Using technology to promote communication and peace-building activities in Cyprus

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Growing uses of Information Technology

- In recent years we have witnessed an orchestrated effort of the EU, the UN and many developed countries to introduce Information Technology and new technologies as tools to accelerate development.

- IT has been exploited in peace building activities in Cyprus in at least two distinct levels
  - To break the communication barrier between the two geographically isolated communities of T/C's and G/Cs.
  - To facilitate the creation of a shared vision and a concrete strategy toward achieving this vision.

Examples

- Seeds of Peace (www.seedsofpeace.org) founded in 1993, uses a taste-of-the-art technology to enable teenagers across border to engage in democratic dialogue within their SeedNet source library. It supports dialogue during period of unrest, thus contributing towards reconciliation and coexistance. The network has over 2,500 young people from 4 conflict regions.

- The Watson Institute has created a system that facilitates global debates (www.infopeace.org) and investigates how global actors make use of IT to influence world politics.

Where is Cyprus?

Why location matters?

- Critical geopolitical position, situated in the the crossroads between three continents Europe-Asia-Africa.
- Situated between East and West has made the island a microcosm of the pervasive culture of violence, war and conflict.
- Cyprus's early ages and recent past, has experienced a history of colonial domination and a full brunt war (Cyprus only received its independence from Britain in 1960).
- Proximity to major players:
  - Turkey-only 40 miles away
  - Close distance to war-torn Middle East
  - Proximity to Greece--between 1963 and the 1974 Cyprus politics focused on unification with Greece

The political situation at a glance

- Cyprus is geographically and nationally divided into two parts by the use of force: the North and the South.
- Turkish Cypriots (T/Cs) live in the northern part and Greek Cypriots (G/Cs) live in the southern part. Since 1974, citizens of the two-communities have not been allowed to freely cross the cease-fire line, controlled by the United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).
- Until today there is no direct telephone, telegraph, or postal connection between the north and the south.
- Between 1974 and today (with the exception of 1994-1997 and 2003-2004) only sporadic bi-communal efforts took place.

The challenge

- “Cyprus is a communication laboratory and an anomaly”
- “It is a country globally connected but locally divided”
- “It is a land divided by bricks, concrete, barbered wire and other barriers of all shapes and forms that compose the Green line” (Gumpert and Drucker, 1997)

It is this “communication anomaly” that challenged us in 1997 to explore innovative uses of technology

Technology-assisted Structured Dialogue

- The Structured Dialogic Design Process (SDDP) is a deeply reasoned, rigorously validated methodology for dialogic design, which integrates knowledge from mixed participants in strategic settings.
- It is especially effective in resolving multiple conflicts of purpose and values, and in generating consensus on organizational and inter-organizational strategy.
- It encourages innovation and prevents “groupthink”.

