

**PAYERS AND PLAYERS:**  
**Problem Representations, Policy Diffusion, and Boundary Work in**  
**Finnish Peace Mediation**

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Master's Thesis

University of Helsinki

Faculty of Social Sciences

Global Politics and Communication/

Governance, Organizations and Communication

track

May 2021



Tiedekunta – Fakultet – Faculty Faculty of Social Sciences		Koulutusohjelma – Utbildningsprogram – Degree Programme Global Politics and Communication (GPC)	
Tekijä – Författare – Author Matilda Rosalyn Mahne			
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title Payers and Players: Problem Representations, Policy Diffusion, and Boundary Work in Finnish Peace Mediation			
Oppiaine/Opintosuunta – Läroämne/Studieinriktning – Subject/Study track Governance, Organizations and Communication			
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level Master's thesis		Aika – Datum – Month and year May 2021	Sivumäärä – Sidoantal – Number of pages 68
Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract			
<p>Peacemakers operate in an increasingly complex global environment. Approaches to peace, including peace mediation, also reflect these changes happening in the surrounding world. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, a new Centre for Peace Mediation within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) was established. This thesis conducts a critical inspection of a policy's seemingly sudden emergence by taking the Centre as its case study. With scarce policy documents, this study collected its data through conducting 10 semi-structured interviews with state and nonstate actors in the Finnish peace mediation field to analyse the way the Centre is perceived to have come about. The interviews lasted around one hour each. In this study, a novel theoretical framework is advanced through inspecting the policy's problem representations (WPR approach), the forces which affected its establishment (policy diffusion), and the boundaries that are used to demarcate between groups (boundary work) to analyse why the Centre for Peace Mediation was established. The study finds that the Centre for Peace Mediation was not solely a result of a restructuring of MFA resources, but was affected by a multitude of forces on the national, regional, and international planes. By employing the WPR approach and the frameworks of policy diffusion mechanisms and boundary work, the study's findings point to Finnish efforts to become a credible 'player' in the field of peace mediation. Studying how policies and the issues interwoven within them are framed and justified is relevant on many fronts. First, it helps understand governance processes and what groups of people are highlighted at the expense of others. The study also elucidates how civil society can partake in national policymaking. It additionally shows how intergovernmental organisations influence nations through agenda-setting.</p>			
<p>Rauhantekijät työskentelevät jatkuvasti muuttuvassa globaalissa ympäristössä. Rauhan edistämisen tavat eivät ole tyhjiössä, ja ne mukautuvat toimintaympäristönsä muutoksiin. Sama pätee rauhanvälitykseen. Suomen ulkoministeriön perustettiin koronaviruspandemian aikana uusi rauhanvälityskeskus. Tämä tapaustutkimus ottaa uuden keskuksen tutkimuskohteekseen ja analysoi, mitä tekijöitä on ollut vaikuttamassa sen perustamiseen. Aineisto tutkimusta varten kerättiin puolistrukturoitujen haastattelujen avulla. Haastateltavina oli yhteensä 10 valtiollista ja kansalaisyhteiskunnallista rauhanvälityksen asiantuntijaa, ja haastattelut olivat noin tunnin mittaisia. Tässä tutkimuksessa rauhanvälityskeskusta tarkastellaan teoreettisen viitekehyksen avulla, joka rakentuu kolmesta teoriasta: poliittisen retoriikan ongelmanmäärittelyn analyysiin tarkoitettu What is the Problem Represented to be (WPR) -lähestymistapa, politiikkamallien leviäminen (policy diffusion) ja rajatyön käsite (boundary work). Tämän teoreettisen viitekehyksen avulla tutkimus selvittää niitä tekijöitä, jotka vaikuttivat keskuksen perustamiseen. Tutkimuksen keskeisimmäksi tulokseksi nousi se, ettei rauhanvälityskeskuksen perustaminen ole ollut pelkkä ulkoministeriön sisäinen rakenneuudistus. Sen perustamiseen on vaikuttanut niin kansalliset, alueelliset kuin kansainvälisetkin tekijät. WPR-menetelmä, politiikkamallien leviämisen mekanismit ja rajatyön aktiivinen teko osoittivat kaikki samaan tulokseen: suomalaisessa rauhanvälitysyhteisössä, varsinkin valtiollisella tasolla, on halua tehdä Suomesta merkittävä tekijä kansainvälisessä rauhanvälitysympäristössä, ei 'vain' rahoittaa kansalaisjärjestöjä tekemään rauhanvälitystyötä. Tehty tutkimus ja sen tulokset ovat relevantteja monella tasolla. Diskurssien analysointi auttaa ymmärtämään valtiollista politiikka ja sen yhteiskunnallista merkitystä, ja tulokset tuovat esiin kansalaisyhteiskunnan roolin valtion toiminnassa. Ne myös näyttävät, miten hallitustenväliset järjestöt luovat suuntaviivoja ja painotuksia, jotka voivat vaikuttaa yksittäisen valtion toimintaan.</p>			
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords Peace mediation, WPR, policy diffusion, boundary work			
Ohjaaja tai ohjaajat – Handledare – Supervisor or supervisors Tero Erkkilä			
Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited Helsinki University Library			
Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information			

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Peacemakers operate in an increasingly complex global environment. International relations scholars commonly hold that the end of the Cold War changed the global security architecture from a bi-polar world and paved way for globalisation. The post-Cold War shifted the character of wars from inter-state to intra-state wars involving a multitude of state and nonstate actors (Šimonović 2003, 251). Calls for peacebuilding have thus been ever-increasing. While the character of wars has perhaps not changed from intra-state conflict, traditional centres for global governance are experiencing a shift once again. The influence of the West is decreasing amid shifts in global power centres (Viola, 2020). Consensus is missing in multilateral organisations, and their mandate of securing peace is being challenged (Richmond, 2017). All of this is complicated – or perhaps aided – by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. In this shifting global environment, approaches to peacemaking do not remain static (Lehti, 2019).

The Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs Pekka Haavisto announced amid the Covid-19 pandemic that a new unit, the Centre for Mediation (as it was first called), will be established in the political department of the country's Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) by October 2020 (Haavisto, 2020). This was reportedly prompted by the government program released in June 2019, which pointed to peace mediation becoming one of Finland's most important foreign policy priorities (Finnish Government, 2019). This study investigates why the Centre was established.

The general issue this thesis aims to address is how peace mediation is institutionalised. More specifically, this thesis takes the case of the Centre for Mediation – a name that was later changed to Centre for Peace Mediation – and focuses on the reasons behind its establishment through three research questions. The first research question asks *how peace mediation was formed into a policy “problem” that warranted a Centre for Peace Mediation in the political department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland*. Policies, such as the Centre, hold certain representations of “problems”, which show how certain issues are thought about in the policy world and represent the things that need change (Bacchi, 2009). Carol Bacchi's (2009) framework on critically evaluating public policies will be used to tease out the

problem representations, which will bring us a step closer to finding out why a Centre was established.

The second issue this study addresses is *how the founding of the Centre has been influenced by a multi-layered environment*. Has it been a purely internal decision within the MFA, or have outside forces affected its establishment? What is the role of other national or regional (Nordic) mediation nations in the Finnish peace mediation scene? And what of the international players - do multilateral institutions, for instance, fit into the equation of influencing the origins of the Centre? These forces will be inspected via policy diffusion literature and will particularly elucidate where ideas for the Centre have come from (Crain, 1966).

The third and final research question focuses on *how boundary work against national, regional, and international actors has influenced the creation of the Centre*. How are Finnish actors drawing boundaries between them and others, demarcating their expertise from the wealth of other actors (Gieryn, 1983)? Asking this question will help us understand more fully why the Centre was established.

These three specific research questions aim to collectively investigate why the Centre came about. They also serve to inspect whether policy diffusion and boundary work are at play in the first place, as their effects on peace mediation have scarcely been studied before. Through these research questions this thesis attempts to map the complex set of actors in the field and, perhaps most importantly, their relationship on the national, regional, and international plane that have affected the policy formulation in the Finnish government.

As a qualitative study, I gather my data through in-depth interviews, focusing on both civil society and state actors. This thesis does not attempt to focus on the effectiveness of policies, namely the new Centre, but rather focuses on how and why the policy came about in the first place. The emergence of the Centre for Peace Mediation within Finland's MFA must be understood as a multi-layered process taking place on the international, regional, and national levels. The Finnish case sheds light to the wider trends in global governance through discussing the role international organisations (such as the UN and the EU) have in global agenda-setting, as well as the role of civil society in affecting national policymaking.

This research fills a gap in literature: First, there is almost no research on boundary work in relation to peace mediation. Additional to this, studies focusing on the effects of policy diffusion in peace mediation are also limited. When peace mediation has been considered in the policy diffusion research field, the focus has been on analysing conflict characteristics through quantitative studies, as well as investigating the effectiveness of policies. This thesis steers away from quantitative methods to explore the topic through in-depth interviews, which allows me to collect rich data for textual analysis. Second, the Centre being an incredibly new development, no previous research on it has been conducted. Perhaps most importantly, there is a need to better understand the institutionalisation of mediation (Wallensteen & Svensson, 2014), and this thesis fills the gaps in understanding the role institutions can play in the field.

The framework of analysis, which includes the WPR approach, policy diffusion, and boundary work are surveyed in the first part of this thesis. I will then discuss the method, after which I will briefly contextualise the case. I will then endeavour to present the findings and discuss their relevance. In this study I argue that while the establishment of the Centre seems like an internal restructuring, there have indeed been elements of policy diffusion, particularly those of learning and emulation on many planes, and that actors engage in extensive boundary work to expand their authority in the peace mediation field. I propose that all the findings point to the MFA wanting to become a credible '*player*' in the field of peace mediation.

## 2. A THREE-STRAND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

While there are many ways to conceptualise peace mediation, this thesis takes a broad understanding of the term to avoid excluding practices that might not fit in a narrower understanding of the concept. Peace mediation will henceforth be understood as a third party assisting conflicting parties resolve disputes to avoid armed conflict (Lehti 2014, 18).

There are various ‘tracks’ that are conventionally thought to encompass peace mediation activities. The United Nations Peacemaker digital toolkit and its Mediation Process and Strategy library explains the differences between the tracks: track 1 involves high-level negotiations between top leadership of conflicting parties that are usually mediated by multilateral organisations or eminent persons; track 1.5 involves informal peace processes between top leadership of conflicting parties; track 2 involves dialogue between regional power figures (e.g., religious leaders) often mediated by iNGOs; and track 3 involves grassroots leadership engaging in mediation programmes (Federal Foreign Office & Initiative Mediation Support Deutschland (IMSD), 2017; UN Peacemaker, 2019).

Building a theoretical framework from three theories (What is the Problem Represented to be [WPR], policy diffusion, and boundary work) provide a solid foundation to inspect the reasons behind establishing the Centre for Peace Mediation. Policy diffusion gives a unique perspective into where policy ideas have come from and the WPR approach and boundary work also seemed to provide the best frameworks to consider the question why the Centre was established, although there were other contending theories.

The research problem could have been investigated from an organisational perspective using a resource dependence approach. The resource dependence theory (RDT) was first concerned with companies’ resources but has later been the focus of organizational science (Davis & Cobb, 2010; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). RDT has also been used to explain cooperation patterns between international organisations in the crisis management field, arguing that organisations’ resource dependencies explain their behaviour towards cooperation (Harsch, 2015). From this perspective, one could use RDT to investigate how organisational changes in the Ministry relate to resource dependencies and the resulting power dynamics in the peace mediation field. While this could have been a viable theoretical option to study our case, the theory’s realist approach places too much emphasis on external power politics. The more

constructivist WPR approach was chosen to critically inspect the policy itself and its underlying assumptions, which might still end up revealing power dynamics.

Regarding boundary work, another path could have been focusing on ‘epistemic capital’ (Alasuutari, 2018). The term epistemic capital concerns authority that is founded on elements like assumptions and actor expertise on specific issues (*ibid.*). The focus of investigating authority is often based on the recognition of someone’s authority by *others*, which goes beyond the scope of this study – I am not concerned with investigating whether Finnish actors have greatest authority in the peace mediation field, but I am rather focusing on the perceptions of Finnish actors themselves. The concept of boundary work allows us to consider claims to authority while not necessarily be stuck in investigating who in the complex and shifting peace mediation field has the ‘final’ authority.

With these in mind, the following section will consider the framework of analysis of the three strands of theory best suited for this study: What is the Problem Represented to Be, policy diffusion, and boundary work.

## 2.1 What is the Problem Represented to be (WPR)?

In order to understand governing processes (and, ultimately, how we are governed), we need to understand how problems are represented in policies (Bacchi, 2009, xiii). Policies, such as the establishment of the Centre for Peace Mediation, are inherently laden with values and assumptions. A post-structural theoretical and methodological framework developed by Carol Bacchi (2009) analyses how policies are coupled with certain policy “problems”. Through this method Bacchi argues that what is proposed, in terms of a policy, reveals what is seen as problematic (*ibid.*). The problem representations in policies suggest that something needs to change. The focus here is how policies themselves produce problems, not necessarily that the policy itself is the best attempt of governments to solve the problem (*ibid.*, p.1). Bacchi argues that the policies shape particular problems, and that these problem representations reveal how issues are thought about.

The policy analysis approach, which is coined “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” (WPR), presents six questions that aim to deconstruct how policies produce problems:



1. “What’s the problem (e.g., of “gender inequality, “drug use/abuse”, “economic development”, “global warming”, “childhood obesity”, “irregular migration”, etc.) represented to be in a specific policy or policies?”
2. What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem” (problem representation)?
3. How has this representation of the “problem” come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the “problem” be conceptualized differently?
5. What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the “problem”?
6. How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?”  
(Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p.20 referring to Bacchi, 2009)

Question 1 takes a policy and inspects its implicit problem representations. For instance, if there is a policy to provide free clean needles to drug users, this suggests that the underlying problem representation is ‘risky’ drug use in spreading diseases. A policy may hold many problem representations in it. Question 2 tries to tease out the assumptions that lay the foundations for the policy problem. These are often in the form of binaries (e.g., legal/illegal), key concepts (e.g., welfare), or categories (e.g., people categories like ‘the homeless’ or ‘drug addicts’) (Bacchi, 2009, pp.7-9). For example, if we take the problem of risky drug use, the assumption could be that drug users share needles in a reckless manner. It is important to note that the assumptions are not necessarily ones held by policymakers themselves (Bacchi, 2009, p.5). They are implicit assumptions woven inside the problem representation itself.

