NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Building a restorative city: what aims and processes?

*Cristina Vasilescu**

1 Introduction

Over the years, the community's full delegation of conflict and crime management to the justice system has triggered the estrangement of victims, families and the overall community from the justice process, bringing about its weakening (Christie, 1977; Zehr, 1990). In this context, restorative justice emerges as a way of doing justice in which conflict/crime management is given back to those directly involved and to the wider community, which in turn is expected to make communities stronger, more responsible for offenders' social inclusion and victims' empowerment, and for dealing with causes of conflicts/crimes. Restorative justice promotes a vision of justice that has a 'democratic orientation engaging people in discussion rather than relying upon legal professionals' (Chapman, Gellin, Aertsen & Anderson, 2015). Restorative justice rests on the conceptualisation of wrongdoing as a 'breach of a relationship obligation' (ACT Law Reform Advisory Council, 2017: 10), which triggers the need to put relationships between the wrongdoer, the harmed person and the community at the centre of the restorative process (Chapman et al., 2015). Thus, it emerges as an

> approach of addressing harm or the risk of harm through engaging all those affected in coming to a common understanding and agreement on how the harm or wrongdoing can be repaired and justice achieved. (…) Restorative processes restore safety, security through bringing people together to undo injustice, repair harm and alleviate suffering. (European Forum for Restorative Justice, 2018: 3, 7)

During the last decades, restorative justice has spread widely not only across continents (North America, Oceania, Europe, etc.) and countries, but also across fields. While restorative justice started to be applied in 'circumscribed, sectorial experiences related to criminal offences' (Mannozzi, 2019), over the years its potential in other fields came to the fore. As Wachtel (2004: 207) points out 'restorative justice is only one of many areas of human activity that can benefit from a restorative approach.' Opening up to the restorative approach in other areas

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of life meant questioning 'how we run schools, businesses and public administration (Mannozzi & Lodigiani, 2015), how we manage youth policies and intervene in underprivileged districts or those prone to criminality' (Mannozzi, 2019) as well as creating conflict prevention and intervention procedures and services at community level (Shearing & Wood, 2003). It also meant acknowledging that this 'requires people to develop capabilities that enable them to participate actively in civil society rather than be passive clients of the legal system' (Chapman et al., 2015). This implies that people need to learn the values and skills of collaboration and dialogue, even in conflicting situations. Thus, restorative practices have started to be applied in various settings of social life (schools, social services, etc.) and, more recently, at city level through the building of restorative cities with the aim to empower people to deal with conflict and harm in a safe, respectful and constructive way in all layers of the community.

While restorative justice is nowadays widely acknowledged at both the regional/international[1] and national levels,[2] the concept of a restorative city is still new and far from being integrated in local legislation and/or policies. Nevertheless, there are several cities around the world[3] that have started their journey towards becoming a restorative city. The present Notes from the Field draws on the experiences of some of these cities described in 'A journey around restorative cities in the world: a travel guide'[4] (European Forum for Restorative Justice Working Group on Restorative Cities, forthcoming in 2023), with the aim to provide learning on their process towards becoming a restorative city, unveiling similarities and differences between them. The cities analysed in these Notes are: Bristol (United Kingdom – United Kingdom); Canberra (Australia); Como (Italy); Lecco (Italy), Leuven (Belgium); Tempio Pausania (Italy); Tirana (Albania); Vancouver (Canada); Wroclaw (Poland); and Whanganui (New Zealand). After this contribution, the case of Canberra is discussed in an illustrative manner by Janet Hope and Holly Northam, while Jennifer Llewellyn offers further reflections on the appearance of 'restorative communities.'

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1 *See, for instance*, publications such as Chapman et al. (2015), Dünkel et al. (2015) and UNODC (2020), and regulatory instruments such as UN ECOSOC Resolution 2002/12 on Basic principles on the use of restorative justice programmes in criminal matters; Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning restorative justice in criminal matters; Council of Europe Ministers of Justice (2021) Venice Declaration on the Role of Restorative Justice in Criminal Matters.
2 *See, for instance*, Aertsen (2022), Canadian Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice and Public Safety (2018), Larsen (2014), Lauwaert and Aertsen (2016), New Zealand Ministry of Justice (2022), Pfander (2020).
3 *See, for instance*, the experience of Tirana in Albania, Canberra and Newcastle in Australia, Vancouver in Canada, Leuven in Belgium, Bristol, Brighton, Hull, Leeds, Portsmouth, Southampton, Stockport in UK, Bergamo, Como, Lecco and Tempio Pausania in Italy, Utrecht in the Netherlands, Wroclaw in Poland, Seoul in South Korea, Oakland and Detroit in the US, Whanganui in New Zealand.
4 The guide will be available in 2023 on the website of the European Forum for Restorative Justice Working Group on Restorative Cities: www.euforumrj.org/en/working-group-restorative-cities.