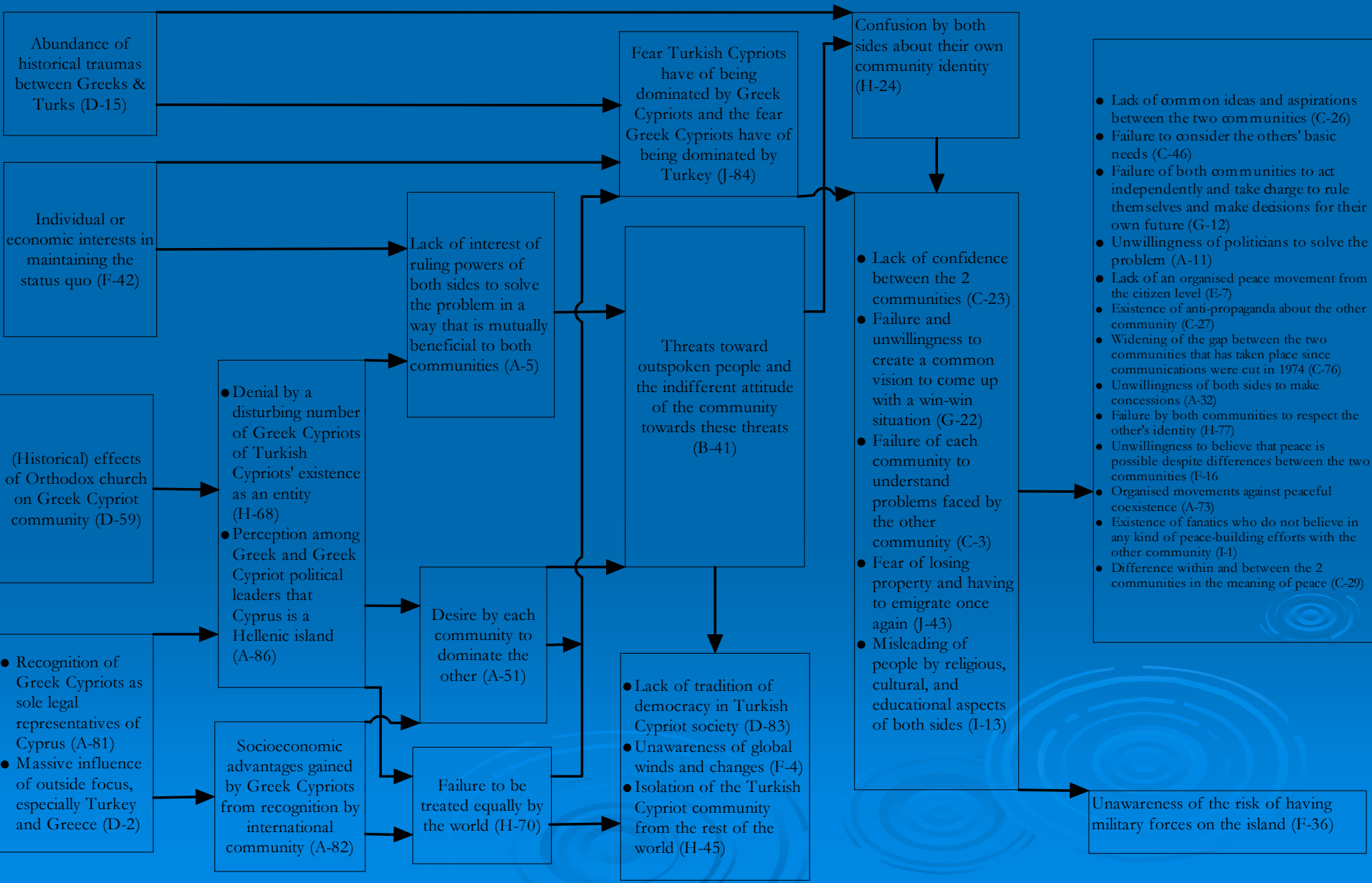
Based on 7 Laws of Cybernetics

1. **Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety** (Ashby, 1958) calls for appreciation of the diversity of observers (i.e., invite "observers" with diverse views).
2. **Miller's Law of Requisite Parsimony** (Miller, 1956; Warfield, 1988) emphasizes the fact that humans have cognitive limitations, which need to be considered when dealing with complex multi-dimensional problems. This is secured by the fact that participants are asked to focus on one single idea or one single comparison at a time.
3. **Boulding's Law of Requisite Saliency** (Boulding, 1966) calls for comparisons of the relative importance across ideas proposed by different people. This is secured through the voting process.
4. **Peirce's Law of Requisite Meaning** (Turrisi, 1997) says that meaning and wisdom can only be achieved when the participants search for relationships of similarity, priority, influence etc. within the set of ideas.

