# Social Cohesion Activities and Attitude Change in Cyprus

Direnç Kanol, International Relations Department, Cyprus International University, Nicosia, Cyprus

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Do social cohesion activities change the attitudes of the participants? This paper uses intergroup contact theory to explore attitude change resulting from contact with out-group(s) in social cohesion activities. Results from a pre-test/post-test design with fifty-five participants in two bicommunal camps in Cyprus show how attitudes change at the immediate end of these activities; an analysis of fourteen participants' comments after one, thirteen, and twenty-five months provides a medium- to long-term assessment of attitude change. Not all participants were completely positive towards the other community before they took part, as assumed by some. There is clearly space for impact in terms of attitude change. Social cohesion activities represent indispensable tools for reducing prejudice and improving relationships between former enemies in post-conflict countries.

Can social cohesion activities alleviate the negative socio-psychological effects of the deliberate negative representation of the "other" group(s) in divided societies? We know that one catalyst of many conflicts is the lack of contact between groups (Webster 2005; Vasilara and Piaton 2007; Hadjipavlou 2007). Some authors argue that social cohesion activities such as bicommunal camps have a substantial effect on participants' attitudes, significantly increasing trust and understanding (Ungerleider 2001, 2006; Hadjipavlou and Kanol 2008). Loizos, for instance, asserts that: "In Cyprus, the strongest case for bicommunal initiatives might be to claim that without them the antagonism between nationalists on both sides could have been more intense, drawing in more waverers, with the possibility of further military conflict and loss of life" (2006, 181).

On the other hand, social cohesion activities have been subjected to various criticisms. According to Broome, bicommunal gatherings do not go "deep" enough (Broome 2005). Counter-socialization forces that preach hatred and work to create an image of the adversary community as the "other" curb the possible effects (if any) of these short-term initiatives, which can be effective only for a very short period (Paffenholz 2010). Loizos takes note of the following danger: "Bicommunal contacts are somewhat removed from concrete livelihood contexts. Once you leave the workshop, you can, if you choose to, forget the whole thing, especially if its resolutions or lessons cannot be realistically activated in your place of work or your home" (2006, 188). Similarly, the Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs suggests that after participants leave these activities, they "go back to their 'normal' lives where they are confronted with prejudice, social pressure, and a lack of understanding regarding bi-communal activities" (2011, 10). Moreover, participants in this type of activities are more likely to have a prior positive attitude towards the other community, and the activities do not succeed in reaching out to the wider population (Paffenholz 2010; Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs 2011; Hadjipavlou and Kanol 2008). This is quite problematic as the aim of such activities is to convert negative public attitudes into positive attitudes. Furthermore, some scholars emphasize the point that more extreme people are more likely to resist change (Eagly and Chaiken 1988). So, it is debatable if an activity that manages to have a positive effect on the attitudes of a relatively positive section of the population can have the same effect on a completely negative section of the population.

However, although there is much criticism of the effectiveness of social cohesion activities, they still seem to be embraced by many conflict resolution activists and scholars. Therefore, the effectiveness of social cohesion activities remains unclarified. In order to fill this gap in the literature, this paper strives to answer the following question: Do social cohesion activities change the attitudes of the participants? Intergroup contact theory is used to interpret attitude change engendered by contact with the out-group(s) in social cohesion activities. Initially, the results from a pre-test/post-test design study with fifty-five participants in two bicommunal camps in Cyprus will illuminate how attitudes change at the immediate end of these activities. Secondly, an analysis of fourteen participants' own comments after one, thirteen, and twenty-five months provides a medium to long-term assessment of attitude change.

### 1. Theoretical Framework

Why would participants in social cohesion activities change their attitude towards the other community? Possible answers to this question can be found in the growing work on intergroup contact theory. According to Allport (1954), contact with other groups can reduce prejudice against them. Allport argues that there are four preconditions for a contact to have an impact. Other scholars working on the theory added another precondition, which is currently accepted by leading scholars (Pettigrew 1998). First of all, group members who come into contact must have almost equal status in that situation. Secondly, those who come into contact must wish and strive for a common goal. The third precondition is that the groups work together to achieve this common goal without any intergroup competition. Allport's final precondition (1954) was the existence of an authority at the top encouraging these favorable conditions.

