

## Transcript of the interview with Brunilda Pali

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*This is one of the eight interviews partly used in the final film of the ALTERNATIVE project, produced by KU Leuven in collaboration with the European Forum for Restorative Justice. All films are published in an online platform: <http://alternativefilms.euforumrj.org/>. To view this video as well as other interviews, click 'INTERVIEWS' on the home page.*

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### **What is ALTERNATIVE?**

The ALTERNATIVE project is a European action research project, which uses conflict and conflict handling as its raw materials, and by doing that, it aims at creating alternative understanding of justice and security, through the application of restorative approaches.

### **Why action research?**

The reasons why we chose to use action research are because action research is a fascinating and complex type of research that aims to create a link between ideas, reality and transformation or change, in other words, the world as it should be, the world as it is, and the world as it could be. By proposing this type of research we have emphasized the importance of each of these elements, so ideas, reality, and transformation, but what is most important the interconnectedness of these elements.

### **Why focusing on conflicts?**

The reason why we decided to focus on conflict in diverse settings is first because conflicts on their own are a fertile ground for understanding social dynamics, the importance of various actors and agents, issues of justice and injustice, and real or

constructed concerns about security, so as such, they deserve our full attention as researchers.

## **Why focus on diverse contexts?**

The reason why we chose to focus on diverse contexts is simply to highlight the rich composition of current Europe. While the whole world is diverse and interconnected, we have to imagine Europe very tightly so, it's because of the small density of space, large heterogeneity of populations, very rich historical-social composition, so there is no going round that, and because any type of intervention, idea, or proposal that you put forward, has to be realigned with socio-historic, economic contexts, in order for it to be meaningful or sustainable at all.

## **Why focusing on justice and security?**

The reasons for focusing on the concepts of justice and security, and for proposing this cluster together, is because first of all they are central values for our current democracies, our democracies rely on these values as pillars, second because security has almost turned into an obsession, while on the opposite justice has completely fallen into disgrace, it's almost an out-fashioned concept right now. So in our project we juxtapose these values together, and by doing this we emphasize their equal value. By proposing alternative understandings, we are interested in democratizing these values, in understanding what do these values mean to the people concerned, instead of having them defined by others for them.

## **If ALTERNATIVE was a journey...?**

If I think of the ALTERNATIVE project as a journey, I think of it as composed of three main phases, which are not necessary successive to each other, but overlap. The first phase was characterized by a reaction to several assumptions, the first was the fetishizing of security as a value, the second was the endangerment of justice, especially social justice and a weakening of social fabric as a result of our obsession for security. The third assumption we were going counter, was the assumption that social difference, cultural difference leads necessarily to social breakdown. After this reaction, the revolting of the mind or of the senses, came the next phase, which is the very natural, curiosity, need to know. So if reality is like this, why is reality like this? We called this phase with different names, context, background, empirical research,

societal ecology, thick description...We tried to be as broad and use as many tools as we could to understand reality. This scientific respect for reality as it is nevertheless was never a reverence for reality, but just a need to understand in order to understand better what is to be done, but it never aimed at looking at reality as a limit, or looking at this limit as a horizon. Now we are at the proposal phase, we try to combine the world of reaction and ideas, to the world of reality, to what can be done. We are now at this phase, and we are trying hard, from our previous understanding, action, to come to a proposal.

## **What are some European challenges and what is the role of ALTERNATIVE?**

There are many challenges for Europe today, like the financial crisis, tendencies towards radicalization, neoliberal policies, disappearance of urban spaces and they are all interlinked. The main challenge where ALTERNATIVE has attempted to offer an answer is the current obsession with security, the challenging of the assumption that what holds society together, the glue that holds society together is fear. We have tended to go counter sentiments that propose fear as the glue that holds society together. The fetishizing of security has promoted the idea that human contact is dangerous, almost contagious, and within ALTERNATIVE, being very courageous in various action sites, by bringing together people that in our imagination would never even meet or talk together, we have broken this idea. So what we are proposing is not that fear brings humans together but common bonds, common life, sometimes not even commonality, but even through our differences we are completely interrelated.

What is your final message?

I think Europe is a common project first of all, before being anything else, so that means it is common ideal and we all have our say in it. What I have learned from the ALTERNATIVE project is that we all need to overcome mechanisms that are cultivating sentiments of fear, and we have to nourish alternative ethical relations with ourselves, with each other and with the world. The way I think we can do this is first of all by being extremely conscious and aware of the forces that pull and push us in different directions, having a political consciousness of what constitutes us, and once we have done that we can make the right choices. And the right choices for me

# ALTERNATIVE

are nourishing of values of courage, trust, solidarity and hospitality, and not let systems, politicians define what is important for us, and who we are.