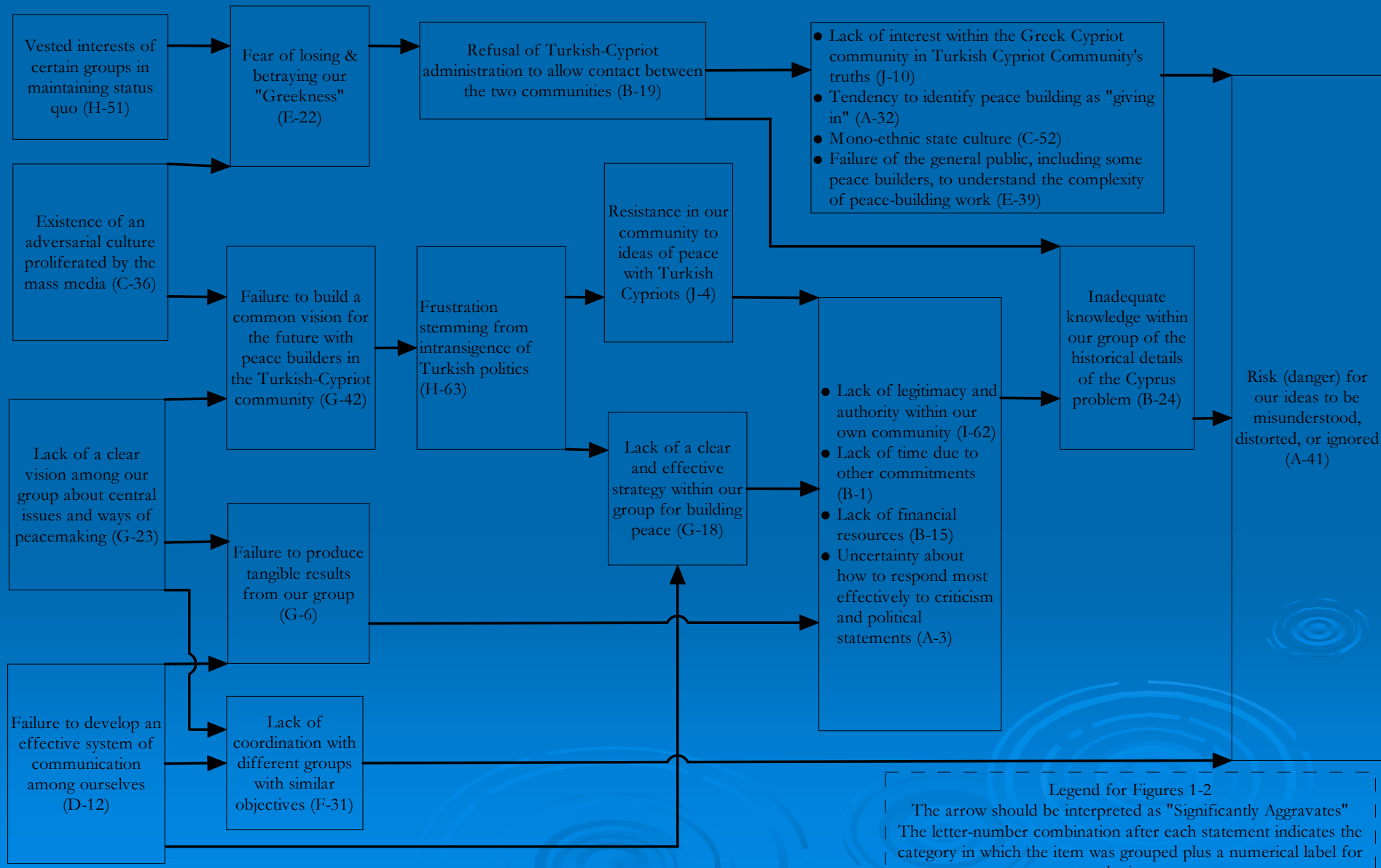
7 Laws of Cybernetics

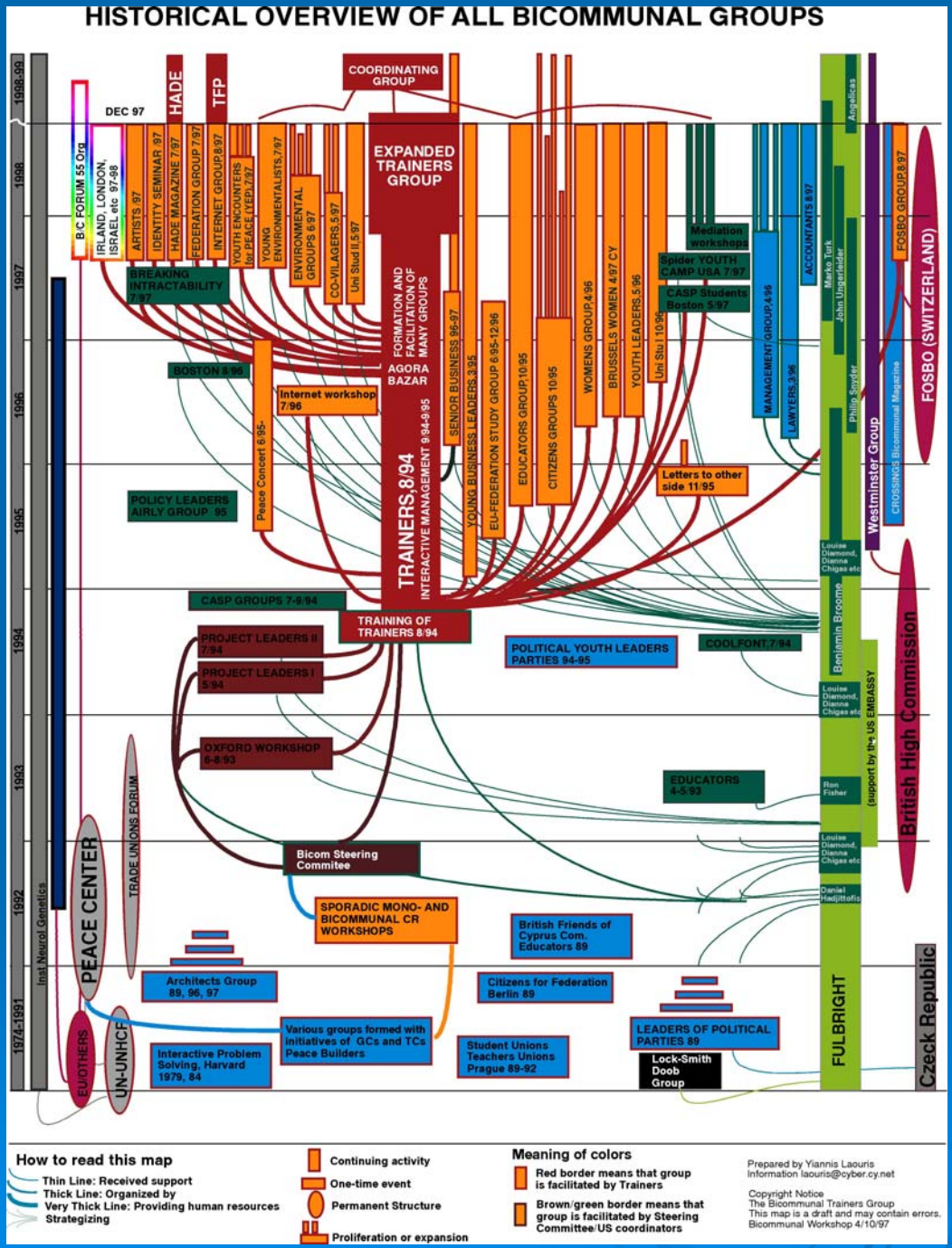
5. **Tsivacou's Law of Requisite Autonomy in Decision** (Tsivacou, 1997) guarantees that during the dialogue, the autonomy and authenticity of each person contributing ideas is protected, and distinctions between different ideas are drawn as a method of deepening our understanding of each idea.
6. **Dye's Law of the Requisite Evolution of Observations** (Dye et al., 1999) tells us that actual learning occurs during the dialogue as the participants search for influence relationships.
7. **Laouris's Law of Requisite Action** (Laouris & Christakis, 2007) states that the capacity of a community of stakeholders to implement a plan of action effectively depends strongly on the true engagement of the stakeholders in designing it.