Others sought to expand this list by suggesting the need for active participation (Maoz 2005), a common language, voluntary contact, and a prosperous economy (Wagner and Machleit 1986). Some suggested that the group's views before coming into contact should not be very negative (Ben-Ari and Amir 1986; Yogev, Ben-Yeshoshua and Alper 1991) and that stereotype disconfirmation is crucial (Cook 1978). However, these expansions are criticized by Petti-

grew as facilitating, rather than essential conditions (Pettigrew 1998). One exception (the fifth precondition) is the condition of the possibility to become friends in the situation of contact, which implies a circumstance of close interaction (Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

Of course, this theory would not be so robust if the processes that lead to prejudice reduction could not be explained so thoroughly. Pettigrew (1998) greatly advanced our understanding of the causal mechanisms by summarizing four processes where contact may show its effect. The first process takes place when learning about the individual(s) from the other group. During this process, stereotypes and negative attitudes are challenged as individuals get to know counterparts from the out-group better (Stephan and Stephan 1984). Based on this understanding, one can expect the prejudices that in-group members have about out-group members to erode after participating in social cohesion activities. Consequently, they start to humanize the adversary group and notice commonalities with the out-group rather than differences.

*Hypothesis 1: Participants are more likely to see the commonalities with the out-group at the end of social cohesion activities.*

The second possible process has behavior exogenous to attitude: The individual changes his/her behavior vis-à-vis an out-group member; if the process is repeated, positive attitude change results over time (Aronson and Patnoe 1997; Jackman and Crane 1986). The third process concentrates on the role of strong affective ties, intimacy, friendship and empathy in explaining attitude change. As the bonds between members of the two groups strengthen during contact, in-group members become more affectionate and empathetic towards the members of the out-group (Wright, McLaughlin-Volpe, and Roppe 1997; Pettigrew 1997a, 1997b; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995; Hamberger and Hewstone 1997; Batson et al. 1997; Turner et al. 2007; Hewstone et al. 2006; Davies et al. 2011). Based on these arguments, one may expect the participants of social cohesion activities to sympathize and empathize more with the out-group members as a result of the intimacy and friendships created.

*Hypothesis 2 Participants are more likely to express mutual concern rather than selfish concern at the end of social cohesion activities.*

The final process is intergroup appraisal, which like the first process relies on the learning process to explain attitude change. The difference is that intergroup appraisal emphasizes on the impact of contact on revising attitudes about the in-group as well as the out-group. The individual who comes into contact with the out-group learns new perspectives and takes less pride in the culture and values of the in-group. The individual accepts that the in-group's way may be neither the only way, nor the best (Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew et al. 2011). Based on this understanding, one could expect the participants of social cohesion activities to be more likely to make self-criticism of their in-group after these activities.

*Hypothesis 3: Participants are more likely to express in-group self-criticism after social cohesion activities.*

As a consequence of all these changes, it is plausible to expect contact to reduce prejudice toward the out-group. There is solid empirical evidence for the robustness of intergroup contact theory based on meta-analyses, reviews, and recent data (including longitudinal studies) showing that attitudes change toward different types of groups (Pettigrew and Tropp 2011; Christ and Wagner 2013; Hewstone et al. 2014). Pettigrew and Tropp (2011) also refine the discussion about the mechanisms discussed above, showing that positive findings are not restricted to a specific country or culture. Findings from all over the world seem to be encouraging for the supporters of contact to alleviate prejudice and conflict.

However, an important limitation is that the theory has not been extensively tested in the context of intractable conflict (Wagner and Hewstone 2012). Wagner and Hewstone (2012) distinguish three phases in regard to intergroup contact theory in an environment of intractable conflict: previolence phase, physical violence phase, and postviolence phase. Similar to Hewstone and colleagues (2008), who tested the intergroup contact theory with a longitudinal study of Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Wagner and Hewstone (2012) find support for the theory

in the context of protracted conflict. The next section of this paper describes the current research measuring the effect of bicommunal camps in Cyprus. This contribution to the civil society and peacebuilding literature also provides evidence for the effects of intergroup contact in a postviolence phase of an intractable conflict.

## 2. Method

A pre-test/post-test research design was used to test the aforementioned hypotheses, comparing the attitudes of the participants before and after two bicommunal camps in Cyprus. Crossroads II Bicommunal Theatre Camp and Friendship for Cyprus Summer Camp for Teenagers aimed to promote the peace process by bringing together young people (aged between 15 and 18) from the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. Previous research does not show any difference of effect between age groups (Pettigrew et al. 2011), which implies that this research might be generalizable to other age cohorts. Crossroads II Bicommunal Theatre Camp, which took place from July 15 to 24, 2011, attempted to accomplish this goal by creating a shared living place for the participants where they could learn and practice drama skills under the supervision of instructors with theatre experience. Cyprus Friendship Program Summer Camp for Teenagers was very similar, except without the focus on theatre skills. It took place from July 22 to 29, 2013. Participants in both camps were given the same opportunities and treated equally throughout. In Crossroads II Bicommunal Theatre Camp, the participants all aimed to learn theatre skills and create a play at the end of the camp working in mixed groups without any intergroup competition. In the Cyprus Friendship Program Summer Camp, the teenagers participated in various sports, fun, and educational activities. The facilitators acted as "soft" authority throughout the camps and the participants were able to develop close ties as a result of the intimate and intense period they shared.