Question 3 looks at the wider societal context over time to inspect how this problem representation has emerged. Question 4, on the other hand, reflects on the flipside of the problem representation to inspect how the problem can be thought differently, what things are not problematised. For instance, our risky drug use problem representation fails to problematise the issue that people are marginalised and failed by the welfare system. Question 5 considers the effects of the problem representations shaped by the policies, whether it has deleterious effects on certain groups of people. The final query, question 6,

looks at how the problem is produced and disseminated, and pays particular attention to how it has become a dominant discourse.

Bacchi argues that discourses produce certain ‘subjectification effects’ (2009, p.16). We make sense of our surrounding social world through certain discourses while we are also subject to governing discourses: “Hence, who we are – how we feel about ourselves and others – is at least to an extent an effect of the subject positions made available in public policies” (*ibid.*). Policies, then, take part in shaping the way we understand ourselves and how we demarcate ‘others’.

Many studies have since taken the WPR approach to critically evaluate policies. For instance, the WPR framework has been used to understand how unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children have been constructed as a policy problem (Rigby et al., 2019). To my understanding, there is very limited literature, if any, on using the WPR approach to critically evaluate policies on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, let alone on peace mediation specifically. This is a lost opportunity, as the WPR approach has been hailed as an “original methodology and scholarly paradigm” that through a post-structuralist lens allows us to consider accounts of power, subjects, and social change (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012, p.1).

It is not the first time, however, that the WPR approach and policy diffusion have been integrated in a study, as this thesis aims to do. Lara Gautier et al. (2019) studied the health sector, particularly the diffusion of performance-based financing and the discursive processes that explain the global diffusion of health problem representations. They use the post-structural WPR approach to investigate how discourses on policies are produced and argue that in order to understand how policies are diffused globally, a deeper understanding of discourses is needed. With their WPR and policy diffusion framework, they find that powerful diffusion entrepreneurs produce and disseminate specific problem representation in the global health arena (Gautier et al., 2019, p.3).

This thesis takes the case of the Centre for Peace Mediation to try to understand how the policy is being framed and tries to tease out the reasons behind its establishment. The WPR approach, then, provides a useful framework for critical scrutiny of the policy and the framing of policy concerns – what is the underlying problem representation that this Centre for Peace Mediation produced? How are issues inherent in the policy choice of the Centre

thought about? What kind of message is the policy signalling about how actors view themselves and others? The WPR approach uncovers the implicit needs that the Centre fulfils.

For the purposes of this study, the first two of Bacchi's questions are considered in depth. I will be investigating what problems are represented in the policy and what their underlying assumptions are to uncover the rationalities inherent in governing policies. This WPR approach will be complemented with two other theoretical stands, policy diffusion and boundary work.

## 2.2 Policy diffusion theory

To further understand the policies that govern us, it is important to understand where policies come from in the first place. Two of Bacchi's questions (numbers 3 and 6) try to understand how specific "problem" representations have come about and how they are produced and disseminated. While this study will make use of the first two questions of the WPR framework, this research will also consider where the policy ideas themselves, not only the problem representations, have come from.

For decades, scholars have been trying to understand why and how similar policies appear in different parts of the world. This phenomenon is called "policy diffusion", which is traditionally understood as a state-to-state process where policies in one country affect the policies of another (Meseguer & Gilardi, 2009). This state-centric notion, however, is too limited today, as much takes place outside of state-to-state interactions. As such, I expand policy diffusion to also entail policy choices in international institutions and civil society that, in turn, may affect the policy choices of a state.

Scholars have paid much attention on identifying the drivers of policy diffusion, or the "flow" of ideas between entities. There are four mechanisms that have gained widespread acceptance as the forces of diffusion:

Learning: the success or failure of policies elsewhere

Competition: policies of other units with which they compete for resources

Coercion: pressure from international organisations or powerful countries

Emulation: the perceived appropriateness of policies  
(Gilardi & Wasserfallen, 2019)

While the parameters of the mechanisms are sometimes blurred, there are specific qualities to each mechanism. Learning, the first mechanism, denotes a situation where a policy choice in place A affects the policy choice of place B. Here the behaviour of A conveys important information about a specific policy to B, so learning takes place when a policymaker acquires new information from others' policy experiences. (Braun and Gilardi 2006.) A helpful example of the learning mechanism could be the liberalisation of energy markets: when one place liberalises their energy market, it can inform policymakers about the success or failure of public monopolies or competitive markets, which then serve as a useful learning point for others.

The second policy diffusion mechanism, competition, is rather straightforward in its meaning. Competition in the policy diffusion context is often considered to be strategic interaction between governments to attract economic activity (Graham et al., 2013). For example, if a government lowers corporate taxes, this incentivizes other governments to follow suite (Swank, 1992). This notion of the competition mechanism, however, is limited in two respects: being state-centric and focusing only on economic gain. A better way to understand competition in policy diffusion could be to include actors outside of governments, as well as expand the motivations for competition from the conventional economic focus to include other resources, such as increased influence. The peace mediation field is a good example of the need to expand conventional definitions. The field is rife with local, regional, and international actors, and often the parties compete for symbolic resources rather than material gain.

Coercion, in turn, can be difficult to discern in policy diffusion. In the international relations literature, coercion usually points to pressure, which is reinforced by a threat of sanctions or the subsequent use of military force. With policy diffusion, the coercion mechanism is thought to appear when costs and rewards for policy change are imposed by a powerful actor (Braun and Gilardi 2006). The focus in the coercion mechanism is usually on power asymmetries. For instance, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) can set conditions for receiving aid, which often include calls for policy change. Coercion, in this case, can be “hard” or “soft”: the powerful actor can use physical power through enforcement and

extensive monitoring to ensure policy change in a target country, or the dominant actor can use soft coercion where it “influences others through ideational channels without exerting physical power or materially altering costs or benefits” (Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2006, p.791). Especially in soft coercion, countries that are dependent on dominant actors structurally or situationally may be more receptive to adopt policies promoted by the powerful actors.

Considering the established policy diffusion mechanisms of learning, competition, and coercion, the last mechanism of emulation perhaps diverges the most from the others. Emulation focuses on a more constructivist perspective, wherein policies are socially constructed and adopted when perceived as appropriate. Policymakers conform to norms by adopting certain policies (Gibaldi & Wasserfallen, 2019). The diffusion of human rights policies is often considered as emulation, as countries sign human rights treaties to signal commitment to global norms (Simmons et al., 2006).

Policy diffusion and its mechanisms can be useful to identify where and how ideas flow from one place to another. Is a policy adopted because it yielded positive outcomes in another place? Is a policy embraced to catch up or get ahead of the crowd? Is a powerful actor forcing a policy change in a country? Is the policy seen simply as appropriate to have? These prompts, which scholars of diffusion tend to focus on, show that the emphasis of the scholarship has mostly been on identifying the drivers of existing or implemented policies. Curiously, the policy diffusion literature has mostly ignored other stages of the policy cycle, especially how the issues are defined and framed *before* their implementation.

The policy cycle is conventionally thought to have five activities: agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and policy evaluation (Lasswell, 1956). While there is no clear-cut, linear progression of a policy from one stage to another, the identification of these separate activities can still be useful when looking at the beginnings of a policy (the forming of the “idea”) to its more concrete aftermath (the subsequent policy itself). For our purposes, the agenda-setting and policy formulation stages can be helpful when inspecting how issues are being framed. Agenda-setting refers to the process where perceived problems end up into policy problems that states commit to tackle (Kingdon, 1984). Policy formulation, in turn, points to developing actionable solutions to tackle said

policy problem (Wu et al., 2017). Inspecting these two stages of the policy cycle can help clarify when and how policy diffusion actually takes place.

Often neglected in policy diffusion literature, the issue-definition stage within policy diffusion is taken up by Gilardi, Shipan, and Wüest (2020). They consider diffusion in the context of the policy cycle – from an adopted policy in one place to the beginning issue-definition stage in another (Gilardi et al., 2020). Their study, while a pioneering step towards understanding issue-definition within policy diffusion, is not the first to tackle this topic. Boushey (2016) examines how the definition of issues can lead to the adoption of a policy, while Gilardi, Shipan, and Wüest (2020) explore how diffusion can produce varying issue definitions over time (2020, p.3). Focusing on smoking bans, Gilardi et al. find that many discursive topics are predicted by levels of prior adoptions in other countries. Ultimately, their study finds that there is evidence of diffusion before the adoption or even agenda-setting stage of the policy (Gilardi, Shipan, and Wüest 2020, p.13). Understanding policy diffusion within the context of a policy cycle could prove useful in separating the focus from the concrete policy to inspecting how the policy is being *framed* in the first place.

In sum, policy diffusion can be understood as the “flow” of ideas from one place to another. There are four mechanisms that have been identified as drivers of diffusion: learning, competition, coercion, and emulation. However, thus far the policy diffusion literature has been plagued by a state-centric focus on diffusion, while it should pay more attention to the multitude of influential actors that participate in the spreading of ideas, such as international organisations or local NGOs. In addition, policy diffusion has been studied mostly during the policy implementation stage and not, for instance, during the issue-definition stage. Much of the framing and justification of a policy comes before its implementation, so if the objective is to identify the flow and direction of ideas, we should pay more attention to how policies are being framed in the first place (regardless of whether the policies actually exist yet or not, or what shape they have ultimately taken). This releases us from only evaluating the diffusion of the final products – the policies! – and instead allows us to also focus on the diffusion of discourses.

Some previous (yet limited) efforts have been made to better understand diffusion in peace mediation. General determinants of mediation have been studied (Wallensteen & Svensson, 2014), but it remains unclear how institutional structures are affected through policy

diffusion. Studies that have tried to investigate the role of diffusion in peace mediation practices have focused mostly on quantitative methods or actual mediation in practice. For instance, Böhmelt (2016) investigates the role of conflict characteristics in the diffusion of mediation practices. By testing his hypothesis through cross-sectional data, he finds that similar levels of violence in crises have an effect in the diffusion of mediation (Böhmelt, 2016).

While research on policy diffusion in peace mediation is scarce, some very recent studies have tried to examine the diffusion of normative frames in mediation. In more constructivist norm scholarship, Pring and Palmiano Federer (2020) investigated the role regional organisations and non-governmental organisations had in promoting certain norms in mediation processes. They found that the diffusion of a norm, in their case inclusivity, was shaped by organisations' local agency (Pring & Palmiano Federer, 2020). Their study also highlights the importance of nonstate actors performing mediation processes, a space which was previously dominated by official state actors.

### 2.3 Boundary work theory

Social scientists have long concerned themselves with studying expertise. Questions like *who has authority* and *who claims to have authority in the production of knowledge* have remained particular points of interest. These questions do not only remain theoretical issues, as they also have highly practical significance. Expertise in a field is often linked with the concept of “epistemic authority”: epistemic authority can be assigned to someone who is more likely to have true information on a question or a field compared to a situation where we tried to figure out the same ourselves (Jäger, 2016; Zagzebski, 2013). Important questions remain: What ideological boundaries exist between groups and fields of knowledge? How is expertise in a specific area defended? How are boundaries created? In what follows, I try to flesh out the significance of these questions by examining the concept of “boundary work”.

Boundary work, first coined by Thomas F. Gieryn (1983), points specifically to the creation of epistemic authority. Gieryn holds boundary work to be an ideological style, a strategic and practical activity to separate certain groups or ideologies from other actors or systems. In Gieryn's case, he analysed how scientists demarcate their work from the work of “non-scientists”. He looked at three examples of ideologies of science and analysed their rhetorical

style, stylistic resources, and the way individuals were constructing social boundaries to distinguish non-scientific intellectual boundaries. Gieryn identified three specific occasions where boundary-work may take place:

- a) Expansion: “when the goal is *expansion* of authority or expertise into domains claimed by other professions or occupations, boundary-work heightens the contrast between rivals in ways flattering to the ideologists’ side;
  - b) Monopolization: “when the goal is *monopolization* of professional authority and resources, boundary-work excludes rivals from within by defining them as outsiders with labels such as “pseudo,” “deviant,” or “amateur”;
  - c) Protection of autonomy: “when the goal is *protection of autonomy* over professional activities, boundary-work exempts members from responsibility for consequences of their work by putting the blame on scapegoats from outside.”
- (Gieryn 1983, p. 791-792)

Boundary work can help elucidate how groups create social boundaries between different groups or communities. With identifying aspirations of expansion, monopolization or protection of autonomy, the rhetorical and stylistic resources can be analysed to see how competing models and actors try to gain resources in specific arenas. These resources can be material or symbolic: for instance, it may be that the groups fight for authority on expertise in a specific field (symbolic), or it could be to finance certain activities (material).

Gieryn shows that boundary work is relational. As boundary work depends on contrasting the actor favourably to the “other”, the work is always defined through the relationship. The content and emphasis of the ideological frames respond to the existing environment in which boundaries are constantly “drawn and redrawn” (Gieryn 1983, p. 781). Especially in the international field, no one actor and their claims to authority and resources have a lasting effect without being frequently re-examined or questioned.

Other studies have since picked up examining epistemic authority through boundary work. Kranke (2020) studies how international organisations (IOs) maintain their expert status. One mechanism, which his research focuses on, is boundary work. Kranke analyses the strategy that IOs use to create boundaries between other IOs and their work, and he argues that boundary work in inter-IO relations involves strategies of demarcation and cooperation.