Turkish Cypriot Problematique



Greek Cypriot Problematique





- The Cyprus Bi-communal Peace and Conflict Resolution Group (known as **Trainers**) is shown as a vertical brown box in the middle.
- It was composed of 16 Turkish Cypriots and 16 Greek Cypriot peace builder pioneers.
- Between 1994 and 1997 they applied a **technology known as Interactive Management** to introduce to conflict resolution and promote reconciliation among about **2,000 individuals**.
- New groups, here shown as vertical orange rectangles were formed. Each group, totalling approximately 40, was composed of an equal number of Turkish and Greek Cypriots. Twenty-four groups were formed, some of which later produced multiple spin offs.
- Primarily their members subsidized the training and all activities of these groups. **Although the UN and many foreign diplomatic missions morally supported these efforts, they were not able to make funds available when needed**. A UNDP fund provided through their project UNOPS was first made available in year 2000 when this whole movement was practically worn out.
- **All meetings and activities were banned in December 1997**.

The birth of tech4peace

In 1997, after the EU decided to postpone Turkey's accession negotiations, the Turkish authorities banned all bi-communal meetings and stopped our face-to-face dialogues and threatened to nullify our pace-building efforts.

We had to find alternative means of communication across the border

Tech4peace supported a series of virtual negotiation co-laboratories and it engaged participants in constructive dialogue

Technology allowed us to:

Keep the channels of communication open, continue peace building efforts and not loose the momentum gained.

The current Political Impass

- 10 years later: The negotiations between the political leaders under the auspices of the UN culminated to the drafting of a comprehensive plan for the resolution of the Cyprus conflict known as the Annan plan.
- It was put on separate referenda on the two sides of the island on April 23, 2004. The negative outcome of the referendum concerning the UN's proposal for the the solution of the protracted Cyprus problem and re-unification of the island left behind a climate of disappointment and disempowerment.

The peace revival project: once again supported by technology

- The peace revival initiative inspired by a team of six veteran peace pioneers in applying the SDDP methodology virtually.