2   Aims of restorative cities: different cities with common goals

Following Christie's (1977) pledge that the restitution of conflict management back to the people directly involved to deal with them in a respectful and safe way allows communities to become stronger, empowers victims, supports offenders' social inclusion and clarifies social norms that regulate communities. Following McCold's and Wachtel's social discipline window (2003), according to which people are more prone to positively change when those in power do things with them rather than for them or to them, restorative cities put communities' active participation in conflict management at the centre of their action. Thus, restorative cities not only ground their action in restorative justice values, principles and methods, but aim to expand their application beyond the criminal justice system in all formal (e.g. workplaces, neighbourhoods, social houses, hospitals, schools, sport organisations) and informal (friendship, family relationships, etc.) social settings, with the objective both to prevent conflicts from generating interruption of social relationships, violence and harm, and to engage victims, offenders and the community in restoratively dealing with harm. However, in moving beyond the criminal justice system, restorative cities do not aim to leave it behind, but rather to link it with the community in hopes of strengthening the use of restorative justice in its original setting, namely the criminal justice system, by favouring the community's participation in the justice system and the contribution of the justice system to the community's involvement in dealing with harm generated by crimes. Several studies (Deboeck, Lauwaert, Vanfraechem, Aertsen & Marchal, 2010; Pali & Pelikan, 2010) have, in fact, identified the lack of social support to restorative justice as one of the main factors hindering its possibility to become a mainstream movement.

Restorative cities thus aim to:

- Increase citizens' awareness about restorative justice principles, values and methods;
- Spread restorative justice values of respect for people's dignity, fairness, solidarity, social cohesion, truth and dialogue in formal and informal social settings;
- Increase people's capacities to look at conflict as an opportunity for change, rather than a threat and to deal with them restoratively rather than violently;
- Provide wrongdoers, victims and the community with the opportunity to deal with conflicts/crimes restoratively in both the criminal justice system and in formal/informal social settings, which implies offering people, who accept responsibility for the harm created, the possibility to make themselves accountable to those harmed, enhancing victims' safe participation in resolving the situation and making the community aware of its role in the generation and management of conflicts/crimes;
- Create spaces and opportunities for dialogue between all people's truth to turn polarised views into a constructive dialogue.

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Furthermore, some of the analysed restorative cities (e.g. Vancouver, Canberra) also aim to enhance the restoration of harm done to Indigenous population, supporting the decolonisation process.

However, restorative cities aim not only to deal with conflicts, but also with the causes beneath them, by mainstreaming restorative justice values, principles and methods in other policy areas, by linking restorative justice actors with actors in other fields (e.g. health, labour market, environment, sport, social policies, housing) and by empowering people to adopt more responsive and responsible ways to undo and prevent injustices and to deal with social challenges characterising today's societies.

To reach these goals, restorative cities aim also to engage citizens, restorative actors and other policymakers and stakeholders in:

- Co-creating and co-producing a shared vision and plan for building the restorative city;
- Developing a common language throughout the restorative journey;
- Providing citizens with an integrated offer of restorative practices/services, in restorative cities where such an offer exists already, but is fragmented (e.g. Bristol, Canberra, Leuven), and activating new restorative practices grounded in the restorative vision of the city.

By unveiling causes beneath conflicts/crimes and dealing with them, by channelling social tensions/conflicts into a constructive path and by actively engaging the community in preventing and restoratively dealing with conflicts, restorative cities aim to enhance just, trustful, respectful, responsible and positive interpersonal relationships that can push a city towards those value sets that, according to Christie (2004), keep societies civil, coherent and integrated, fostering social cohesion and crime prevention.

3   The process towards becoming a restorative city: similarities and differences

The analysis of the processes activated by the earlier-mentioned cities to become restorative cities shows that each city needs a tailor-made process towards becoming a restorative city based on the social, political, legal and cultural features of the city, on resources available (knowledge, consensus, time, funds, etc.), on the level of advancement of restorative justice in and outside the criminal justice city, on the needs to which the restorative city is called to answer, on the existence and interaction with other similar movements/initiatives in the city (e.g. child-friendly cities, LGBTQ+ friendly cities, peaceful cities), on the timing of the start of the process, on the existence of an innovator and of a coalition of actors advocating for restorative justice at community level, and on the aspirations of the actors engaged in the process. Thus, there is no ideal or standard process towards becoming a restorative city, as this journey requires 'transformation of status quo-reproducing consciousness into status quo-challenging critical consciousness' (Gil, 2006: 508).

Some of the analysed restorative cities (e.g. Bristol, Canberra, Tirana, Wroclaw) started their restorative city journey top-down, relying on the political and institutional will of local authorities (municipality, City Council) to make the city a restorative city. Other cities (e.g. Como, Lecco, Leuven, Tempio Pausania, Vancouver) started their journey towards becoming a restorative city bottom-up, relying on the desire of restorative justice practitioners to embed restorative justice in social settings of the community. Even though both top-down and bottom-up processes can be used to start the process of becoming a restorative city, the journey undertaken by analysed restorative cities shows that both levels should join forces at a certain point of this journey. The experience of analysed cities shows that restorative cities need both a social humus from which to grow as well as institutional and political support in service of mainstreaming restorative justice values, principles and methods in city policies and to deal with causes beneath conflicts/crimes. The existence of one level without the other risks limiting the potential of a restorative city.