Applying Erving Goffman's work on dramaturgy, he holds the activities to be performative: the IOs (in his case the World Bank and the IMF) demarcate their activities on the "frontstage", while on the "backstage" they cooperate with resources on overlapping issues (Kranke 2020, p.19). To the outside world it seems that the IOs highlight their own specific expertise, while the less highlighted aspect of cooperation still takes place mostly away from the public eye.

Kranke's take on boundary work emphasises the importance of symbolism. One strong symbol, according to him, can be a reform. This highly symbolic organisational decision, a reform, is one of the most visible frontstage activities, as they show a dramatic change in the organisation (Kranke 2020, p.7). When studying organisations and the boundary work within which they engage, the strategies and decisions can change considerably during symbolic activities like reforms.

Boundary work, Kranke finds, is highly dependent on the context. Changes in the environment can have a dramatic effect on how the work is used. In Kranke's case of the IMF and the World Bank, the global financial crisis increased the desire for actors to demarcate between the IOs. This shows that the strategies are not static. On the other hand, in some cases selective cooperation with an IO could increase the organisation's claims to expertise. For example, the IMF reinforced its surveillance expertise by cooperating with another specialised IO (Kranke 2020, p.15). Organisations respond to the context and have to adapt in each situation when it comes to boundary work. When considering claims to expertise and epistemic authority, the presentation of policies (and the actors themselves) takes centre stage (*ibid.*, p.19).

Gieryn (1983) and Kranke (2020) show that boundary work is intricately linked with epistemic authority. Boundaries are created and used to distance an object from the "other", and in this way boundary work is always relational. The action is context-specific and non-static, as actors may respond to environmental changes in their strategies for boundary work. Additionally, it is performative and often holds highly symbolic value. Understanding the way boundaries are created and used in specific contexts can help elucidate why organisations or entities choose a specific course of action. When inspecting ideological frames, boundary work can help understand the concepts that are being highlighted and why. It does not assume that the actions of entities take place in isolation: the international,

regional, and local context of a boundary work activity is crucial to understand the contents of the action, which can in turn help understand other actions taken in similar contexts.

To my knowledge, no studies have investigated the role of boundary work in peace mediation. While the policy diffusion framework is useful in identifying the “flows” of ideas, boundary work can help us better understand the ideological and discourse components behind the creation of the Finnish Centre for Mediation together with the WPR approach. Although Gieryn’s study focuses on the demarcation of scientific activities, his framework is useful in this study as well. The peace mediation field is filled with ideology as any other social arena. Competing models and actors abound in peace mediation, and Gieryn’s theory on boundary work can help elucidate why Finnish actors frame the peace mediation problem as they do.

The three seemingly different theoretical strands – the WPR, policy diffusion, and boundary work – have convergences. For instance, they all emphasise relationality, be it in separating ‘us’ from ‘others’ (WPR and boundary work) or the flows of information between actors (policy diffusion). The way issues are spoken about, or framing, is central in all three theories. Additionally, the element of competition is present in both policy diffusion and boundary work thinking.

They also fill gaps in each other to help us understand the processes leading to the establishment of the Centre. The first, WPR, is used to tease out how the Centre is framed and what the underlying policy “problem” is. This aims to answer the first research question: *how has peace mediation formed into a policy “problem” that warranted a Centre for Peace Mediation in the political department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland?* It will help elucidate the discourse around the policy and what the underlying need for a Centre is.

The second, policy diffusion, is used to inspect where actors perceive that the ideas for a Centre have come from, and how these framings have diffused from one place to another. This, in turn, addresses the second research question: *how has the founding of the Centre been influenced by a multi-layered environment?* This will help investigate the multitude of forces affecting the Centre.

The third theoretical strand, boundary work, serves to complement the two approaches above. It finally tackles the last research question: *how has boundary work against national, regional, and international actors influenced the creation of the Centre?* This adds a particular focus on authority and expertise and their role in establishing a Centre.

This theoretical framework will help to map the processes behind the establishing of the Centre for Peace Mediation: how the policy issues are thought about, what need the Centre fills, where the ideas for it have come from, and what role claims to authority and expertise play in establishing the Centre. I argue that the Centre is not only a simple restructuring of MFA resources but that it signals efforts to be seen as a real '*player*' in the field of peace mediation.

### 3. METHOD AND DATA

There is a very limited pool of policy documents relating to the sudden emergence of the Centre for Mediation. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020 the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Pekka Haavisto, announced the new Centre for Mediation (as it was first called) during the Ambassador's Conference 2020 (Haavisto, 2020). A press release was also sent out the same day (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2020). Other than these, there are very few primary sources relating to the Centre and its establishment.

Due to the scarcity of existing data, this study draws all its data from semi-structured elite interviews. As this thesis aims to understand the various actors and processes that led to the Centre's founding and how it is framed and justified, interviews are particularly useful in trying to tease ideological themes out. Drawing from the data from interviews, I will be looking out for the effect of the international society, Nordic (regional) states, and the civil society on state policies.

With the Centre for Peace Mediation as my case study, a background interview was first conducted to gain a better understanding of the field. There are many challenges pertaining to securing elite interviews and being able to navigate the issues stemming from status differences (Mykkänen, 2001), and the background interview served as the first point in gaining access and mitigating some issues in conducting such interviews. The background interview was later incorporated into the dataset.

All semi-structured interviews for this study (N=10) were conducted online during December 2020 – March 2021 as a safety precaution due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to the background interview, eight full interviews and one shorter email interview were conducted. The interviewees included three female and seven male participants. Interviews were conducted mainly via the video communications platform Zoom and were recorded to avoid misinterpretation and errors in recollection. One interview was conducted over a phone call due to technical issues, and one interview was conducted via email at the request of the interviewee. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted around one hour each.

The research subjects had varying backgrounds although all were operating in the Finnish field of peace mediation. Based on my investigation, the targeted interviewees were well-

informed of the Finnish peace mediation processes. These include individuals in civil society affiliated with the most prominent peace mediation NGOs in Finland, such as CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation (CMI), Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (Felm) and Finn Church Aid (FCA). They also include those from research institutes like the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), government employees affiliated with the work of the Centre for Peace Mediation and the wider workings of the MFA, as well as government employees affiliated with civilian crisis management issues. The variety of perspectives aids in providing a more comprehensive picture on the ideological frames used in the Finnish case. The research subjects were asked to participate in this study through an interview request via email.

The interviewees will remain anonymous in this study to avoid any negative repercussions on participating in this research. The idea of anonymity was to allow participants to share thoughts freely on the subject. As a further precaution, I will generally refer to two groups of people when I consider the findings from the study: broader civil society (including research institutes) and state actors. At most, I might add a qualifying detail, such as “NGO representative”, and I used the phrasing at my discretion. The data from interviews was transcribed to facilitate subsequent analysis. After the transcription process, the data was analysed for common themes around how the Centre is framed and how it relates to policy diffusion and boundary work.

To support my textual analysis from the frameworks of What is the Problem Represented to be (WPR), policy diffusion, and boundary work, I used thematic analysis to identify relevant themes and compare the arising themes in relation to the rest of the data set. Thematic analysis has been widely used as a textual analysis method, and it includes a process of searching, reviewing, and defining themes (V. Braun & Clarke, 2006).

As reviewed earlier as part of the framework of analysis, the WPR approach is used to guide this study. In addition to using Bacchi’s (2009) WPR approach as a theoretical lead for this study, I will use her question framework as a method to deconstruct the policy choice (the Centre for Peace Mediation). The probing questions from the WPR approach are used to tease out how the Centre, and the problems the policy inherently produces, is thought about. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on questions 1 and 2 to tease out what problems are represented and what types of assumptions relate to such representations:

1. “What’s the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policies?”
2. What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem” (problem representation)?”

(Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p.20 referring to Bacchi, 2009)

The remaining four questions that probe how the problem representation has come about, what alternatives it ignores, its effects and how it is produced and disseminated are questions that far exceed the scope of this thesis and are issues that I hope future research on this topic will investigate. They are crucial in critically evaluating policies and their effects in society, so they most certainly are needed. In this thesis, I aim to take the first step to understand the processes leading to the Centre.

## 4. BACKGROUND FOR THE FINNISH CASE

Finland's involvement in peace work is not particularly new. Peacekeeping, for instance, has been an important part of the nation's foreign and security policy since the early 1960s (Pesu, 2020). During the Cold War, Nordic countries focused on peacekeeping and had built an international brand as 'peace nations', but the small Nordic nations were pushed to the margins of peacekeeping after other countries focused their efforts on peacekeeping after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Jakobsen, 2006). After this global shift, Nordic countries, including Finland, began to increasingly focus on conflict resolution, although peacekeeping is still an important component of Finnish foreign policy (Lehti, 2014). Nordic approaches to conflict resolution and mediation were not uniform, however, and diverged widely from each other (See Lehti 2014 for an overview of Nordic approaches to peace mediation).

Peace mediation has been highlighted as Finland's foreign policy priority for the past 10 years (Ministry for Foreign Affairs n.d.; Lehti 2014). It has especially focused on supporting civil society actors as well as building the normative framework for peace mediation in multilateral institutions. For instance, Finland, together with Turkey, founded the Group of Friends of Mediation initiative in 2011, which eventually led to the presentation of the first General Assembly resolution on mediation. There have been many successive resolutions on mediation within the UN. Finland has also been actively driving the peace mediation agenda in the EU. For instance, jointly with Sweden, it proposed a European Institute of Peace (EIP), which was founded in 2014. Other multilateral institutions in which Finland has supported the mediation agenda include the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the African Union (AU).

There are many actors operating around peace mediation issues in Finland, not least civil society. CMI is widely considered one of the most well-known Finnish peace mediation NGOs. Established by former President of Finland and Nobel Peace Laureate Martti Ahtisaari in 2000, CMI has become a formidable mediator organization in the international field. President Ahtisaari's involvement in the Aceh peace process, for which it won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008, is also thought to have inspired peace mediation as a foreign policy priority in the 2010s (Lehti 2014, 111). Two other prominent civil society organisations, Felm and FCA, work around peace mediation issues in Finland. Both Christian organisations have a slightly broader approach to conflict prevention than CMI, which

focuses specifically on mediation and dialogue often in high-level processes. They place emphasis on peacebuilding and ‘peace work’ (Finn Church Aid, n.d.), working often with a bottom-up approach.

There are various governmental bodies that are also involved in peace mediation. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), for instance, has departments, units, and embassies working with these issues. Aside from the MFA and civil society, other Ministries have connections to mediation activities, such as the Ministry of the Interior via the Crisis Management Centre Finland (CMC Finland) that operates under it.

The Centre for Mediation, as it was first called, was first announced in August 2020 and began operating in October the same year (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2020). It is a separate unit within the MFA political department, together with five other units: Unit for Security Policy and Crisis Management (POL-10), Unit for Arms Control (POL-20), Unit for European Common Foreign and Security Policy (POL-30), Unit for Human Rights Policy (POL-40), and Unit for UN and General Global Affairs (POL-50). A few months after the Centre was established, its name was changed into Centre for Peace Mediation. Henceforth, the Centre is referred to with its current name. It is operated by seven people composed of Ambassadors and civil servants.



## 5. BECOMING A ‘PLAYER’ IN THE FIELD

With the framework of analysis presented above, this section will be inspecting the three research questions in the Finnish case. What kind of problem representations are there for the Centre? What assumptions are connected to them? How has the idea for this policy come about - is there policy diffusion happening on the national, regional, and international fields? Is there boundary work at play, and why are certain boundaries drawn between actors? These issues aim to inspect the reasons why the Centre for Peace Mediation was established within the political department of the MFA. Of course, this is by no means a comprehensive account of every reason behind its establishment. This study does, however, begin the conversation around this issue and highlight the relationship of state and nonstate actors in the field, as well as the role of intergovernmental organisations in global agenda-setting.

I argue that the case is defined by wanting to become ‘*players*’ in the field of peace mediation. While the Centre seems to be an internal restructuring of MFA resources, there is a change of approach from being a ‘*payer*’, solely financing NGOs, to also wanting to become a ‘*player*’ in the field of mediation. I suggest that strengthening the peace mediation agenda has been influenced by the diffusion mechanisms of learning from and emulation of other actors on the national and international field. Strengthening its peace mediation capacity is also seen as direct support for the agenda of multilateral institutions and the multilateral ‘world order’. Finnish skills, expertise, and it being a ‘model’ country in the field of mediation are highlighted, which suggests desires to expand its authority on the international mediation field. The performative nature of a reform allows a change of approach from solely financing NGO activities to increasing the government’s capacity to act as a mediator in track 1 (high-level) processes.

This case showcases the institutionalisation of peace mediation – how the agenda is cemented in the MFA to reflect a continuity of Finnish involvement in mediation activities and to highlight its ‘niche’ in the international field to become a ‘*player*’.

### 5. 1 What’s the “Problem”?

As mentioned earlier, to understand governing processes, we need to understand how problems are represented in policies (Bacchi, 2009, xiii). This section seeks to examine the

first research question: *how has peace mediation formed into a policy “problem” that warranted a Centre for Peace Mediation in the political department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland?* The WPR approach includes a set of questions, which aim to deconstruct policies. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on questions 1 and 2 (see above in section 3 on methods) to tease out what problems are represented and what types of assumptions are connected with such representations. This section, then, seeks to understand the policy issue that needed to be addressed through setting up a Centre for Peace Mediation.

### 5.1.1 Justifying peace mediation

While I will include perceptions from the civil society side, in this section I will focus mostly on state actor interviews to understand how they, as policymakers, justify the policy choice of a Centre for Peace Mediation.