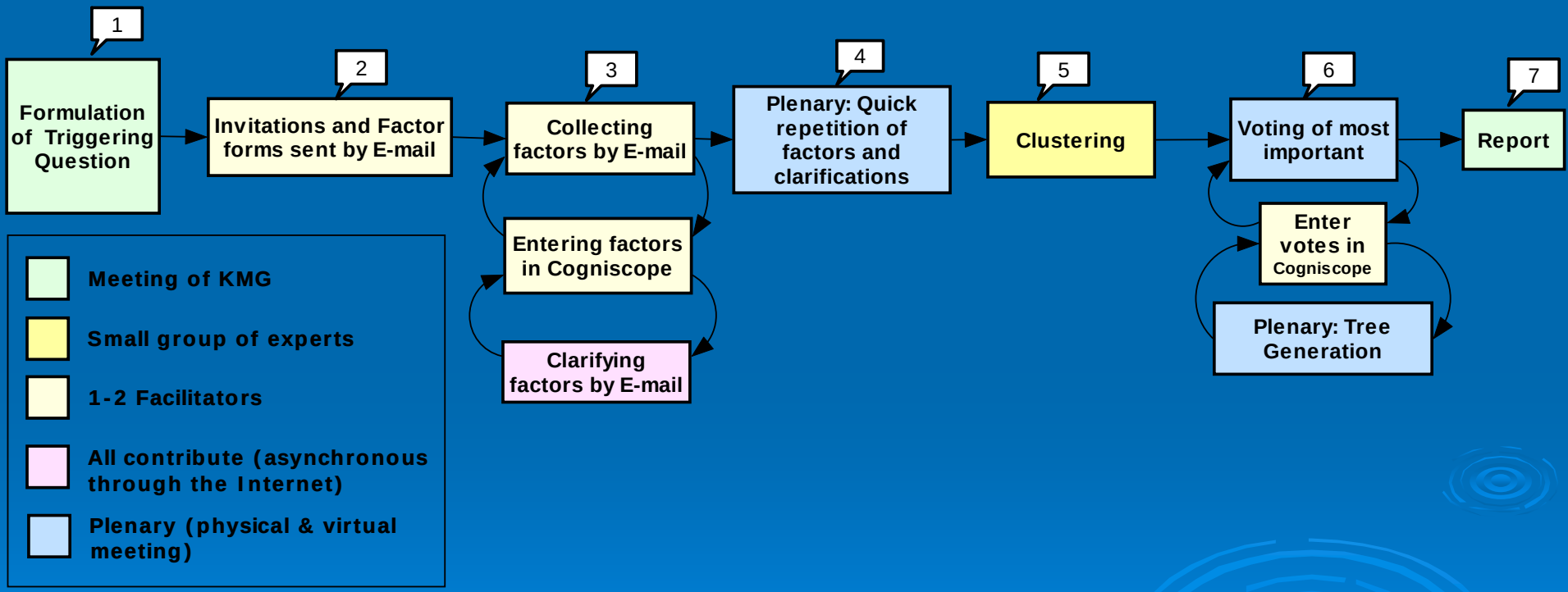
- The purpose of the project was to investigate the feasibility of reducing the cost and shortening the time required for a SDDP application, while securing the fidelity of the process and of the products.

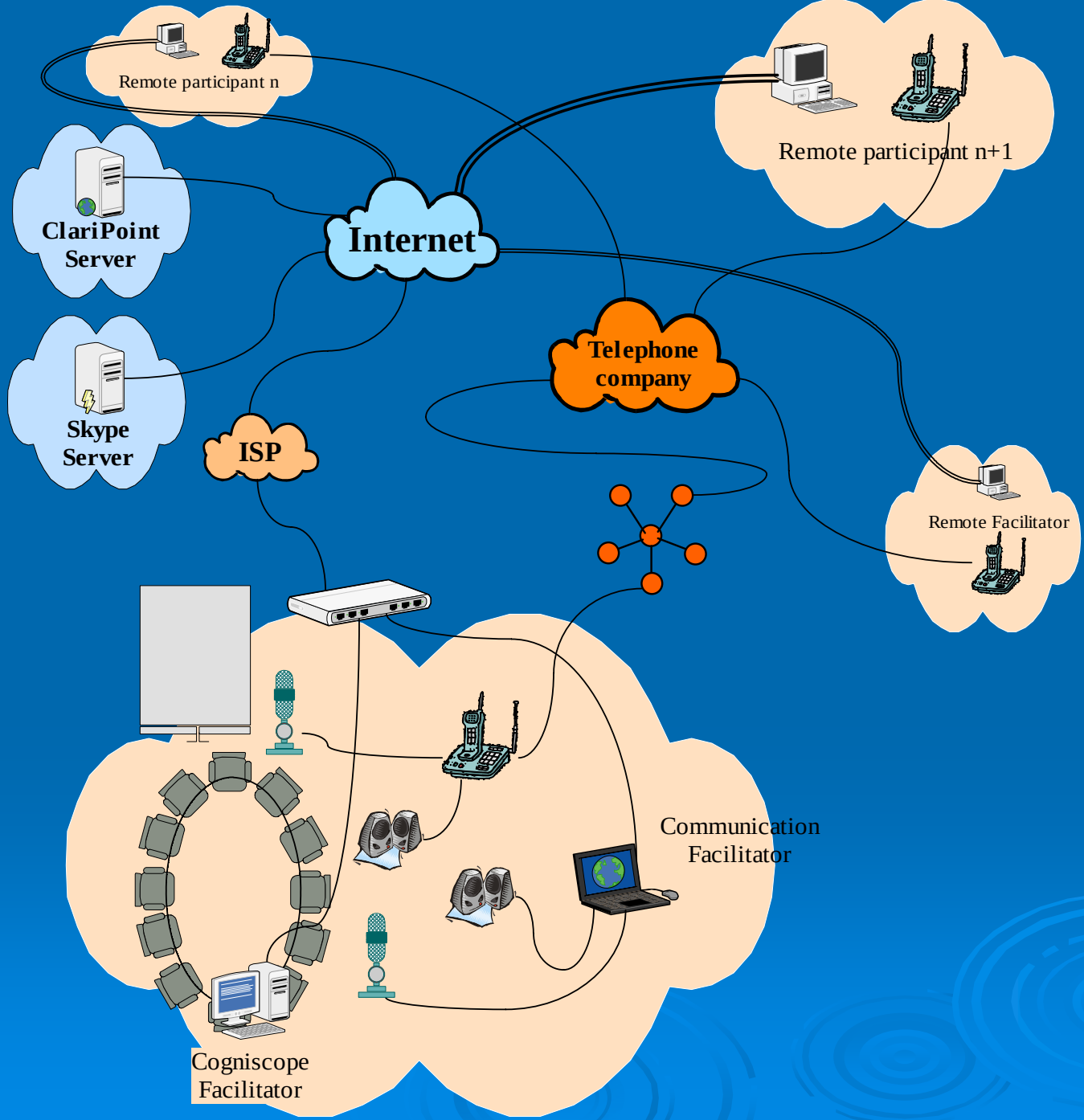
Why using SDDP?