The organizers of the two camps agreed to assist this study by administering a survey to the participants at both the beginning and the end of the respective camps. For the Crossroads II Bicommunal Theatre Camp, the first data was collected as soon as the participants arrived. The post-camp data was collected on the last day of the camp, when

the participants were getting ready to leave. For the Cyprus Friendship Program Summer Camp for Teeenagers, the author personally collected the data before the camp, during a meeting where the participants were given information about the logistics. The data after the camp was collected by the organizers on the last day of the camp. The short questionnaire aiming to capture attitude change was given to 55 participants, of whom 29 were Greek Cypriots and 26 Turkish Cypriots. The sample includes all of the 14 participants of the Crossroads II Bicommunal Theatre Camp, with a 100 percent return rate. The sample includes 41 participants from the Friendship for Cyprus Summer Camp for Teenagers, which had 44 participants. Here, three questionnaires were not returned.

The questionnaire used three questions to explore the attitudes of the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot participants towards each other. Perception of commonalities with the out-group (hypothesis 1) was measured by asking the participants to choose a response to the statement: "we have so much in common with the Turkish/Greek Cypriots" with the following possible answers: "strongly disagree" (coded as 0), "somewhat disagree" (coded as 1), "neither agree nor disagree" (coded as 2), "somewhat agree" (coded as 3), or "strongly agree" (coded as 4). Mutual concern (hypothesis 2) was measured by the statement: "The Cyprus problem must be solved on the basis of a mutually acceptable compromise". Participants were asked to respond using the same scale from "strongly disagree" (coded as 0), to "strongly agree" (coded as 4). Openness to self-criticism (hypothesis 3) was measured by asking the participants to comment on the statement: "I recognize that both communities have made mistakes in the past," again using the same five-point scale. Cronbach's alpha of 0.71 for the data taken before the camps began shows that the items have an acceptable level of internal consistency. The analysis compared the change in responses before and after the camp using a t-test.

Kelman argued that measurement of the effect of interactive problem-solving workshops should be conducted not only before and immediately after the workshop but also after a considerable period (2008, 47). To the author's knowledge, there is only one study (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005) that specifically measured the long-term effect of

peace workshops with an experimental design. The present study combines the short-term analysis with a semi-structured questionnaire distributed on September 1, 2012, which was approximately thirteen months after Crossroads II. In order to increase the number of observations, the study also included the participants of Crossroads I Bicommunal Theatre Camp, which took place approximately twenty-five months before data collection, as well as Crossroads III which took place about one month before data collection. The sample included two participants from Crossroads I, five participants from Crossroads II and seven participants from Crossroads III. Qualitative analysis and quotations related to the hypotheses are included in the results section. The participants were directly asked if and why participating in the camp made them realize that they have more things in common with the other community (hypothesis 1), participation in the camp made them empathize more with the other community (hypothesis 2) and participating in the camp changed their views to make them more open to criticizing their own community (hypothesis 3). The author personally conducted this survey during a reunion of Crossroads Bicommunal Theatre Camp participants. This provided some findings on the question of whether the effect of social cohesion activities is long-lasting or not. The qualitative and quantitative questionnaires can be found in the appendix.

### 3. Results

The descriptive statistics (see Table 1) show that the differences between the means before and after the camps are significant in the expected direction. On the 0 to 4 scales, the mean before the camps is 3.40 with respect to the first hypothesis, 3.60 with respect to the second hypothesis, and 3.46 with respect to the third hypothesis. The respective figures after the camps are 3.87, 3.87 and 3.91. Examining the paired t-test results for the three hypotheses (Table 2), the means before and after the camps are significantly different at the 99 percent confidence level with respect to the first, second, and third hypotheses (t= -4.8942, t= -2.6734, and t= -4.0379 respectively). Therefore, the results obtained from the pre-test/post-test study provide empirical evidence for all three hypotheses. For visualizations of the difference of means before and after the camps for hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, see figures 1, 2 and 3 respectively.
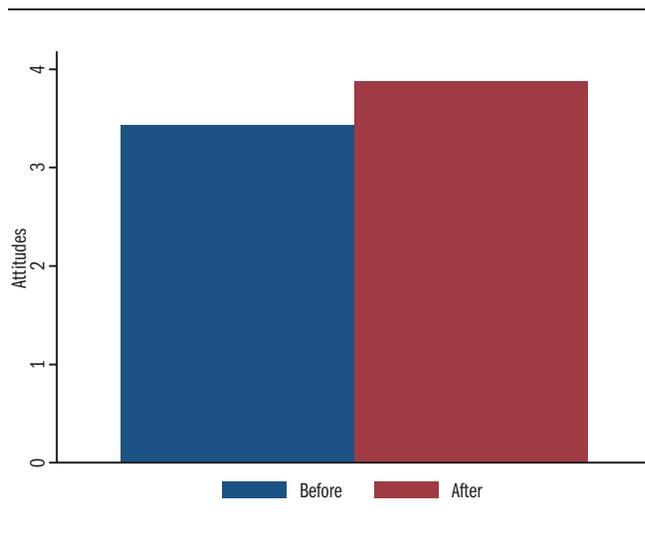
**Table 1: Descriptive statistics**

