains a fully inclusive method to address societal issues of immediate concern. Moreover, while some interreligious dialogue activities remain confined to transforming individual understanding of self and other religious traditions as well as personal relations on a small scale (the impact of which is limited and hard to measure), a subset of its activities has been directly linked to peacebuilding, especially in areas of political tension and conflict.

In both cases, these interreligious actors have specific religious worldviews and are mostly involved in religious practices linking them to particular religious institutions, while interreligious dialogue almost always takes place in the practical arena of daily
life, from local to global. Therefore, interreligious dialogue can be directly linked to the applied sciences, whose aim is to apply the knowledge generated through various sciences to practical aspects of human life. In so far as the sciences of religions have increased our collective understanding about religions and how they function within and across cultures, the application of this knowledge to the practice of interreligious dialogue brings the latter into the purview of applied sciences in general, and the applied academic study of religions in particular. In addition, as already noticed, since a subset of interreligious dialogue activities is directly linked to peacebuilding interreligious dialogue falls at the intersection of the applied academic study of religions and the applied sciences of peace and conflict resolution studies in particular.

This intersection is conceptually complex to represent fully in this brief overview. There are numerous studies in both conflict resolution and peace studies suggesting a variety of definitions. We present here only one for each, to optimize the reader’s understanding of how each of these fields intersects with the others. Conflict resolution is defined by Wallensteen as: ‘a situation where the conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solves their central incompatibilities, accept each other’s continued existence as parties and cease all violent action against each other’. For Wallensteen, ‘Although conflict resolution in armed conflict has been part of the peace research agenda, it has yet to develop a consistent set of research-based propositions’. The final section of this chapter will present one proposition in this direction. In the meantime, Wallensteen’s argument is useful for our purposes because it directly links the field of conflict resolution studies to that of peace studies, or more precisely, peace research. According to this author, ‘Conflict resolution is approached on the basis of the insights generated in contemporary peace research [. . . whose] ambition [has been] to understand the causes of violence and to find ways to reduce/remove violence’.

Obviously, both of these definitions directly relate to a variety of on-the-ground experiences that link both fields to the broader discipline of applied sciences, defined on wordwebonline as: ‘The discipline dealing with the art or science of applying scientific knowledge to
practical problems'. This definition relates to both applied social and human sciences, thus focusing on the theories developed in the humanities and social sciences useful for solving problems related specifically to human behaviour and experience.

This area of applied knowledge production includes that of the applied academic study of religions. This branch of the academic study of religions concentrates on the social relevancy of this very discipline through its applications in a variety of areas where the following three kinds of people interact: (1) experts in the academic study of religions; (2) users of religious discourses; (3) civil inquirers of information about practitioners of religious discourses. Implicit here is the encounter, directly or indirectly, between religious practitioners and a variety of other actors (be they religious or not). Obviously, when these actors self-identify themselves religiously, one can speak of a form of interreligious dialogue or interaction taking place. One subset of these interactions occurs when this interreligious dialogue takes place as a means to either prevent or resolve tensions and conflicts. In these limited contexts, interreligious dialogue can be understood as promoting, explicitly or implicitly, peacebuilding in general and conflict resolution in particular. In such instances, interreligious dialogue therefore falls within peace studies and conflict resolution studies, as well as the applied academic study of religions.

In closing this section, two examples are useful to set the stage for better understanding the role of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding activities. First, the dialogue component of any peace process is not always explicit. Yet, no peace process can occur without it. Dialogue is implicit in the first of the five criteria Darby outlined in the description of peace processes: ‘that the protagonists are willing to negotiate in good faith’. The General Assembly of the United Nations consensually adopted Resolution A/61/221 on 20 December 2006, entitled: ‘Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding,
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and cooperation for peace’. On 4–5 October 2007, this resolution began to be implemented through a two-day event as part of the activities of the UN General Assembly. This event was the fruit of a chain of events that has many sources. One of them is the Interreligious Roundtable of Religious NGOs working in partnership with various UN agencies. Another is the efforts of the Philippines delegation at the UN over the last few years to promote a UN resolution on this topic. A third is in the post 9/11 context in which the UN passed a resolution regarding terrorism and security as well as organized several dialogical events in New York and beyond.