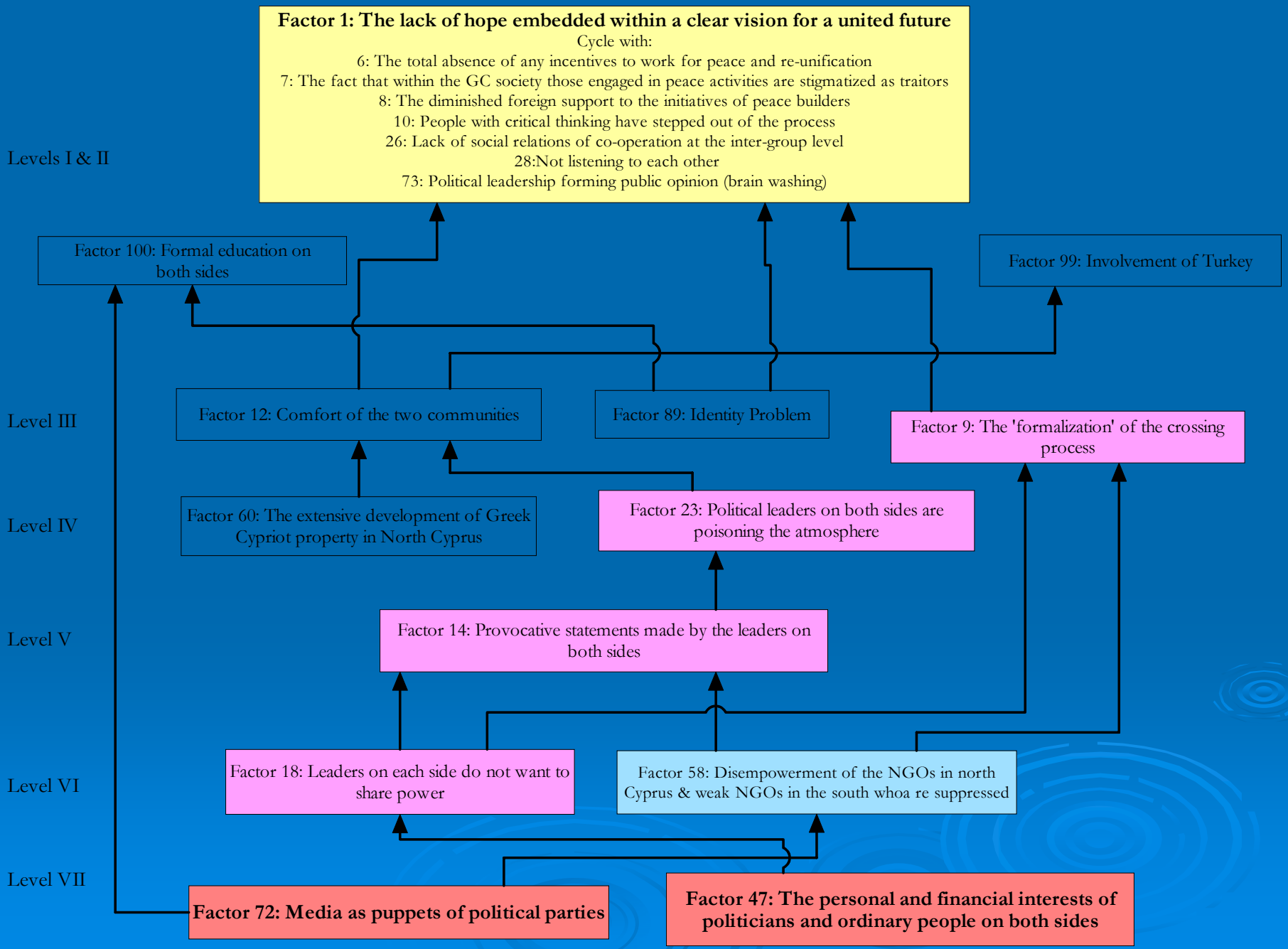
- The SDDP promotes focused communication among the participants in the design process and results in shared ownership, commitment and convergence to an agreed-upon consensual action plan.

