



Linköping University

RESEARCH CONFERENCES

ESF-LiU Conference

In Search of Peace: Dialogues
between Theories and Practices

Norrköping • Sweden
20-24 October 2012

Chair: Dr. Daniela Vicherat Mattar, *Leiden University College
The Hague, NL*

www.esf.org/conferences/12387



Conference Highlights

Please provide a brief summary of the conference and its highlights in non-specialist terms (especially for highly technical subjects) for communication and publicity purposes. (ca. 400-500 words)

Global conflicts have been one of the most striking features of our recently inaugurated 21st century. However, and as expected, this has also implied that the search of *peace* has drawn more and more actors to engage at local and global levels in seeking systematically for sustainable forms of conflict resolution, peace-making and peace-building. Yet, even if the search for peace has been a longstanding endeavor in human history, in this search it has been frequently assumed that we know what we are referring to when we talk about *peace*. This tacit understanding though has implied the idea of *peace* often remains bounded by the liberal paradigm, namely reduced to its negative or positive definitions—the absence of war or societal integration respectively—without acknowledging the complexities of the concepts and experiences at stake. In order to tackle this, the search for *peace* demands ongoing dialogues between the theories and practices that evolve around it. Since all actors imagine and address *peace* differently, varying in their theoretical approaches and methods to promote and achieve it, to create a space for open dialogues is always needed. This conference offered such space.

During four days—located in the Norrköping campus of Linköping University—scholars, activists, students and practitioners at various stages of their respective careers and coming from different backgrounds and places, met to exchange ideas and explore the differences and commonalities among the various experiments, discourses, narratives, practices and performances of *peace* across the world. While on the one hand there were sound presentations and debates about the developments of peace studies as discipline, on the other hand various types of *peace* strategies and practices—from military to sport to socio-therapy interventions—were explored and discussed. This combination of dialogues was very enriching in order to question the purpose of knowledge production regarding *peace*, especially in high-lightening as one the main conclusions, that there is an urgent need for a production and circulation of knowledges that serve action. But also, and equally important, to engage in producing various forms of knowledges that are not monolithically confined to one cultural definition or strategy for *peace*.

The conference was totally successful in propitiating a platform to investigate the various forms in which *peace* has been framed and practiced, bridging across generations, disciplinary and territorial borders. It was also successful in offering various sources of information and exchange since participants had the possibility to follow a program that included a photo exhibition, poster/dialogue session, a documentary and debate, lectures and round-tables discussions.

The purpose then of fostering and facilitating dialogues between scholars and practitioners was achieved. And yet, despite this success, one of our findings was that there is an urgent need to keep this kind of conversations open if we aim to move towards a more sustainable and peaceful coexistence.

I hereby authorize ESF – and the conference partners to use the information contained in the above section on 'Conference Highlights' in their communication on the scheme.

Scientific Report

Executive Summary

(2 pages max)

In its call, the conference *In Search of Peace: Dialogues between Theories and Practices*, had as main objective “to foster and facilitate a dialogue between scholarly interrogations and the various experiments and experiences of peace beyond disciplinary and territorial borders”. The result was a research conference that succeeded in creating a platform in which academics at various stages of their careers, as well as practitioners, activists and educator gathered and engaged in investigating peace beyond their disciplines, geographical and generational limitations. Thus the dialogues that took place along the four days were inspirational not only for propitiating novel ways to address the quest of and for peace, but also because of the synergies that the encounter of these multiple actors and their backgrounds implied for the whole group.

The conference was inaugurated in the evening of October 20th with a photo exhibition entitled *Walls between People* (A. Novosseloff and F. Niesse), an issue that was readdressed with a documentary screening and debate on walls as devices of conflict resolution later during the conference. The three following days were organized along three main themes that guided the development of key-note lectures, dialogues or round-table discussions and a poster session. The themes addressed were the following:

- i) Peace Narratives: practice awaiting theorization / theories awaiting realization? — during these session the participants engaged in discussing whether there is indeed a gap between the peace theorizations and peace-making and peace-building strategies. As in other fields the gap was acknowledged; strategies to tackle it then emerged from the need to recognized the power of ground-based experiences of non-violent forms of conflict resolution to produce meaningful forms of interpreting peace at the local level.
- ii) Spaces of/for peace: Theoretically imagined or/and practically experience — space and time were identified and discussed as crucial categories in order to frame conflicts and peace strategies in a meaningful way. It seems urgent to give equal importance to the creation of infra-structures that would enable the dialogue between the parts in conflict, as those that aim to control conflict (like walls). The role of networks (of people and narratives) is in this sense a crucial element of conflict-resolution.
- iii) Moving beyond the liberal paradigm of peace — last, but not least, the participants re-addressed the prevalence of the liberal paradigm in peace research, acknowledging that certainly much has been advanced since it started, but there are various grey zones in the search for peace that need to be recognized. Peace cannot be reduced to a formula that is equally applicable across the world, although its pursue demands a global commitment.

The timing of the conference was coincident with the award of the Peace Nobel Prize to the European Union. The EU was praised for its historical role in promoting reconciliation and peace. Certainly in some levels, and mostly recognizable within the European borders, that has been the case. However, it is dangerous to believe that an experience that has been locally successful can be “exported” as such to rest of the world. In this sense, this conference contributed to highlight the problem with univocal understandings of peace, namely that

understanding peace like this supposes no dialogue, or in the best of the cases it sets clearly how this dialogue should be framed, and who should be included and have legitimate voice to participate in it. This, however, is being ultimately the ongoing source of conflict and violence across the world rather than a source of peace. Our conference hence concluded that in the search for peace, there is an urgent need to keep the conversations open.

Scientific Content of the Conference

(1 page min.)

- Summary of the conference sessions focusing on the scientific highlights
- Assessment of the results and their potential impact on future research or applications

The main body of the conference was concentrated along three days organized thematically around the need to examine the existing narratives of peace, the role space plays in defining the terms in which we conceive it and the critical need to move beyond the traditional liberal understanding of peace for the sake of attaining it as viable experience.

Day 1—October 21

Peace Narratives: practice awaiting theorization / theories awaiting realization?

This first day was devoted to discuss the general tension and gap existing between theories and practices of peace. The discussions were framed by an introductory lecture offered by Prof. W. Dietrich (UNESCO chair for Peace Studies, University of Innsbruck, Austria) on the different ideas and conceptualizations of peace along history, and the role different cultures play in defining these ideas. The lecture was followed by a first dialogue “*Thinking about Peace*” where scholars from universities in Ireland, Italy and Iran presented and discussed various epistemological approaches to conflict-resolution and peace building.

The posters presented at the conference were briefly discussed this first day, when all five presenters explained their cases: the status of peace studies in Italian universities; the search for human commonalities in global peace movements; the search for youth assets in developing peace in Kenya; the role of networks in ending the violence in Lebanese war; and the experience of Aland islands in the promotion of sustainable peace-strategies. The posters were displayed during the whole conference, and discussions often referred back to these cases.

The afternoon sessions started with two lectures: one offered by Carol Hayman (Chief Executive of Peace Direct, UK) who discussed how could academic researchers and local peace building organisations help each other in seeking peace. The second lecture, given by Prof. S. Cobb (Director of the Center for the Study of Narrative and Conflict Resolution at S-CAR, George Mason University, US) tied-up the day theme by addressing how any conceptualization of peace is embedded in a larger dynamic of narratives and counter-narratives that require to be critically addressed if the aim is to generate sustainable collaborations between the parts involved.

Finally that day the second dialogue was organized along the presentation of concrete cases that would bridge theories and experiences of peace: the case of non-violent activism for socio-environmental transformation in Colombia; the development of non-violent communication skills in a context of post-conflict peace building and youth training done by the Red Cross in Rwanda; the aesthetics of transrational peaces in the experiences of skateboarding as mechanism of peace-building in Kabul; and the need to give a voice to rural populations as method of participatory research for conflict transformation in Uzbekistan.

Day 2—October 22**Spaces of/for peace: Theoretically imagined or/and practically experience**

Time and space are crucial categories that define the terms in which peace can be experienced, but also conceptualized. In the morning of this second day the lectures of Prof. L. Reyckler (Center of Peace Research and Strategic Studies, University of Leuven, Belgium) and Prof. P. van Tongeren (Former Secretary-General of Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and now Infrastructure for Peace (I4P)) addressed the questions of time and infrastructures for peace and peace-building research and strategies.