|  | N | Mean | SD | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Commonality before | 55 | 3.40 | 0.68 | 2 | 4 |
| Commonality after | 55 | 3.87 | 0.51 | 1 | 4 |
| Mutual compromise before | 55 | 3.60 | 0.60 | 2 | 4 |
| Mutual compromise after | 55 | 3.87 | 0.47 | 1 | 4 |
| Past mistakes before | 55 | 3.46 | 0.77 | 0 | 4 |
| Past mistakes after | 55 | 3.91 | 0.44 | 1 | 4 |

**Table 2: Paired t-tests**

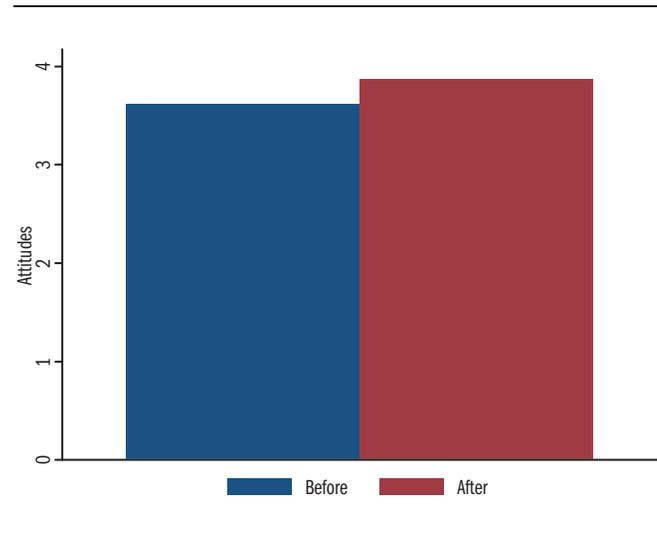|  | t-value | p-value |
|---|---|---|
| Commonalities (hypothesis 1) | –4.8942 | 0.01*** |
| Mutual concern (hypothesis 2) | –2.6734 | 0.01*** |
| Past mistakes (hypothesis 3) | –4.0379 | 0.01*** |

Note: All p-values measured as two-tailed.
*** significant at $p < 0.01$.

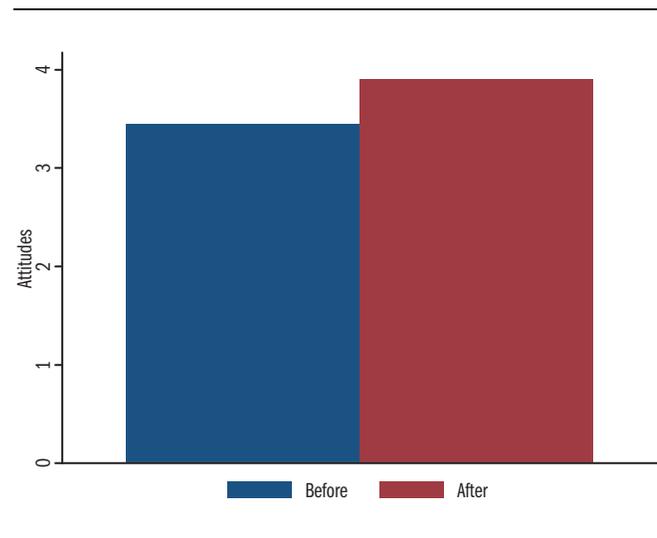**Figure 1: Commonality with out-group before and after camp**



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**Figure 2: Mutual acceptability of a solution before and after camp**



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**Figure 3: Acceptance of in-group's past mistakes before and after camp**



