

BORDERS TO CROSS

Title:	The Importance of Mediators
Name workshop:	Dealing with Conflicts
Projects presented:	1. De Hallen 2. High-Speed Train Project in France*
Workshop director(s):	David Laws
Name rapporteur(s):	Sergej Schellen & John Callaghan
Date and time of workshop:	14:30 – 30/10/13

Mediators, the bridging of communication.
There is no single formula for dealing with conflicts.
The top-down process (of dealing with conflicts) is “old-school”

District Mayor: The top-down process of governing and decision-making is “old school”, all parties that have an interest in the conflict should be involved at the table.
It is very important that everyone recognizes the neutrality of the mediator, and for the government to have shown that, as a mediator is something impressive.
A problem can even arise and spiral out of control, no matter how ‘smart and willing’ (to avoid a conflict) the parties involved are.
Mediators and people tend to hold a distance from too much technical information. The technical subjects can scare them.
There is a great importance in letting the parties of the conflict come together to decide the guidelines and rules, and talk it out in order to build trust.

Description and elaboration of observations and reflections of projects and/or things that happened and/or were discussed during the workshop: 10-20 lines:

In both cases mediators were an essential part in turning the situation from worse to bad and perhaps even to good. More than anything mediators provided the bridge of communication between the people that would otherwise never speak. That in itself eases the conflict situation and lets opposing sides listen to each other, in turn breaking down a bit of the mistrust. The mediators also made sure that everyone who was in some way involved in the conflict let their voice be heard by presenting the environment as a leveled playing field, and getting them as involved as possible in the guideline creation and decision making. To the degree that even squatters in the case of de Hallen were given a chance to voice their opinion. Another helpful point was to be as transparent as possible with the information, whether that meaning opening the files of the past (de Hallen), or

getting experts to educate the residence of what sound the trains will be making by providing “sound samples”. But further escalation wasn’t always in the control of the mediator; new players from the outside could worsen the situation once again at any moment. In the case of the French railway project south of Paris the Prime Minister’s new policy to cut the budget for high-speed rails caused all the work into finding an alternative project to be in vain. This lack of full control by either the mediator or all the original stakeholders can lead to a lot of frustration, at which point resignation may have to be an option because nothing else can be done.

The level in which the highest governing body concerned with a case was neutrally involved just to try and do its best to solve the problem can be quite surprising to some. This idea that the government can be there to provide a leveled playing field for its citizens and be more responsible in the field of communication is a real sign that the governance process, at least in some areas, is changing from the “old school” top down fashion of decision-making and that inclusion is where things are heading.