When asked why a Centre was needed, many of the state actors answered the question in more broad terms, focusing on why peace mediation itself is needed in the first place. The comment below will be used to show a variety of policy “problems” that are used to justify an increased focus on peace mediation:

*[O]bviously it's also in our best national interest that the less there are wars and conflicts and problems, the better it's also for us as Finland. The more we can support them - the parties in conflict - the less there is suffering, the less there are sort of all that complex net of problems deriving from conflicts, violent and armed conflicts especially, is something that the more we can do on prevention side, the better it is. I think this is very clear to everybody working on this field that it is in Finland's best interest to do so. I would say, this is sort of the objective, which is the most important one that we are supporting... obviously we are working very long on development cooperation, we are supporting these other countries, and doing our share in global burden sharing in many ways. But I would say that mediation is one of the most cost-effective ways of doing it, supporting them, and at the same time doing our share – the world is better, it's more predictable, it's better for us, it's better for our companies, it's better for everybody. So it's a win-win-win-win-win-win-win-win situation. Win for everybody if we can advance in it.*

I propose that the narrative offered here in this excerpt is the following: There are people suffering due to conflicts, which needs to be addressed and prevented. The conflicts result in other problems, which affect Finland as well. It is Finland's duty to share the burden, but it is also in Finland's best national interest to prevent "*a complex net of problems*", as the absence of conflicts will make the world "*better*" and more predictable, making it better for citizens and businesses alike. Peace mediation, then, is among the most cost-effective ways for Finland to solve these problems. Other state actors' comments followed similar reasonings as the ones brought forth in this excerpt.

As a reminder of the WPR approach, the first step in our analysis is to determine what problems are being represented (question 1). What policies are created point to how issues are thought about (Bacchi, 2009). The first problem representation here includes the issue of suffering that needs to be changed. From this angle, peace mediation is almost a moral responsibility: there is a great deal of suffering that needs to be addressed, and it is the nation's duty to "*do [its] share in global burden sharing*". Other state actors usually echoed this narrative. Many said that peace mediation is needed because people are suffering due to conflicts. The humanitarian explanation was often followed by a line, "*[s]o there is a clear need to strengthen the efforts for peace mediation*", which they used to point to the building of an infrastructure like the Centre for Peace Mediation.

The second problem representation is the more vague "*complex net of problems*" that are derived from conflicts. This points to the need for a more predictable world, which makes it better for "*us*" and companies. It suggests a more economic angle to the problems arising from conflicts that need to be addressed by the "cost-effective" method of mediation. This was also often echoed by other state actors. While highlighting the need for effective peace mediation, one state actor commented on conflicts: "*But of course, in our global world, it's not only [a] regional issue, because they are then affecting everybody in the international community. I'll just mention the immigration issue, for example, how it affects everybody.*" The immigration "issue" was brought up by more than one state actor during interviews, and it was often highlighted that preventing a conflict is "*so much cheaper*" than a violent conflict and that "*[s]omehow investing in prevention is also a wise thing to do*".

In sum, the problem representations for the need for an increased focus on peace mediation (which consequently fed into a Centre for Peace Mediation) included a humanitarian

perspective as well as the adverse repercussions that violent conflicts have to a country like Finland, including an issue of immigration.

With Bacchi's question 2 of the WPR approach, the focus is on the underlying presumptions within the represented problem. The assumptions or beliefs are not necessarily those held by policymakers themselves – the examination is turned towards the problem representations and the underlying presuppositions (Bacchi 2009, 5). It strips the problem representation to its core and inspects its foundational assumptions.

First, I will consider the assumptions of the problem representation of it being a duty of Finland to do its share in mediating and preventing conflicts in order to make the world "better". The first assumption in this problem representation is that the conflicting parties are fully known. The second assumption is that the known conflicting parties are causing the suffering. The third assumption is that these parties cannot solve the issues amongst themselves but need outside support for conflict resolution. The fourth assumption is that peace mediation is effective in making the world "better". The fifth assumption is that Finnish support in particular will bring about necessary change.

The predominant idea forming in the first problem representation and the underlying assumptions is a more 'selfless' take to peace mediation. This is not a particularly new thought in the peace, security, and development fields. In the early days of Finnish development aid policies, the country's longest-serving president, Urho Kekkonen, said during a visit to Tunisia in 1965 that "[w]ith regards to its own history, Finland has a duty of honour [*"kunniavelvollisuus"* in Finnish] to help others in those fields in which it is possible to us" (Artto, 2005, p.12) [self-translated]. Now returning to the 2020s, the idea that there is meaningful expertise in Finland in the field of peace mediation, and that it is almost a moral duty to help communities that are suffering, has similar flavours to notions expressed 80 years earlier.

If we take the second problem representation of preventing conflicts' adverse effects on Finland, there are other assumptions at play. First, there is simply an assumption that the effects of a conflict on the other side of the world *can* affect Finland; second, that the effects are negative for the country; third, that the effects include undesirable immigration patterns;

fourth, it is less economically costly to invest into peace mediation than to face these challenges.

In the second more self-interested problem representation and its assumptions, the focus is on the costs of conflicts for Finland. It takes a globalisation discourse to the fore, in which the interconnected nature of the globe results in conflicts elsewhere being damaging to Finland, where one adverse effect is considered to be immigration. While it is unclear what aspect of immigration is seen as harmful, the problem representation and the underlying assumptions point a focus on nation-building.

The way state actors frame the issue through these two problem representations and the underlying assumptions show how two entities are put into opposition: 'us' and 'others' (Bacchi, 2009). Finland, the 'us', is painted in a positive light. The country is considered to be void of conflicts that would have negative repercussions for the rest of the world. The country is painted as a responsible state in the international world system in engaging in burden sharing. Finland also is thought to have the skills necessary to help resolve conflicts elsewhere. The 'other', the parties engaged in violent conflict, is painted in a negative light. Their inability to solve conflicts is causing suffering. Their conflict is also reverberating negative effects to Finland, 'us'.

In sum, these issues highlight part of the justifications that underlie the Finnish peace mediation efforts and ultimately the setting up of the Centre. While the assumptions brought up by question 2 of Bacchi's line of problem representations are not necessarily the opinions of the policymakers themselves, they lay the foundations on which the policies are ultimately built. The Finnish government's peace mediation efforts seem to justify mediation through it being almost a moral duty of Finland to help those who are suffering - with the assumption that Finland can play a role in helping reduce tensions between known conflicting parties - which will ultimately benefit the nation of Finland as it reduces a series of issues stemming from violent conflict, including undesired immigration effects. As Bacchi (2009) argues that one can find juxtapositions of groups of people when diving deeper into a critical evaluation of a policy, so I have proposed that there is a particular division of 'us' (Finland), and 'others' (parties in conflict). Here Finland is showcased in a positive light, while most of the problems are caused by parties in conflict.

These were used to argue towards the need to strengthen the government's capacity to partake in effective peace mediation. The following section looks particularly how the Centre for Peace Mediation itself is being framed and justified.

### 5.1.2 Justifying a Centre for Peace Mediation

During the interviews, state actors showed similar ways of answering the question of why a Centre for Peace Mediation was needed. As shown in the section above, their focus was often first on justifying peace mediation at large. After establishing why peace mediation was needed, only then did government actors move on to explain the Centre for Peace Mediation as a policy choice. The framings for the need for a Centre diverged from the general issues raised for the need for peace mediation.

There were two main justifications that state actors seemed to give for the need for a Centre: strengthening MFA capacity and having higher ambitions for the government's role in Finnish peace mediation.

We will first consider the former justification. As a reminder, in question 1 of the WPR approach, we look at the problem representation of a policy. Perhaps the most common justifications for the need for a Centre was strengthening the MFA's capacity in the peace mediation field. The need for more coordination and coherence within the MFA itself were often cited as the practical reasons for a Centre for Peace Mediation. When asked why the Centre was needed, a state actor said, "*Well, yes. The short answer is that we need to have more coordination in this matter, in this field*".

Both government and civil society actors mentioned the complex nature of the MFA. Peace mediation issues were reportedly scattered within the Ministry's political department and development policy department in addition to the regional units and embassies.

Bringing up the need to improve coordination within the Ministry, one state actor said that the "*role [of] the Centre is really try to, at least for the time being, try to somehow pull all the strings together and make sure we are all somehow playing towards the same goal.*"

Another state actor said that it should be "easier" for partners to interact with the MFA because of the new Centre. Referring to Finnish NGOs in the field, the state actor said, "*Well,*

*they have very warmly welcomed the new Centre, so in that way obviously it's good that they feel they have a partner with whom to talk to, who have kind of a more central role or overall picture of the activities”.*

The problem representation here seems to be a lack of coordination and coherence within the MFA. The image is that efforts have been scattered within the Ministry, and from this angle, the different thematic units and departments have not had a coherent and coordinated way of handling peace mediation issues. As a solution to this “problem”, it seems like the MFA is trying to somewhat centralise the Ministry’s peace mediation issues into one coordinating body.

Here we again inspect the underlying assumptions of the problem representation itself and not the assumptions held by policymakers. The first assumption is that a lack of coordination is a reason for ineffective mediation practices. The second assumption is that a Centre for Peace Mediation within the MFA’s political department can, in the first place, act as a coordinating body for the rest of the Ministry (and wider government).

This problem representation and justification suggests that there has been an internal reason for establishing a Centre. It seems that the problem has been perceived to be on the Ministry’s side – to be more effective in “*playing towards the same goal*”, a coordinating body is needed. It could be that there are a variety of interests at play with various departments and units within the MFA. One NGO representative raised the notion of there being tensions between various groups within the Ministry that may work in a specific country concurrently, such as those working on development cooperation, humanitarian issues, and peace issues. The “*massive issues*” on the ground are due to differing standards, according to the NGO representative.

This problem representation suggests that synergies within the Ministry are needed, and a Centre is a solution for it. Coordination seems to be seen as an essential ingredient for effective peace mediation, while the lack of coordination is considered to lead to ineffective mediation.

In addition to this first problem representation concerning coordination, a second common justification for a Centre was that the MFA had a higher ambition for peace mediation. State

actors said they operate with a “*multitrack approach*” and have higher ambitions to add a diplomatic track to the Finnish peace mediation scene. One state actor said that “[w]e want to be at the centre, closer to the conflicting parties as possible. That is the way to sort of have influence and not only stepping back and financing, but also getting closer to the – what is it called? – to the centre of the conflict.” He highlighted that all tracks were needed for a “*comprehensive*” approach. The state actor later in the interview emphasised that conflicting parties themselves are the ones who can solve the conflict in an effective way. The comment, however, highlights the multitrack approach of the mediator and the ambition of wanting to “*be at the centre, closer to the conflicting parties as possible*” to have influence.

Another state actor gave a similar take on ambition levels rising:

*At some point in the past when we didn't have that many resources at the Ministry, the model how we worked in many cases was that we financed an NGO doing the grassroots level activities. It's been a very good way to work. At the same time, we now felt that we want to do more. Since there was a very strong political backup, we were able to get more resources, so financially we've been fortunate to have more financial resources to mediation work. But there was also higher level of ambition. Definitely now we want to be more active ourselves, also as the Ministry, so more diplomatic mediation. At the same time continuing the good and close cooperation with the NGOs. So, in that sense I think this is really adding up to the previous setup, where really in some cases we were the ones who were financing. Of course, we are still financing, but we also want to be a player. There's a slogan that we don't only want to be payers, but we also want to be players at the Ministry. And it's very true that if we want to have a higher ambition level, then we need to have the diplomacy track there as well. Even if our NGOs and our partners are doing excellent work, it's just not possible for them to be diplomats.*

This echoes the multitrack statement of the previous state actor's comment. There are two matters that need to be particularly highlighted in this comment: first, the Ministry wanting to be a “*player and not only a payer*” in the peace mediation field, and second, that it's “*just not possible for [NGOs] to be diplomats*”. The narrative from these two comments is that the previous approach of outsourcing mediation activities to NGOs is not enough at this point in time. The idea behind the comprehensive approach is that it is effective to build peace from



multiple levels. The problem representation of the need for a multitrack approach seems to be that civil society actors cannot be diplomats, which has resulted in lack of effective peace mediation in solving conflicts. The Centre, then, seems to be a testament to higher ambition levels.

The state actor framings reveal how the issue of ambition is being thought about. The problem representation is that the Ministry has only had the identity of being a *'payer'*; being a *'payer'*, then, needs to change into also being a *'player'*. The NGOs have previously had the title of being *'players'*, but now the MFA would be included in that identity because of increased resources. Nevertheless, they would not be the same *'players'*, because according to state actors, *"it's just not possible for [NGOs] to be diplomats"*.

The underlying assumptions are the following: First, that effective peace mediation requires the high-level diplomatic track in addition to grassroots peace mediation. Second, that Finnish involvement in the centre of conflicts via a diplomatic track will help solve a conflict. Third, that a diplomatic track has not been possible due to a lack of resources, political backup, and ambition in the MFA.

The problem representations and assumptions suggest that the Centre has been justified on two grounds: first, that there is an internal need for coherence and coordination within the MFA. Second, that the MFA will be a *'player'* in the peace mediation field. The relational aspect of the Finnish mediation approach is heavily highlighted

It might be prudent to briefly consider some diverging views on establishing the Centre. Those unaffiliated with the MFA conveyed that the Centre seemed to be an internal restructuring, but that there was uncertainty around what change this would bring compared to the previous setup. When looking at the creation of policy "problems" around policies, civil society members and even some state actors not affiliated with the MFA were not clear on what role the new structure would play that the previous setup did not allow.

Many of those unaffiliated with the MFA conveyed the notion that it seemed like there was *'form before content and function'* with the Centre. As one civil society member put it, *"We are also wondering what is coming out of it and where they are actually aiming at. So I think it's still a little bit perhaps unclear for them and unclear for the partners. But I think there is*

*also a kind of expectation for synergies and cooperation and so forth*". During the interviews, much of the confusion (and at times, frustration) around the Centre's establishment as a unit was that the MFA's staff rotation scheme did not allow building institutional memory within the Centre.

This could suggest that the need for a Centre and its role in the peace mediation scene has not been clearly justified in the public and with its partner organisations, as during the interviews there was clear uncertainty among partners of the MFA why a Centre was established in the political department of the MFA and what added value it brings. It also supports the notion that the Centre has been mostly an internal restructuring within the MFA. While some spoke in a more sceptic tone, others were hopeful about the MFA initiative, as they felt they had room to contribute to how their work will evolve and mentioned that "there seems to be a good open line with them". It could be that once the functions of the Centre will be more established (it had been operating less than 6 months at the time of the interviews), there will be different "policy problems" that will be communicated to the public in the future.