It is worth noting that the UN also put in place the Alliance of Civilizations in 2005 to promote a form of intercivilizational dialogue, especially between the West and the Islamic world. The use of the term ‘civilization’ in this Alliance’s initial mission reflected a reaction against the ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis, whose reception especially among Muslims worldwide including in the Balkans still resonate painfully. In this vein, Hall and Jackson recently argued that ‘a self-reflective research agenda for a fourth generation of civilizational analysis, within IR [international relations], should begin, and end, with a questioning of the precise relationship between IR and anthropology, and IR and philosophy of history as each of these disciplines involve themselves in mythistoricizing civilizations’.

Three theoretical points emerge from our analysis of these recent UN developments. First, the language used for this UN initiative reflects the Western heritage with its divided language of ‘culture’ and ‘religion’, going back implicitly to the ideational debates (and at many times outward conflicts) around the role of religion in the public sphere, especially that of politics. Second, the cases chosen in the round-table of 4 October 2007 reflected a clear preference for talking about interreligious rather than intercultural dialogue. Moreover, a large number of national reports – over 70 – also focused on interreligious dialogue. A comparison of the first and second observations leads to a third: there seems to be a greater need on the part of many nation-states and individual experts to talk about interreligious dialogue rather than intercultural dialogue because of the role religion plays in the contemporary identity politics and thus the need to promote this particular kind of dialogue at this point in time.
This preference for interreligious over intercultural dialogue may reflect a shift in the language used in the international community away from a purely Western secular worldview, wherein the notion of intercultural dialogue has been the preferred language in policy matters especially, rather than the notion of interreligious dialogue. This seemed to be a result of the relegation of religion to the private sphere, minimizing its importance in international relations as well as in national interactions.

The gradual shift in interreligious dialogue activities from the margins to the centres of power mentioned above represents an example at the intersection between the academic study of religions and theology, as well as the applied academic study of religions, peace and conflict-resolution studies. This new reality, with ever increasing numbers of major interreligious dialogue practices affecting international relations calls for further methodological conceptualization in the study of interreligious dialogue.

Finally, a note on our own methodological approach to interreligious peacebuilding is in order. It combined not only traditional library and field research, but also included the conducting of the nine IDP seminars between 2005 and 2008 throughout the Balkans. Our IDP methodology thus included five dimensions. First, we not only sought information from practitioners in the field, but also contributed to giving back some knowledge to at least those individuals who attended our different workshops. As researchers, we were not only perceived as ‘takers’ of information from local interviewees; many of our workshop evaluations make it clear that we were also ‘givers’, by sharing our own knowledge and experience of interreligious dialogue. Second, because several participants in our workshops were potential or actual interviewees for our research, some of them told us that they felt more at ease responding to our questions because they had ‘seen us in action’ in the same field of action on which they were being interviewed. Third, because we often interviewed people who had been or were still linked to interreligious organizations, some of which acted as our local partners in doing workshops, a number of these activists felt that they were benefiting institutionally from their cooperation with us. Of course, in one instance in particular, our choice of collaborating with one organiza-
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The unfortunate result of completely closing the door to the latter one. This point can thus be seen as a double-edged sword methodologically speaking. Fourth, the fund-raising efforts that were done by Ina Merdjanova to make these workshops possible also indicated to our interviewees that we were knowledgeable about the recent challenges of fund-raising in this field. Fifth, having one of us fluent in one local Balkan language and having a fair command of a few others, in addition to being linked to one local university also provided a relative sense of common Balkan identity, at least for several workshop participants. This sense of shared Balkan identity with at least one of the two workshop leaders was further solidified when we cooperated with a local interreligious organization to help us organize and host a seminar. This IDP approach thus provided an opportunity to practice what ethnographers call ‘immersion’ in the field of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding in the Balkans.

Our IDP theory thus implies a methodological approach that enhances the results of research in two ways. First, it increases understanding of the object of study through creating a higher level of trust with the interviewees. Second, it creates greater local impact on the various grounds where our workshops took place. IDP may thus be one example of how to improve ethics in research methodology when it comes to the particular field of interreligious dialogue.