The analysis of restorative cities reveals also that various levels of formalisation and institutionalisation have been adopted. In some cities (Canberra, Bristol, Tirana), the journey has been institutionalised within the municipality/council through the creation of specific units, identification of dedicated municipal staff, and the creation of multilevel and/or multi-agency working groups or public-private partnerships coordinated by the municipality; in other cities (e.g. Leuven, Vancouver, Whanganui), a formal, but flexible, structure of the restorative city has been jointly defined by actors engaged in this process; in still other cities (e.g. Como, Lecco, Tempio Pausania) a formal structure is not made explicit, even though restorative justice values and principles guiding the journey towards the restorative city have been defined and shared among actors engaged in it.

A difference also lies in how the process towards becoming a restorative city unfolds. In some cities (e.g. Bristol, Canberra), existing restorative services together develop a shared vision and common language and an integrated offer of restorative practices, while in other cities (e.g. Como, Lecco, Leuven, Wroclaw, Tempio Pausania, Tirana, Vancouver), (new) restorative practices grounded in the restorative city vision are developed together with participating actors.

Despite differences in the process, the analysed restorative cities also reveal similarities in the journey towards becoming a restorative city. The existence of an innovator that starts the process is a common and key feature in all analysed restorative cities. Even though the size, the social and cultural features or the level and tradition of restorative justice practice influence the shape and development of the restorative city, the launch of this process seems to entirely depend on the existence of an innovator able to push the application of restorative justice beyond the criminal justice system and to catalyse support for advancing this process from other actors. Advocacy coalitions are, in fact, present in all analysed restorative cities (e.g. Restorative Collective in Vancouver, the Restorative Justice Board in Wroclaw, the Leuven Restorative City Network Organisation and Steering Group, Bristol Restorative Board, Intermediary bodies in Como and Lecco, the Advisory Board of the Trust in Whanganui). The existence of an advocacy coalition is key for the development of a restorative city; its construction is a complex and multifaceted

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process that requires a shift in the cultural, legal and policy approach to conflicts/ crimes and their management in all layers of a community and, hence, the mobilisation of a great amount of (knowledge, legal, consensus, economic) resources that are not possessed by a single actor. As underlined by Evelyn Zellerer and Norm Leech (forthcoming 2023), it takes a village to build a restorative city. Thus, in all analysed restorative cities the process towards becoming a restorative city is based on a network approach. However, the types of actors serving as the policy innovator and the advocacy coalition differ among the analysed restorative cities. In some cities (e.g. Canberra, Lecco, Wroclaw and Vancouver) the role of policy innovator is taken up by an individual/informal group of restorative justice practitioners, while in others (e.g. Como, Whanganui, Tirana) it is non-governmental organisations (NGO) or universities (e.g. Leuven and Tempio Pausania). Only in Bristol this role seems to be shared between the City Council and a group of restorative practitioners. The limited presence of municipalities among innovators shows that on the one hand the potential of the restorative city has not been entirely seized by local authorities, and on the other hand, restorative cities need a social humus from which to grow.

Advocacy coalitions are made of various actors: NGOs in the field of restorative justice and beyond, university/research centres, public institutions, practitioners in restorative justice and, in some cases (e.g. Como, Lecco and Leuven) citizens. In almost all restorative cities, network building occurs through workshops aimed at raising awareness and building knowledge on restorative justice in the community, developing a common restorative language and a vision of the restorative city.

Other similarities centre around the integration of restorative practices, grounded in restorative justice methods, for preventing conflicts from turning into harm and for managing harm when it occurs, and their implementation both within and outside the criminal justice system.

Similarities also exist in the challenges faced by restorative cities: limited/lack of political and institutional support at both local and upper levels; limited continuous and adequate funding; and limited/lack of broad social support of and engagement with restorative practices.

4   Conclusions

This brief analysis shows that even though restorative cities share common aims, the process of building a restorative city varies extensively depending on the features of the context, available resources, aspirations of actors involved and the existence of a restorative culture and practices beyond the criminal justice system. Nevertheless, some features are present in all cities, which seems to suggest that they are significant aspects to which attention needs to be paid: the existence of a policy innovator able to bring together an advocacy coalition to advance restorative justice at community level; use of a network approach that expands beyond the restorative field (both in the criminal justice system and the community) to build the restorative city; the connection of top-down and bottom-up restorative movements to advance the process towards a restorative city; embedded restorative

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justice values, principles and methods in all layers of the community; the development of a shared restorative language; the adoption of both a prevention and management restorative approach and practices to conflict/crimes; the integration of existing restorative practices in a shared vision of the restorative city; and finally, the development of a strategy to deal with limited/lack of political, institutional, social and financial support.

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