For now, the problem representations for the policy have become clearer during interviews conducted for this study, which gives us clues to *how peace mediation has been formed into a policy "problem" that warranted a Centre for Peace Mediation in the political department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland*, which is the first research question for this study.

The justifications behind the Centre for Peace Mediation seem to be two-fold: first, there is a need for an internal restructuring that results in coherence within the Ministry, and second, there is increased ambition to add a diplomatic track to the Ministry's approach to be a 'player' to engage in peace mediation in a comprehensive manner. Considering how the framing of issues constitute an 'us' and 'others' (Bacchi, 2009), there are similar elements here. There is, according to state actor frames, clear separation between the government and NGOs and other partners. Because of the lack on the NGOs' side – them not being able to be diplomats – the Centre as a 'player' is being justified.

Drawing also from the previous section on justifying peace mediation at large, the policy problems and underlying assumptions behind all of the problem representations reveal the foundation on which the Centre is built on: that Finland, which is highlighted as a globally responsibly country, has a duty to mediate; that Finnish expertise will bring a change to

conflicts; that a multitrack approach, now with the addition of a diplomatic track, is the most effective way to bring peace; that a Centre will address all of the former and bring coherence into the MFA for effective mediation.

As there is an ‘us’ and ‘others’ in the national field, there is also an ‘us’ and ‘others’ on the international field between Finland and the parties in conflict, as specified earlier. Both juxtapositions point to the ‘need’ of the MFA to become a strong mediator in the field.

## 5.2 Policy diffusion? The Centre in a multi-layered environment

The justifications for a Centre through policy ‘problems’ were considered in the previous section. Now we turn to inspect the multitude of forces that could have influenced the policy choice of a Centre through the second research question: *how has the founding of the Centre been influenced by a multi-layered environment?*

Policy diffusion, as a reminder, is thought to have four drivers (or mechanisms): learning, competition, coercion, and emulation. This research is not a comparative case study to investigate whether there are correlations between, say, Switzerland and Finland’s peace mediation approaches. It is about how Finnish actors’ perceptions – do they think that the policy choices have been interdependent with another actor? Have they perceived elements of learning, competition, coercion, or emulation that have ultimately affected – or at the very least, informed - the creation of the Centre? By inspecting the case of the Centre through a policy diffusion lens, we can better understand how policies are formed and which actors have had influence in the seemingly national decision of setting up a Centre.

As argued earlier, one of the limitations of policy diffusion literature has been its state-centric focus. Considering the complex global environment, I will be expanding the notion of policy diffusion from being a state-to-state process to include other nonstate actors, such as civil society or international organisations.

The following will consider these issues on three separate levels: the national, regional, and international planes. Of course, such crude separation of levels might not easily exist in practice. For the sake of organising this study into digestible parts, I have decided to separate them into three parts while acknowledging their inherent interdependencies. This section will

hopefully elucidate that the Centre was not established in isolation, but that strengthening the Finnish peace mediation scene was affected by a multitude of forces.

### 5.2.1 National field

This part considers national actors – be they individuals, NGOs, or larger institutions – and their role in establishing the Centre for Peace Mediation. Collecting common themes from the interviews that were conducted for this study, I will inspect the nationally driven reasons behind the establishment of the Centre and see if there have been effects of policy diffusion, for instance, by the civil society members. As an example of civil society's role in policy diffusion, international NGOs have pushed gender mainstreaming in international institutions and have also been instrumental in driving policy diffusion of gender equality issues in local governments (True & Mintrom, 2001). The national actors and their role in this Finnish case, then, is imperative to inspect.

Similar to the trend of giving a broad justification for peace mediation and then a more specific justification for a Centre as a policy choice (see previous section), interviewees usually gave a two-pronged answer to the question of where the idea of the Centre came from: The longer historical reflection was that peace activities have long been a foreign policy priority in Finland and so a Centre for Peace Mediation is almost a “*natural continuum*” or “*evolution*” of this trend. The historical narrative usually included that Finland started with peacekeeping in the 50s, formed its development policy in the 60s, all the while trying to be profiled as a neutral country during the Cold War. The country then continued strengthening its crisis management efforts and later on started focusing on peace mediation after President Ahtisaari's Nobel Peace Prize in 2008.

The shorter-term answer for the establishment of the Centre in 2020, in contrast to the historical continuum, was that the government had people in key positions who had increased expertise in the field of mediation. State actors additionally emphasised that the budget for peace mediation was increased. Gleaning from the interviews, this general narrative of it being a longer historical continuum of peace mediation as a foreign policy priority, coupled with increased expertise and resources within the Ministry, drove the establishment of the Centre. In terms of driving factors for the establishment of the Centre, the focus was on government processes.

While civil society and government representatives mentioned a few individuals within the Ministry whose knowledge of peace mediation goes beyond the “generalist” civil servants, there were two names that came up consistently in interviews. Pekka Haavisto, the current Foreign Minister of Finland, was mentioned by every interviewee. A seasoned Finnish politician, Haavisto has been involved in high-level mediation posts and is particularly known for his mediation work in Africa. His field expertise was often highlighted: “...*And then now Haavisto, obviously being one of the, if not THE contemporary mediator names that we have here in Finland...*” [the word “the” is capitalized in line of respondent’s own emphasis], as an NGO representative said. Especially those unaffiliated with the MFA said that it was likely due to Haavisto’s strong mediation background that he “*pushed*” for a stronger contribution to the peace mediation field in the form of the Centre for Peace Mediation.

State actors also highlighted Haavisto’s role in the establishing of the Centre, but it was slightly diverging from the tone of civil society: while some state actors mentioned that the Minister decided to establish the Centre, other state actors highlighted that it had been a longer process of thought and that as Haavisto had a background in peace mediation, he “*is willing to invest into it politically*”. This suggests that state actors give slightly less emphasis on Haavisto’s role as a driving force for the Centre.

The second person who was consistently mentioned was Kai Sauer, Undersecretary of State for foreign and security policy. His involvement with peace mediation-related activities for over 10 years already under Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb were often cited as instrumental in shaping Finnish peace mediation policy. Kai Sauer was told to have extensive knowledge of the field through working with the likes of former President Martti Ahtisaari and former Prime Minister Harri Holkeri, who are among Finland’s nationally cherished mediators. Sauer also directed the Unit for UN and General Global Affairs, which was previously responsible for the Ministry’s peace mediation activities.

The state actors’ cited reasons for the establishing of the Centre were often more multifaceted than that of civil society’s notions. Civil society tended to emphasise Haavisto driving the change, while state actors tended to highlight the role of the government program, the increased budget, and the overall expertise on peace mediation within the MFA driving the

establishment of the Centre. Some civil society actors in the field were wary of giving statements for why the Centre was established, as they said that they did not know exactly why the Centre was set up and who was driving the change. Civil society actors further highlighted that the Centre seemed to be an internal decision by the MFA, a perception that was widely backed by state actor themselves.

Three state actors explicitly mentioned the notion that the “*time was right*” for an internal structural change of establishing the Centre for Peace Mediation as a separate unit within the Ministry’s political department. As peace mediation within the Ministry had been a part of the Unit for UN and General Global Affairs (POL-50), two state actors conveyed the idea that peace mediation, in a sense, outgrew the UN unit, as Finnish mediation activities were not limited to UN-issues anymore: “*It was kind of, it became larger than the unit’s mandate itself, so it was high time to let it go independent*”. Other commonly cited reasons behind the time being “right” for a structural change like the Centre was that the current government program “*is very much about peace mediation and conflict resolution. [...] And then, you know, our current Foreign Minister is of course very...I mean he is a mediator himself. So somehow the time was really currently right to take this new step*”. One state actor said that a proposal was crafted to present three alternative ways of advancing in the field, which was then sent to the senior management team and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and “*while they approved the ideas, they decided to establish a Centre for Mediation*”.

As the Centre’s establishment is seen as an internal process within the MFA, the effects of policy diffusion on the national level are not visible at this point. There seemed to be, however, some diffusion elements from the NGO side.

The role of civil society members themselves in the establishment of the Centre was not straightforward. Many NGO representatives were not aware of any consultation of civil society prior to the establishing of the Centre. Some NGO actors did mention that the MFA and NGOs had had conversations some years ago about what was needed in the field, but that it was a “*surprise*” when a Centre was announced in August 2020. As one civil society representative said:

*I think that in the end, the Mediation Centre is quite a surprising turn, because I think it was 2018-19 when Ambassador Antti Turunen had the task to review the MFA capacity,*

*and it was very much a kind of internal exercise that the MFA was looking at exactly their own capacity and the needs at different departments and embassies. And [they] developed kind of extensive analyses and recommendations, and then there was a roundtable discussion with civil society organisations that are working with peace mediation. Then the recommendations were more on the kind of network-based model in the Ministry, not to establish a centre but to work as a network and bring the kind of capacities that are at the geographical department, development cooperation, and the political department. So in a way, the Centre was not something that was proposed in this work. And therefore at least for me, it was a bit of a surprise that then suddenly, opposite to the recommendations and conclusions of the background study, there was a Centre established.*

The comment suggests that there have been active measures to consult civil society organisations in the past and learn from them. To what extent the learning fed into the creation of the Centre is unclear based on this comment, but it seems that to this civil society representative, the recommendations from previous consultations were not heeded. Referring to the same process of consulting civil society with regard to peace mediation, one state actor said:

*[...] Ambassador Antti Turunen, he and Ambassador Sirpa Mäenpää, who is still working in the Centre for Mediation, they were very influential in sort of organising within the Ministry but also outside of the Ministry a series of workshops on mediation. They did the, I would say, background work on how to narrow the idea and what is the path to take, what are Finnish strong sides in mediation, what is something that we should advance. They were getting, using the expertise from NGOs and I would say the civil society side, I don't know who else. But they were sort of collecting information and putting it together and preparing the ground for the Centre for Mediation. In that process of workshops and everything, civil society and NGOs were involved. [...] It's been one of the priorities [...] for the Centre to work very, very closely with the civil society, and the NGOs and different organisations. We always think that the best way Finland can work is using a sort of collaborative model, where state actors and nonstate actors work very closely together and complement each other."*

Antti Turunen, who was the Ambassador responsible for mediation policy within the MFA during 2018-2019, was cited by some civil society and state actors to have consulted civil society in the matter of advancing in the field. One part from the state actor's comment should be especially highlighted: taking civil society expertise into account, the MFA was "*collecting information and putting it together and preparing the ground for the Centre for Mediation*". This comment by the state actor suggests that the MFA has engaged in learning from the civil society, which has fed into the creation of the Centre. While some civil society representatives convey the idea that establishing a mediation centre was not part of their recommendations, the state actor's comment suggests that learning from civil society has, at the very least, informed the eventual creation of the Centre for Peace Mediation.

It is perhaps useful to refer back to the previous discussion on policy diffusion and its relation to the policy cycle. We need not necessarily focus on the final policy product itself, the Centre, to evaluate whether or not diffusion mechanisms might have been at play, but we can also look at diffusion in the issue-definition stage of policies and how that can lead to the adoption of a policy (Boushey, 2016).

The civil society representative conveyed there were recommendations to use a network to bring the capacities of the different MFA departments and units together. The issue-definition embedded within the recommendation, then, seems to be a lack of coordination within the MFA. When looking at the rhetoric of state actors for justifying the Centre for Peace Mediation, one essential element was the lack of coordination within the MFA (see section 5.1.2 on justifying the Centre for a more detailed discussion). There are similarities with the way the issue is defined by civil society and state actors.

In sum, actors highlighted a variety of forces that influenced the setting up of the Centre for Peace Mediation. Many of these forces suggest that diffusion mechanisms were not strongly at the fore on the national level, as common elements that were mentioned included the historical continuum of Finnish involvement in peace activities, and the short-term concerns of having the 'right people' in key positions in the government, an emphasis on peace mediation within the government program, and an increased budget.

However, I have suggested that the role of civil society has unearthed an element of diffusion on the national level: learning. While the final policy product of a Centre might have, at least



from the perspective of some civil society members, differed from their previous recommendations and seemed like an internal restructuring within the MFA, there seems to be learning at least in the issue-definition of the policy itself.

### 5.2.2 Regional field

There were two Nordic countries that were brought up by almost every interviewee: Norway and Sweden. The relationship with Nordic countries in this field seems to be a complex mix of different approaches and tensions. On the one hand, like-mindedness with regards to human rights, good governance, gender issues and being supporters of the multilateral world order was emphasised. Respondents often said that good cooperation was happening, for instance with the Nordic Women Mediators (NWM) network, but that the cooperation (especially with Norway) fell short in other forms.

After listing similar principles among Nordic countries, a state actor said, *“It’s very easy to find somehow joint initiatives. Then there are also, you know, we are financing same NGOs, partly, so there are that kind of links as well. But yes, we are aware that there are wishes that we should do more. Let’s see”*. Based on my analysis from the interview situation and the state actor’s comment, the issue of Nordic cooperation seemed to be a sensitive one.

There were diverging takes on the issue of competition between the Nordic countries. Many mentioned the notion that Norway was in a *“class of her own”* with regard to its track record and the resources it has allocated for peace mediation. Sweden was occasionally mentioned as well due to its established mediation history and larger resources for mediation.

Some interviewees held that there is competition between Nordic countries: Norway is part of Finland’s *“peer group where you are perhaps comparing and competing”*. Others held that there is no way to compete with a country like Norway due to the inability of Finland to match its resources. One state actor’s comment particularly highlights the latter perspective:

*Sweden and Norway are using much, much more in peace mediation than Finland. I was in some event a few years ago, organised by the MFA, and they gave me actual numbers. It was basically that the Norwegians spent, for the expenses of one mediator, pretty much the same amount of money that the whole yearly budget for the*

*MFA's POL-50, which was then taking care of the mediation, was for one year. So, Finland has been a poor country in that sense. It has been, in a sense, a quite sensible way to give the few little money that we have to different organisations, or concentrated to a couple of organisations, instead of supporting maybe one major initiative in world peace. [...] So, it's been out of necessity. It has been also quite sensible, because we have been able to escape from the situation of competition in a sense that the Nordic countries, for example, would compete who would be the negotiator, or mediator, for different conflicts and so on.*

What is particularly interesting is that Finland has “*been able to escape from the situation of competition*” due to the lack of resources. This suggests that Finland and Norway, for instance, have not been in competition with each other as they have diverging resources and thus different strategies to peace mediation. Norway is funding major peace initiatives, while Finland has traditionally funded NGOs to do the practical work. Nevertheless, some civil society members and a few state actors have mentioned that there seems to be competition with Norway.