- A SDDP co-laboratory provides an excellent opportunity for stakeholders, to not only expand their shared understanding of the current problematique, but also to develop a roadmap for future work and achieve consensus on next steps.

The new process: Harnessing collective wisdom at a fraction of the time using SDDP in a virtual communication context




Remote participant n
Remote participant n+1
ClariPoint Server
Internet
Skype Server
Telephone company
ISP
Remote Facilitator
Communication Facilitator
Cogniscope Facilitator


Factor 1: The lack of hope embedded within a clear vision for a united future
Cycle with:
6: The total absence of any incentives to work for peace and re-unification
7: The fact that within the GC society those engaged in peace activities are stigmatized as traitors
8: The diminished foreign support to the initiatives of peace builders
10: People with critical thinking have stepped out of the process
26: Lack of social relations of co-operation at the inter-group level
28:Not listening to each other
73: Political leadership forming public opinion (brain washing)
Levels I & II
Factor 100: Formal education on both sides
Factor 99: Involvement of Turkey
Level III
Factor 12: Comfort of the two communities
Factor 89: Identity Problem
Factor 9: The 'formalization' of the crossing process
Level IV
Factor 60: The extensive development of Greek Cypriot property in North Cyprus
Factor 23: Political leaders on both sides are poisoning the atmosphere
Level V
Factor 14: Provocative statements made by the leaders on both sides
Level VI
Factor 18: Leaders on each side do not want to share power
Factor 58: Disempowerment of the NGOs in north Cyprus & weak NGOs in the south whoa re suppressed
Level VII
Factor 72: Media as puppets of political parties
Factor 47: The personal and financial interests of politicians and ordinary people on both sides

Benefits

- Time saving
- Larger number of participants
- Remote participants
- Less costs
- No boundaries

Shortcomings

- Shortcomings of most technological advances- sometimes there are simply problems (connection failures, teleconference connections, etc.)

- Some of the laws suffer-clustering and other parts of the method happen by a smaller group of people (might become a problem if that group is not trusted by other participants)

Thanks!