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Moving on to the survey of previous camp participants, thirteen out of fourteen reported a significant attitude change in the medium and long term after participating in one of the Crossroads camps, based on hand-coding of what they wrote on the semi-structured questionnaires. Where an answer was not clearly quantifiable, the respon-

dent was consulted face-to-face for clarification. This quantitative finding suggests that the camp not only had an immediate effect, but also a long-term one. Almost all participants self-reported significant positive attitude change. The participants' comments suggest that the causal mechanisms are compatible with the intergroup contact theory. As the following quotes illustrate, participants are more likely to see commonalities with the out-group after having participated in social cohesion activities (hypothesis 1):

> "Through living together and talking about our everyday activities and interests, we came to the conclusion that we are more alike than different."

> "I realized that we have so much in common because we lived together for some time and this gave me a chance to get to know them and their way of life better."

The following two quotes suggest that the participants are more likely to have mutual concern rather than selfish concern after having participated in social cohesion activities (hypothesis 2):

> "The camp made me empathize with them more. They lost houses and relatives like us. I empathize because we have a lot in common."

> "I empathize more with the other community now because we all lost some important things and we all feel the same."

And the following two quotes suggest that the participants are more likely to express self-criticism of their in-group after having participated in social cohesion activities (hypothesis 3):

> "After living together in the camp, barriers seem to disappear and now I am more open to criticizing my own community."

> "Now I am more open to criticizing my own community because now I know that we are all the same and we are all in this thing together."

Where participants reported no significant long-term change in their attitudes, their argument was not that the effect of the camp faded with time but that they were already completely positive towards the other community:

> "I guess the camp didn't make me realize any commonalities I have with them that I didn't know. It just reminded me of the

similarities that I have forgotten during the time I haven't seen many Greek Cypriots."

> "By participating in the camp I didn't start criticizing my own community more. I always criticize my own community."

## 4. Conclusion

Peacebuilding needs activities to overcome the negative socio-psychological effects caused by forces that may include education, media, and negative rhetoric of politicians or family members. Social cohesion activities aim to achieve just this but there are question marks over their effectiveness. The results of the study reported here confirm the intergroup contact theory suggesting that social cohesion activities can indeed be effective. Relying on this theory and using a pre-test/post-test study, this paper showed that the fifty-five participants in the Crossroads Bicommunal Theatre Camp II and Cyprus Friendship Program Summer Camp for Teenagers saw the commonalities with the out-group more, had more mutual concern compared to selfish in-group concern, and were more open to self-criticism of their in-group after the camps. Furthermore, statements made by fourteen participants in the Crossroads I, Crossroads II, and Crossroads III camps provided some evidence for long-term attitude change and further substantiated the finding that social cohesion activities can be effective. Thirteen of these fourteen participants self-reported significant positive change.

Researchers working on the endogeneity problem in regard to the question of tolerant people seeking contact or contact decreasing prejudice found important evidence for simultaneous causation working both ways (Binder et al. 2009; Sidanius et al. 2008) and in fact a stronger effect when contact is the independent variable (Pettigrew 1997a; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Powers and Ellison 1995; Wilson 1996; Van Dick et al. 2004). The sample reported here shows that not all participants in these camps were completely positive towards the other community before they took part, as is assumed by some. So, there was clearly space for impact in terms of attitude change. Social cohesion activities might be quite effective tools in achieving positive attitude change in post-conflict societies such as Cyprus.

One important shortcoming of this study was the lack of control groups. At the time of the camps, I followed the

news during the periods the camps took place. There were no significant developments with respect to the track I level negotiations at the time of the camps. This is encouraging for the validity of the results presented. Nevertheless, like any pre-test/post-test study, the validity of the findings is much less robust when control groups are not present. Therefore, the findings in this paper should be cross-checked. Future research may use different measurement techniques with the presence of control groups in order to put the argument to a more stringent test.

## Appendix
### Quantitative items
1. We have much in common with the Turkish/Greek Cypriots.
2. The Cyprus problem must be solved on the basis of a mutually acceptable compromise.
3. I recognize that both communities have made mistakes in the past.

### Response scale

Strongly agree (4)

Somewhat agree (3)

Neither agree nor disagree (2)

Somewhat disagree (1)

Strongly disagree (0)

### Qualitative items
1. Has participating in the bicommunal theatre camp made you think that you have more in common with the other community than you thought before attending the camp? Why?
2. Has participating in the bicommunal theatre camp made you empathize more with the other community? Why?
3. Has participating in the bicommunal theatre camp changed your views to become more open to criticizing your own community more? Why?

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**Direnç Kanol**
direda@yahoo.co.uk