Issues of diffusion on the operational level can help elucidate the underlying synergies and tensions that exist with Finnish actors and Nordic countries. During an interview with a civil society representative, many important themes on Nordic coordination and competition came about. When asked about the relationship they have with other Nordic partners, the interviewee said: “*I think what has been kind of surprising for me is that the Nordic partnership at the operational level is not that close*”.

The civil society representative offered a few cases to illustrate her point about the relationship with Nordic countries, particularly Norway and Sweden, being complex. In one case, while the civil society organisation worked in a Southeast Asian country, the interviewee said: “*We had had a very good cooperation with the Norwegians at the MFA concerning – let's say at the working level – coordinating and exchanging information*”. The interviewee then described how certain MFA representatives were not allowed to participate in an event in Helsinki due to what she felt was competition and continued to explain that that when it came to operational issues, information was not passed between the Nordic countries when it came to strategic moves in solving a conflict.

The interviewee's comments on Nordic cooperation bring up two mechanisms of policy diffusion. First, at the Ministerial level, there was coordination and exchanging of information. This suggests that a policy diffusion mechanism is at play, especially the mechanism of learning, as the parties exchange information to coordinate activities. The mechanism involves learning from others' experiences to shape a policy accordingly. Learning is considered a horizontal mechanism of diffusion, wherein no top-down element is present in contrast to the mechanism of coercion (Meseguer, 2005, p.72). Policymakers learn from other through influence, wherein an actor can be influenced to adopt a policy because it shows "positive" effects somewhere else (*ibid.*). Here we see elements of the mechanism learning, which suggests this horizontal diffusion of practices between the Nordic countries.

However, while there seemed to be coordination and exchanging of information in the case above, certain strategic information was withheld due to competition. Contrary to the common notions of the competition mechanism in policy diffusion, which traditionally stipulates that actors adopt similar policies in order to remain competitive, competition in this case seems to lead to exactly the opposite: in order to protect information that is considered strategic, actors do not engage in sharing the information, which could lead to similar policies. It seems that divergence could, to some extent, be considered a competitive advantage.

A few other state actors cautiously expressed the idea that Norway's model is not a very collaborative one. As one state actor said, "*Norway is quite protective of their turf. They never showed great enthusiasm for this Finnish initiative. So, it's a bit strange in this Nordic framework where we are otherwise very close and Norway has been so protective*". One NGO representative said that it is not competition with Norway per se, but that it is just a different strategy of doing things: "*They can afford to fund quite big activities by themselves without cooperation with others*", he continued about Norway.

As mentioned earlier when discussing policy diffusion theories, if the mechanism of competition is present, actors can be thought to compete for either material or symbolic resources. If competition is present here, it seems to be less about material resources as opposed to more symbolic resources: rather than focusing on funding, the competition seems to be more about increased influence on the field. Considering the emphasis that the interviewees placed on the value of cooperation in the peace mediation field (see section

5.2.4 on the ‘four Cs’), Norway’s reportedly non-cooperative attitude in this issue was often seen in a negative light of competition.

When speaking of the issues of Nordic cooperation and competition, a state actor commented on sharing information: *“As I said, I think we are all very pragmatic, so it’s easy to discuss very openly and frankly with other Nordic colleagues. Sometimes, I mean yes, it is stated that there is competition and not everything is shared with others. But that’s also something that I think comes with the nature of mediation”*. The idea of it being part of the nature of mediation to keep certain issues a secret was echoed by some other interviewees who said that confidentiality is essential to retain the trust of conflicting parties.

Marko Lehti (2014) has provided a survey of Nordic approaches in peace mediation. Among other important findings, he discovers that while Nordic countries cooperate extensively in the fields of security and defence, this does not necessarily hold true in the peace mediation field (Lehti, 2014, p.149). My findings from the interviews, backed with certain comments by civil society and state actors, suggests that similar dynamics are still at play.

There is a communicated desire, at least from the Finnish side, to strengthen Nordic cooperation that does not yet seem to happen in practice. Lehti posits that the lack of cooperation stems from the different profiles of each Nordic country within this field (*ibid.*). While many other civil society members and state actors suggested that Norway’s model is not the most cooperative one and that might stem from them wanting to *“protect their turf”*, there are differing perceptions whether Finland’s relationship with Norway is that of competition or simply different strategies.

When it comes to policy diffusion in the regional field, especially Finnish actors’ relationship with Norway seems to be complex. There seemed to be an almost natural expectation for Nordic diffusion of information and practices through the mechanism of learning, but this seemed not to be happening with the case of the Centre.

There does, however, seem to be some level of competition happening between Finland and Norway. Having said that, based on the interviews, it does not seem that Finland set up a Centre for Peace Mediation to deliberately compete with a country like Norway, so the

diffusion mechanism of competition does not seem to be one of the drivers of setting up the Centre.

Strong evidence, then, for policy diffusion on the regional field is found wanting, even though glimpses of the diffusion mechanisms of competition and learning can be occasionally recognised in Finland's relationship with the Nordic countries, especially that of Norway. These findings support Lehti's (2014) claims that cooperation in the field of mediation does not seem to be strong, even though the Nordic nations cooperate extensively in many other fields. Strengthening the Finnish peace mediation scene via a Centre does not seem to be driven by, for instance, competition with Nordic countries, but I suggest it is rather an effort to find its place as a small country in the world order, which the next section will touch on.

### 5.2.3 International world order

The following will focus on the international playing field to inspect how international actors have influenced the creation of the Centre for Peace Mediation, and whether some policy diffusion mechanisms are at play. In this 'international' grouping are other nations (outside the Nordics) and international organisations that became relevant during the interviews.

Many interviewees mentioned that Finland has been cooperating with Switzerland, a "*peace mediation superpower*", in peace mediation activities. In one of the interviews, a state actor said that they had, for instance, consulted governments that were active in the peace mediation field and mentioned explicitly that "*Switzerland was very open and extremely supportive in terms of sharing the information*". Other state actors also regularly mentioned Swiss support to Finnish peace mediation. One NGO representative gave his opinion on why cooperation with Switzerland was happening: the overall international positioning of Finland and Switzerland is similar, as they are not a NATO member, they are small, neutrally-minded countries that have had a similar approach to peace mediation – focusing mostly on capacity-building.

There is strong evidence in the policy diffusion literature that ideological congruence can aid learning from another country (Gilardi, 2010; Grossback et al., 2004). Some state actors

mentioned that they consulted governments broadly to “*see what worked and what did not*”, while at the same time emphasised that they were not trying to copy someone else’s model or approach. While there is a pronounced desire to create something unique in Finland and that they are “*not trying to replicate the profile of Switzerland and Norway*”, as one interviewee said, many cited that there was learning and cooperation taking place especially with Switzerland. Learning from the Swiss experience could be at play due to the ideological similarities and the general positioning of the two countries.

In addition to learning from the Swiss experience, other notable actors in the international field included multilateral organisations. Regarding peace mediation, there seemed to be a dual activity in the Finnish relationship with intergovernmental organisations (IGOs): strengthening the organisations’ peace mediation frameworks while also showing support to multilaterals’ agenda by strengthening Finland’s own peace mediation capacities.

Interviewees often highlighted Finland’s involvement in actively strengthening the normative framework of peace mediation within organisations like the UN, the EU, the OSCE, and even the AU. A state actor commented on the link between Finland’s emphasis on peace mediation and the multilateral forums:

*The UN, for example, is a whole unique organisation in the field of peace and security, of course in other fields as well. But peace and security is really at the core of the UN. The current Secretary General is very committed to conflict prevention. He has wonderful speeches where he says that it is conflict prevention and mediation that are really in the core of the organisation, and we want to support that. [...] We can support the Secretary General and then the whole organisation when we have this strong commitment and expertise as well on mediation. Of course, to the European Union, it’s our most important multilateral forum. In the EU also there is a very strong emphasis now on conflict prevention and how we could do better, and also in the OSCE.*

Many state actors echoed similar thoughts to the comment above. It appears that the agenda of multilateral institutions seems to have influenced the Finnish government wanting to strengthen its peace mediation capacity.

What policy diffusion mechanism, however, is at play in this case? Almost every state actor and civil society member emphasised Finland's involvement in building the normative framework of peace mediation within these IGOs. That being the case, it does not seem entirely valid to claim that Finland's creation of the Centre was influenced by "learning" from the agenda of multilateral institutions (the frameworks which Finland has been actively building itself).

Instead, the policy diffusion mechanism of emulation could be at play here. In the emulation mechanism, the perceived appropriateness of a policy can lead to its eventual adoption in another place (Gilardi & Wasserfallen, 2019). The focus of the emulation mechanism is on the social construction of 'appropriate' policies, such as human rights policies (Greenhill, 2010). Scholars have also found that IGOs have been a prominent venue in fostering the construction of 'appropriate' policies (Bearce & Bondanella, 2007; Gilardi & Wasserfallen, 2019). I suggest that in this case, strengthening the issue of peace mediation through a Centre for Peace Mediation is done for the perceived appropriateness of the conflict prevention agenda, which IGOs are fostering.

I began this study with the expectation that the Finnish campaign for the UN Human Rights Council membership, as well as non-permanent membership for the UN Security Council, were partly a reason why the peace mediation agenda was strengthened within the government. I expected that Finland wanted to raise its profile in the UN for these campaigns. This, however, did not seem to be quite the case. While a few civil society representatives thought the campaigns could very well have been a reason, some state actors in the MFA and outside of it said that establishing the Centre was not an intentional decision taken to strengthen the Finnish profile especially for the campaigns.

Instead of focusing on organisations in the international plane, some interviewees emphasised the importance of the international system at large and how that has affected the creation of a Centre. This was a particularly intriguing point, as it was not a specific international organisation driving the policy diffusion of peace mediation, but it was a broader systemic change in the international world order that was seen as a factor in Finland strengthening its capacity to engage in peace mediation.

Systemic change in the international society has been found to affect state behaviour: seismic shifts can lead to nations adopting a new understanding on security threats and challenges, which then lead to foreign policy realignments (Blavoukos & Bourantonis, 2014). One quintessential example is the end of the Cold War, which shifted the global security architecture from a bi-polar world and brought new security considerations to the fore.

Many civil society actors conveyed that the changes in the international landscape are shaping Finnish approaches to peace mediation, including the setting up of the Centre for Peace Mediation. When pointing out the changes in the concept of peace mediation, one NGO representative summarised the systemic change within the international landscape: *“[T]he key trend is that there is less demand for the UN, less demand for third-party mediation as such; but there is stronger ownership and locally led processes.”*

Another NGO representative also brought up this issue of a changing international world order and expressed that maybe the government has slowly started to understand that *“multilaterals are not enough”* and that due to this, there is a need for new actors in the field so that *“[...] it won't become this kind of a powerplay of biggest actors only, but there [would] still space for multilaterals and smaller countries even in a different setting.”* This realisation, according to the interviewee, then led to the government focusing more on the implementation of the mediation activities rather than only funding and working on the normative frameworks.

The issue of carving a space for smaller actors in the perceived shifting international world order could point to the diffusion mechanism of competition: In order to gain a space and a strategic edge over the so-called ‘biggest actors’ and their plausible powerplay, the capacity for implementing peace mediation needed to be strengthened in Finland.

With regard to the IGOs and their perceived declining authority in the field, one NGO representative claimed this is sometimes wrongfully labelled as competition:

*Yes, there is competition, and I think the one challenge is that, how to say... There is a couple of layers. What is currently a structural challenge is that many of the organisations that are mandated to mediate are actually not able to function as a mediator. There is always a dilemma of how much should we put effort on keeping the*



*legitimacy of the system, which is not able to function, and how one can build other types of processes [...] But maybe at the end of the day, it's the credibility of those institutions. So, I think it's not competition, but it's a dilemma for most of the governments that they would want to see the UN functioning – and other multilaterals functioning – but as they are not functioning, how to contribute without eating their legitimacy. So, it's not a competition, it's a dilemma that is many times perceived as a competition.*

In contrast to civil society members, state actors did not explicitly mention the trends in global governance structures with the establishing of the Centre. Instead, they often highlighted Finland's commitment to supporting the multilateral world order: “*Finland is also a strong supporter of the multilateral system. We believe that's the best way to organise ourselves on this globe. By being active on this field, we feel that we can support the multilateral system*”. On three separate occasions the government representative explicitly mentioned that Finland is a strong supporter of the multilateral system. While other government actors were not making as explicit statements as this, most of them strongly highlighted Finland's implicit support to multilaterals through building the normative frameworks.

It is not clear, then, whether competition is driving Finland's actions during the purported shift in the international world system. What seems clearer, however, is that the government is professing strong support to the multilateral system.

Summing up the international plane, I have suggested that learning from the Swiss experience has influenced the creation of the Centre. This could support previous findings that ideological congruence can aid learning from another country (Gilardi, 2010; Grossback et al., 2004). I have also suggested that emulating the UN conflict prevention agenda might also be at play in strengthening its own mediation capacity via the Centre.

The case of the possible shift in the international world order is slightly more complex. I propose the setting up of a Centre for Peace Mediation suggests a dual role for Finland in this instance: a) strengthening the peace mediation agenda in Finland is showing the nation's support to IGOs (like the UN) and their agenda; and b) the potential gradual systemic shift

from a multilateral world order requires the nation to strengthen its own national capacity to implement mediation activities itself to control the possible powerplay of bigger actors.

By inspecting the policy diffusion mechanisms, we can see the ‘flow’ of ideas from a variety of places which have influenced the creation of the Centre, which elucidates processes through which countries adopt new policies. Based on the above, diffusion mechanisms cannot be considered to exist only between states, as organisations can play a role in setting the agenda. Strengthening its mediation capacity, be it by learning from the Swiss, emulating the UN agenda and perhaps vying for a space in the new international order point to Finland (and the MFA, specifically) actively establishing its position to be considered a ‘*player*’.

#### 5.2.4 Competition and the ‘four Cs’ approach

I will diverge briefly from the national-regional-international division, as one particular theme arose in all categories. Considering the multitude of forces affecting the creation of the Centre, this brief section will hopefully further elucidate the Finnish case’s relationship with the diffusion mechanism of competition.

When speaking around the theme of competition, interviewees many times directed the conversation towards what they wanted to focus on instead: what I coin the ‘four Cs’ of cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and complementarity. I noticed these four terms were being mentioned time and time again, but that no qualifying elements were provided for them. Based on the interviews, it is not clear how cooperation and collaboration, for instance, differ. The concepts seemed to be used in an interchangeable fashion by the participants, and their differences in practice remained unclear. Due to the vagueness of definitions, I created this box of the ‘four Cs’, which serves to capture the multifaceted nature of cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and complementarity.

Competition was often held in direct opposition to the ‘four Cs’ mentality. A state actor made a comment on something that was often found in other interviews as well:

*Mediation is a sector with a lot of competition, but this is not sort of our approach. It's much more in the line of cooperation, working together, complementing each*

*other. We are certain that we can find the ways to sort of complementing each other on the Nordic level, with the United Nations level, with the EU level, with different countries and different organisations.*

The comment shows that the conversation was taken away from competition towards the ‘four Cs’ outlook. Instead of focusing on the competitive element of peace mediation, the issues of cooperation, complementarity, coordination, and collaboration were rather the focus of Finland’s ‘approach’. Many suggested implicitly that the ‘four Cs’ was a Finnish approach to mediation, while one civil society representative explicitly mentioned that there was no clear ‘Finnish approach’ on mediation yet.

One state actor suggested that many actors are competing for getting ‘credit’ from bringing peace (competing for symbolic resources), while also recognising that the changed character of wars requires broad coalitions or partnerships to ‘match’ the complexity of today’s conflicts. He further highlighted that within this broad coalition, Finland could have a specific role, a niche, in peace processes.

Looking at the concept of competition, it seems like state actors (and civil society members) are ‘tiptoeing’ on a very thin line. On the one hand, they seem to generally recognise that being a part of a (‘successful’) peace process raises a country’s symbolic status. However, they counter the notion of competing with others for who gets credit by emphasising their preferred approach, the ‘four Cs’ and the local ownership of conflicts. They then, in a sense, ‘backtrack’ to the idea of competition and niches to add that Finland could have a place in a peace process through its strong expertise in solving conflicts.

Before a civil society representative gave a case example of an organisation trying to find a niche in a peace process, she said: *“So, there are many actors, and I think sharing information and working together is much stronger than said. But still, you have to kind of show that despite of all the others, you have a strategic role and you [can] contribut[e]...”*. There is a tension between cooperation and finding a strategic role, a niche, in a peace process.

The link between niches and competition is elusive in policy diffusion literature. The diffusion of innovative niches have been studied in the context of sustainability practices

(Seyfang & Longhurst, 2016; Smith & Raven, 2012). In this same context, scholars have studied the protection of innovative niches and their connection to competitiveness (Smith & Raven, 2012). However, it is not clear whether niche-building is inherently connected to diffusion mechanism of competition.

Instead of similar approaches diffusing among peace mediation actors, finding a ‘strategic edge’ or niche seems to create more differentiation among mediation actors. Here organisations’ foci in peace processes, then, do not necessarily ‘diffuse’ among actors, as their similarity seems to be considered as more of a threat than an opportunity.

Finding a ‘strategic role’ or a niche in a peace process implies that some level of competition is present between actors in the peace mediation field. It does not, however, seem to be specifically connected to the policy diffusion mechanism of competition. Instead, I argue that this relates inherently to boundary work, which I will return to in the following section on boundary work.

**Figure 1: Policy diffusion and the Centre for Peace Mediation**



To summarise the policy diffusion section of this study, it seems like a few policy diffusion mechanisms are indeed at play in the Finnish case (see Figure 1). By inspecting the policy diffusion mechanisms, we can see the ‘flow’ of ideas from a variety of places which have influenced the creation of the Centre – this, in turn, elucidates processes through which countries adopt new frames and policies. I have also argued that we must move past focusing excessively on the similarities of the final policy products, and instead focus on discourse and how the flows of ideas are perceived to have influenced the people in the Finnish peace mediation scene.

On the national level, civil society members seemed to have played an implicit role in informing the establishment of the Centre for Peace Mediation in the issue-definition of the policy. On the regional field, elements of competition with Norway, for instance, did not seem to directly drive the establishment of the Centre, but Norway seemed to be a country that interviewees compared Finland to rather often and whose seemingly non-cooperative approach was felt as competition. On the international field, learning from Switzerland seems to have been prevalent.

In addition, I have suggested that Finland is emulating the conflict prevention agenda of the UN (and other IGOs). In connection with this, I also found that many civil society members highlighted the diminishing authority of these multilateral institutions on the peace field and its connection to Finland strengthening its own mediation capacity. Drawing from their operational insights, I carefully suggested that becoming a ‘*player*’ in the peace mediation field by establishing a Centre could be serving a dual role: first, it shows the nation’s support to the multilateral world order, and second, in the event of a systemic shift in the world order, it allows the country to strengthen its own mediation capacity to control a plausible powerplay of biggest actors and defend its own role and the role of organisations that it continues to support.

In sum, policy diffusion mechanisms of learning and emulation can be recognized from interviewees’ perceptions of setting up the Centre for Peace Mediation, while no sign of coercion was perceived. The diffusion mechanism of competition is complex, for although Finnish actors emphasised what I call the ‘four Cs’ mentality (cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and complementarity), finding a strategic edge seemed to be important in order to have a role in a peace process. While I found that this emphasis on ‘niches’ is potentially

not related to the diffusion mechanism of competition, it does seem to relate to boundary work, which will be clarified in the following section.

These elements show how the Centre has not been a ‘simply’ an internal restructuring within the MFA. There are outside forces which I have suggested to have affected the Centre’s establishment – be it learning from civil society or Switzerland or emulating the UN agenda, I propose that these point to Finland wanting to strengthen its position to be considered a credible actor in the wider peace mediation field.

### 5.3 Boundary work to expand authority

We have considered how the Centre for Peace Mediation has been generally justified and what “problem” representations are present in the rhetoric of state actors. By considering the role of various policy diffusion mechanism, we have also considered the ideational flows affecting the establishing of the Centre. We will now inspect how boundaries are created and why, which will clarify and potentially fill the gaps from the two previous sections. This section, then, tackles the last research question: *how has boundary work against national, regional, and international actors influenced the creation of the Centre?*

As a reminder, boundary work is an ideological style and practical activity to separate certain groups or ideologies from other actors or systems (Gieryn, 1983). Gieryn identified three occasions when boundary work may be used, namely when the goal is to a) expand authority or expertise, b) monopolise authority, c) protect autonomy. In this study I expand the notion of boundary work to include the activity done against other actors in the field, not only against other professions or occupations that may be occupying a desired space.

This section looks specifically at the boundary work that interviewees engaged in during the semi-structured interviews for this study. The focus will be both on comments by civil society and state actors, as both groups – with considerable differences even within them – complete the image of how and why boundaries are used in the context of Finnish peace mediation and how these come to play with the Centre itself. The following will attempt to show that there are efforts to expand Finnish authority in the peace mediation field.

### 5.3.1 Finnish exceptionalism

Gieryn (1983) argues that when a group tries to expand their authority, they usually do it by heightening the contrast between them and rivaling groups by flattering their own side (Gieryn 1983, p. 791-792). This, I found, seemed to be the same in the Finnish case. During the interviews, Finnish actors engaged in boundary work when highlighting Finnish exceptionalism in the peace mediation field. This emphasis on Finnish skills and expertise, combined with highlighting the need for cooperation, suggests that there are desires to expand the authority of Finnish peace mediation in the international sphere. The following will inspect examples that show how some boundaries were created.

Interviewees emphasised Finland's history in shaping it into a suitable peace mediator. Many particularly highlighted the country's position of neutrality during the Cold War. This, respondents said, helped build an image of an "*non-partial mediator*", an "*honest broker*", and a "*bridge*" between the East and West, which is helpful to secure trust in peace mediation activities. Many claimed the neutral image from the past is sustained even though it is part of the EU and thus anchored in Western institutions.

Continuing the particularities of the nation's history, one NGO representative commented on Finland's relationship with Russia and said how "*managing the influence from Russia*" while a small country has brought Finland respect, adding that "*those are dynamics that most of the time exist in a conflict*". One state actor mentioned the lack of colonial undertakings in the country's past and said, "*...so our history is pretty good in that respect*". The country's history in development, peacekeeping and crisis management were also mentioned as bringing credibility to its peace mediation activities. The respondents, then, underlined the unique history of Finland in making it a credible actor in the field.

Interviewees often mentioned strengths of Finland's international profile, which focused on the nation's role and reputation in the international world order. They emphasised that Finland is a small and stable country that has "*solved its own problems*", in addition to having high levels of trust in the society and high levels of equality and education. Its efforts to build the normative framework around peace mediation within multilateral institutions was much-emphasised, in addition to Finland wanting to build a rules-based international order and having the image of a "good cop".

One state actor recounted the beginning phases of the government's focus on peace mediation:

*So, it started with small resources, I mean there were no illusions that we would become immediately big peace negotiators or mediators in the field like in the style of Norway or Switzerland. But what we decided to do instead was to focus on the normative work. So especially in the UN we started to prepare a UN General Assembly resolution, which then gave the UN a sort of a platform to develop its own peace mediation capabilities and it was also a justification for them to ask for more resources. It brought peace mediation as a concept to the forefront. We tried to raise awareness about this concept. That's how we found our niche in the middle of these big actors in the field. I think what we managed was to carve ourselves a good niche in that field. Another step was to form the Group of Friends which we did together with Turkey. [...] It attracted a lot of attention. I think there are more than 50 governments who are members now and several regional organisations. It was a good platform also to coordinate these resolutions. And by the way, after the first resolution there were more – I think there are four resolutions altogether by now. So that's quite a strong normative foundation in the UN for peace mediation. Similar activities were conducted in regional organisations as well, OSCE, the Group of Friends is actually Finland, Turkey and Switzerland, and then in the EU we have also been like the pioneers and sponsors of peace mediation.*

The government representative's comment shows that there were active efforts to find a "niche" for Finland among bigger actors and that the country did not (and could not), compete at the same level with established mediation nations. Due to the constraints of the relatively small resources, building a normative framework allowed Finland to carve out a space through which it could influence world politics. This comment suggests that Finland did not try to compete with other nations directly in the form of concrete mediation activities. Instead, the focus was on having a niche in building the normative framework in multilateral platforms and, in that way, being able to highlight the nation's profile of being "*like the pioneers and sponsors of peace mediation*".



The role of influential Finnish mediators laying the foundation for Finnish expertise were also brought to the fore in almost every interview. The name most often mentioned was Nobel Peace Prize laureate and former president Martti Ahtisaari, who was said to highly increase Finland's reputation in the field. Other relevant mediators that were mentioned included Harri Holkeri, Elisabeth Rehn, Sakari Tuomioja, and Kimmo Kiljunen who reportedly strengthened Finnish expertise and reputation in the peace mediation field.

After listing a great deal of elements of the Finnish profile, one state actor said:

*So, we are easily seen as a non-partial mediator, who doesn't have...we don't have our own interest in the play. We are simply trying to help the international community. We are not parties in any crises where we are going in to help them. So, this makes us, gives us possibilities to be effective in peace mediation, our background, our history and background and the strengths which I have just mentioned. [...] But people trust us. There is a demand for our services in peace mediation.*

Combined with the historical background, the values of Finnish society and the individuals building the country's reputation in the field were used to highlight why Finland fits well in peace mediation, and why its "services" are "demanded".

Many studies have taken Gieryn's (1983) concept of boundary work and studied its role in discourses. In the context of studying journalists' rhetoric, some argue that discourse is a site where actors debate and contest what their field should look like "through presenting definitions, setting boundaries, and seeking legitimacy" (Carlson, 2016, p.361). Boundary work and legitimacy-seeking are closely connected in this case as well.

I propose that the Finnish actors' discourse shows elements of boundary work and how these are used to gain legitimacy. There is an emphasis on Finnish exceptionalism in the field: the unique history and strengths of Finland allows others to trust it as a mediator and consider it an expert in the field.

The rhetoric of Finnish exceptionalism, in fact, excludes other peace mediation actors as credible mediators. Based on my analysis, the interviewees' comments seem to draw

boundaries between Finland and influential mediation nations through highlighting Finnish exceptionalism: By painting itself as an actor that has no geopolitical interest in the conflicts as a small country, this could exclude other mediators affiliated with countries like the United States, China, and Russia that may have a geopolitical stake in a conflict. With regard to Finland's lack of colonial involvement, this paints those affiliated with the likes of the UK and Germany in an unfavourable light. The emphasis on Finland's pristine reputation with human rights and equality could act as a contrast to Qatar, for instance.

While the Finnish actors rarely mentioned contrasting countries with 'unsuitable' backgrounds for mediation, the boundary work that they engaged in was creating implicit distance to other established international mediator nations. In boundary work there is always an 'other' in contrast to 'us', which shows the relationality of the activity (Gieryn, 1983; Kranke, 2020). It points to an attempt to build and expand Finnish mediation legitimacy and authority in the field in contrast to 'others'.

### 5.3.2 Complementing through "niches"

Rather than trying to claim a monopoly in peace mediation or simply protecting its autonomy, Finnish actors seem to work towards an expansion of authority through boundary work (Gieryn, 1983). Although Finnish exceptionalism in the field is conveyed, many interviewees strongly emphasised that one cannot effectively work alone in the field.

Relating back to the previous discussion on niches and competition (see section 5.2.4.), the diffusion mechanism of competition did not seem to provide a satisfying answer to the issue of niches. Boundary work, however, could provide a different perspective to the matter.

As one NGO representative said: "*...I look at what changes can we achieve in a certain peace process. And from that angle, it is clear that alone you will never make a difference.*"

In most of the interviews, when talking about effective peace mediation, four words in particular kept on being highlighted: cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and complementarity. As explained previously when discussing policy diffusion (section 5.2.4), I coin these the 'four Cs' model of mediation. Following the predominant idea gleaned from interviews, these 'four Cs' are needed in order to achieve effective change.

Respondents seemed to have relatively similar ideas about organisational bounds of Finnish NGOs in the field: Felm and FCA, with their Christian backgrounds were said to have their own niche in the field by working with religious and traditional leaders and using concepts of reconciliation, as well as working closely with “*overall development*” of countries. CMI, in contrast, was said to have its own “*regional approach*” and focus more on global security policy. One state actor commented on the Finnish NGOs working in the field: “*Probably I would say they have their own boxes in the world of mediation*”.

This idea of “boxes” or niches was coupled with one of the ‘four Cs’, complementarity, in a comment by another government representative:

*Maybe if I start from the national field, as I said, we have wonderful NGOs in Finland. I'm not the one to estimate if there is competition. I think they each have a very specific niche where they are experts. In that sense, well I guess somewhere there are some overlaps in individual cases, but as my personal overall estimation would be that they all have their special niche areas, and ideally, they actually complement each other. [...] If you, for example, compare their annual programs, you can see that there are different emphases. As I said, they all have their niche, I don't know how actively, I guess little by little they are focusing on their strengths, which makes sense in order to complement each other's work.*

The comment shows an intriguing connection between competition, niches, and complementarity. The niches are highlighted to act not as a strategy for competition, but as a strategy for complementarity. Everyone focuses on their strengths to bring about change through working together in a complementary fashion. As one NGO representative conveyed, multiple actors bringing “*different things to the process*” can be very helpful when considering the various “*layers within civil society inclusion*”. This requires a “*collaborative*” mentality for peace activities, according to him.

This focus on unique strengths links to boundary work. As a reminder, expertise in a specific field is often linked with ‘epistemic authority’, where epistemic authority is assigned to someone who is more likely to have true information on a question or field compared to a situation where we tried to figure out the same ourselves (Jäger, 2016; Zagzebski, 2013).

Organisations carving out a niche for themselves through such ‘unique strengths’ seems to be an attempt to highlight one’s authority in a specific field or a specific focus in mediation.

Niches were not always void of the idea of competition, however. As explained earlier, in order to participate in a peace process, one had to have a “*strategic edge*”. When speaking of the Finnish NGOs’ relationship with each other, one respondent said: “*We have good working relationships programmatically, but then again, of course there is competition for funds. Even though we are a small family, you probably would still look for who gets the biggest Christmas gift*”. While cooperation may be happening, there are underlying elements of competition for material resources. Gaining funds from the government was sometimes considered essential for the NGOs’ existence.

The idea of niches with approaches translated also to the regional field. On this topic, one state actor compared the Nordic approaches to peace mediation: The Norwegian state has “*quite a lot of money to spend on initiatives on peace*” and uses it to facilitate high-level peace processes, and Sweden similarly has high-profile individuals backed by their government. Finland’s approach, in contrast, has been to “*outsource*” mediation to NGOs. The respondent continues:

*It hasn’t worked that badly, because if you compare the three countries, the one way to reason it is that it’s effective if they have a little bit different profiles. Sweden and Norway can do their own thing and Finns can do something a little bit different. Finland has been able to give the opportunity for these organisations to develop kind of like new ways of building peace or facilitating or mediating. It has actually been quite successful because they have these three organisations at least, all of them have been able to develop quite interesting ways of mediation and peacebuilding, which governments cannot really develop so well. Governments aren’t really that good at innovating things.*

The crucial idea is that it is “*effective*” to have “*different profiles*” in the regional field and that the Finnish government’s approach has contributed to organisations’ innovative ways to mediate conflicts. Here boundaries are drawn between regional approaches in the name of efficacy. Here again, the idea of claiming authority in a specific strength is key. Finland having to historically outsource mediation to NGOs has contributed to innovation in the

Finnish field, which increases the country's expertise and legitimacy in the wider peace mediation field.

Having a niche does not automatically guarantee a space in a peace process. In the international plane, the parties in conflict have agency in choosing the third party, the mediator. Some proposed that countries have to essentially build their own “*brands*” or “*CVs*” of what they have done before. Another state actor said: “*I think somehow competition is also...well, it's also understandable. It's also that the conflict parties sometimes do forum shopping, they go around the donors, checking who can offer what*”. This suggests that conflicting parties have considerable agency in choosing who they want to work with. Much of the rhetoric from both civil society and state representatives has been around “*local ownership*” of peace processes and Finnish actors being there, first and foremost, to support it. Yet, in order to be in the peace process, they must have a niche. Some expressed that the Finnish approach will be clarified once they increase their ‘track record’ in conflicts.

Finnish actors seemed to actively engage in boundary work to carve out a space for themselves, a niche, to complement other actors in the peace mediation field. Complementing through niches was taking place on the national NGO level, regional level, as well as internationally through building a country's ‘CV’, as a respondent suggested. The reasons behind carving out a space seem to be context-dependent, as the relationship between niches, competition and cooperation is a complex one. On the one hand, niches can be used to have a competitive edge over another mediation actor. On the other hand, niches can also be used to enhance cooperation, or the ‘four Cs’ in general. Niche-building in general suggests that there are active efforts to defend Finnish authority and legitimacy in a ‘unique strength’ in order to have a role in a peace process.

### 5.3.3 Centre as a performative act

The establishment of the Centre is itself a symbolic act of boundary work. Returning briefly to Kranke's (2020) study on boundary work and the performative nature of such activities, he emphasised the importance of symbolic elements. To him, a reform is a highly symbolic organisational decision and one of the most visible ‘frontstage activities’, as they show a dramatic change in the organisation (Kranke, 2020, p.7).

Kranke's idea of reforms could be applied in the Finnish case as well. The Centre seems also to be a symbolic change, a performative action much like a reform, which signals a change in the organizational strategy for peace mediation. The MFA, as argued earlier, wants to do the actual mediation rather than focusing only on the normative frameworks and outsourcing the work to organisations via financing. An internal restructuring presents a unique opportunity: through this 'frontstage activity' of reforming peace mediation within the MFA and establishing a Centre for Peace Mediation as a separate unit within its political department, it can modify its organisational strategy to take a more active role in the practice of mediation. The Centre respects and disseminates the principle of cooperation while also occupying a new space in the field.

This shift to being '*players*' instead of solely being '*players*' via a performative act further highlights how boundaries are constantly "drawn and redrawn" (Gieryn 1983, p. 781). Many said that it was due to a lack of resources that the Finnish government chose to direct its mediation funds to financing NGOs. The environment in which boundaries are drawn are not static, but ever changing (Kranke, 2020). The often-mentioned reasons for setting up the Centre (an increase in budget, more political backing, and having experts in key positions) changed the environment in which boundaries, which respond to the surrounding environment, are drawn. Now there is an 'us' – the new '*players*' in the field of mediation, and the 'other' – '*players*'. The Finnish case also shows that boundary work is highly relational, as other scholars have previously argued (Gieryn, 1983; Kranke, 2020).

This relational and performative act of boundary drawing, however, seems to have surfaced some underlying tensions among actors in the Finnish peace and security architecture. A few members on both civil society and government side conveyed the notion that the establishment of the Centre seemed to "*step on the toes of crisis management and civilian crisis management*". The conceptual issue, according to my reading of interviewees' comments, was whether peace mediation was inherently seen as a question of development or security. While the Centre is, as its name conveys, dedicated solely for peace mediation, there seems to be room to define its role and functions more clearly in the future, as well as more clearly navigate the conceptual tensions within 'peace mediation' that seem to be translated to institutional structures.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study has critically evaluated the foundation on which policies are created and what forces affect them. Taking the case of the Centre for Peace Mediation, set up in the political department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA), I have delved deeper into the reasons behind its establishment by interviewing relevant actors in the Finnish peace mediation field and analysing the discourses via three lenses: What is the Problem Represented to be (WPR), policy diffusion, and boundary work. Through inspecting various elements behind the Centre's establishment via these three lenses, I have argued that the Centre for Peace Mediation was not purely an internal restructuring within the MFA but has been affected by a multitude of forces to strengthen the Finnish government's capacity to be considered a credible '*player*' in the global peace mediation field.

The first research question *how has peace mediation formed into a policy "problem" that warranted a Centre for Peace Mediation in the political department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland* was answered via the WPR approach. Policies, also in this Finnish case, reveal how issues are generally thought about (Bacchi, 2009). I have argued that the problem representations (Bacchi, 2009) of a need for a diplomatic track (due to a lack on the national field) and the juxtaposition of 'others' on the international field causing issues for Finland have pointed to needing a stronger peace mediation capacity within the MFA in the form of a Centre for Peace Mediation.

The second research question *how has the founding of the Centre been influenced by a multi-layered environment* was inspected via a policy diffusion lens. I have argued that some mechanisms of policy diffusion could be recognised especially on the national and international planes. On the national level, civil society members seemed to have played an implicit role in informing the establishment of the Centre in the issue-definition of the policy, and on the international field, learning from Switzerland seems to have been prevalent. In addition, I have suggested that Finland is emulating the conflict prevention agenda of the UN (and other multilateral institutions). These elements show how the Centre has not been 'simply' an internal restructuring within the MFA. There are outside forces which I have suggested have affected the Centre's establishment in being considered a '*player*' in the wider peace mediation field.

The third and final research question *how has boundary work against national, regional, and international actors influenced the creation of the Centre* was inspected through the boundary work lens (Gieryn, 1983). I have proposed that the Finnish actors' discourse shows elements of boundary work on many planes and how these are used to ultimately expand their authority in the field of peace mediation. These were done through highlighting Finnish exceptionalism, needing a niche even though actors strongly highlighted what I coin the 'four Cs' approach (cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and complementarity), and finally having the Centre as a performative act to change its strategy from financing NGOs (a 'payer') to now also implementing mediation activities itself (a 'player').

This study highlights how civil society can have a role in influencing policymaking. It also shows how intergovernmental organisations and the wider international world order can affect a nation's policy decisions. Most importantly, it showcases how the foundation of a policy is filled with problem representations, influences from others, and active work in creating boundaries between groups.

Like any research, this study also has limitations. The issue of conducting interviews online due to the global pandemic was the most pressing one. While this inhibited my ability to control the environment of the interview, the discussions mostly took place through a video call where I could analyse participant's body language. Technological issues due to poor network connectivity sometimes presented problems during interviews. Most interviews, however, went on without technological interruptions.

Due to the anonymity of respondents, it is difficult to give sufficient background to the respondents to increase the repeatability and generalisability of the study. As one NGO representative said, the peace mediation actors are part of a 'small family' here in Finland, which further complicates maintaining the anonymity of the respondents. I decided that protecting the interviewees' identities with providing only the necessary background information, however, was more important in this case than risking confidentiality.

The semi-structured interviews also presented limitations and opportunities. While I had the privilege of interviewing altogether 10 people, the amount of data it generated meant that the transcription and coding was very time-consuming and a costly process, which invariably results in some degree of error (Sudman & Bradburn, 1983). Additionally, an interview



question that I formed specifically to tease out how boundaries are approached in the field was met with a great deal of confusion from almost every interviewee. The question admittedly was not clear, but I decided to keep it in my question framework, as it would occasionally prompt relevant comments. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me to expand on what I meant by the question, all the while trying to be careful of not leading the interviewee towards a specific direction. Besides, most interviewees tended to discuss a great deal of boundary work issues in other parts of the interview, so it did not hurt to have a question probing the topic further.

One could claim that this study is limited because there is no comparison of final policy products, for instance between the Swiss and Finnish models of mediation where I have suggested that learning has taken place. I have argued, however, that it is not always useful to compare the final products of policies, as diffusion might take place in the issue-definition stage (I have argued this to be the case with the Finnish NGOs influencing the government through defining the issue itself). The eventual comparison of policies is by no means unimportant, but it can be used to supplement what involved actors themselves perceive to have been the case.

This thesis is, to my knowledge, the first study to focus on the Centre for Peace Mediation. I believe an increased focus on the actual functions of the Centre and the Finnish peace scene should be considered more in the future, especially in the advent of the new EU fund, European Peace Facility (EPF) that brings potential points of contest to the actual conceptualisation of peace mediation and its boundaries. Another important point that was beyond the scope of this thesis is the role of funding as an institutional means to affect NGO work, which should be explored in future research.

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## 8. APPENDIX 1: Question framework for semi-structured interviews

1. Background of interviewee
  - a. Can you tell me a bit about your background and how you ended up focusing on peace mediation/peace work?
  - b. Where do you think the idea of a Centre for Peace Mediation came from?
    - i. What was the policy issue that needed to be addressed? Why was a Centre needed?
2. Multi-layered environment
  - a. How have Finnish actors influenced the creation of the Centre?
  - b. How have Nordic actors influenced the creation of the Centre?
  - c. How have international actors – such as other nations or international organisations etc. – influenced the creation of the Centre?
3. Competition
  - a. What type of competition have you noticed in the peace mediation field on the national, regional, or international planes?
    - i. What are they competing for (material/symbolic)?
  - b. How are borders/boundaries/lines drawn between peace mediation actors and why?
4. Conclusion
  - a. How do you see the future unfolding with the Centre for Peace Mediation?
  - b. Is there something else you feel was left out, is there something you would still like to discuss?