The lectures were followed by a third dialogue about the institutional conditionings and its relations with civilians acting for peace. Experiences from Ukraine, Botswana and Uganda were presented and discussed in relation to the conditions for peace in risk societies, the role of mediating institutions and civilian peacekeeping agendas, as well as their permeability (or not) to local and traditional justice systems and peace-building strategies.

The afternoon sessions concentrated on the spatialities of peace. We began by watching the documentary *The Walls of Shame* (T. Denis & G. Ratrovondahona, 2010) that was introduced and discussed by Dr. A. Novosseloff (Global Governance Institute and University of Paris 2, France) who interrogated the existence of separation walls as peace-builder strategies. This discussion continued in the frame of the fourth dialogue, where the experiences of community development strategies in Northern Ireland, identity politics in Public Spaces in Indonesia, and community-based sociotherapy strategies for identity-based conflicts in Rwanda, were presented as examples of the importance space plays in defining the terms in which peace is constructed as a narrative, but also can become a tenable experience.

Day 4—October 23**Moving beyond the liberal paradigm of peace**

During this final day, the prevalence of the liberal paradigm in peace studies was examined. The day started with a lecture by Prof. J. Galtung (Founder of PRIO and director of Trascend International, Norway) who discussed the role of discourses for the peace practice from the Cold War period to the West-Islam today. It was followed by a fifth dialogue in which alternatives to liberal approaches were discussed by means of analyzing the origins of liberal democratic peace building strategies in the UN agenda, and critically assessing the appraisal of the UN peace-keeping mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia. It continued presenting the case of Palestinian and Israeli human rights activists engaged in establishing an agenda for peace, that is sustainable although not necessarily coherent. Thus, it was clear we need to move towards a "new" conceptual imagination of peace in terms of strategies for intercultural communication.

After being exposed to these various experiences, Prof. V. Fontan (Head Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at the UN University for Peace, San Jose, Costa Rica) framed these discussions in the new paradigm seeking to decolonize peace, which basically proposes the need to recognize and validate other epistemologies for peace and conflict studies.

In this context, our final dialogues posed the question of peace and education as connecting elements in the search for sustainable peace. To do so, we were confronted to various experiences of women's exile stories across generations in Finland, as well as the experience of peace and disarmament education in Albania, the strategies of dance pedagogics as a chance to overcome prejudice in integration processes in Germany and the need to pay attention in the early training of teachers and educators for the sake of peace promotion.

Forward Look

(1 page min.)

- *Assessment of the results*
- *Contribution to the future direction of the field – identification of issues in the 5-10 years & timeframe*
- *Identification of emerging topics*

In policy terms the findings of this conference are highly relevant to current EU priorities. In relation to the FP7 Cooperation Work Programme in Socioeconomic Sciences and Humanities, the conference *In Search for Peace* directly focused on the challenges faced by development and social cohesion in increasingly global environments, problematizing various factors affecting multiculturalism in divided societies, specifically on the level of cultural interaction, discrimination/integration on everyday bases. We also discussed the social impact of control mechanisms as sources of conflict-resolution and human security, particularly when they are set in place to promote *peace*. The conference also addressed the challenges posed by conflicting urban, national and regional environments as reflections of social diversity, while also tracing their commonalities within European history.

It is my intention that the publication of the experiences presented during this conference could furthermore inform the European Council in its continuous work regarding the EU Peace Building Commission, in the light of developing a positive and flexible research agenda for the sustainable achievement of the multiple peaces we seek for across the world.

- *Is there a need for a foresight-type initiative?*

Peace is not only one of the founding pillars of Leiden University College, but also the emblem of our city “The Hague”. For this reason I think it would be of great importance for the development of our program to organize a continuation of the type of dialogues this conferences propitiated, in order to nurture our program with innovative approaches to the search for peace, but also the agenda of the international city for peace and justice, and the international community operating here.

For the sake of the dissemination of our findings, it would be of great help to organize a forward looking initiative, that would further establish the networks of collaboration among the conference participants.

Atmosphere and Infrastructure

- *The reaction of the participants to the location and the organization, including networking, and any other relevant comments*

There was a generally positive reaction of the participants to the whole event. In terms of logistical and administrative support we were all very grateful. The meeting also generated a network among the participants who are, until now, regularly exchanging information about other events and paths to continue with our conversations.

In terms of infrastructure, the university facilities were very much appreciated. Maybe it would have been more friendly if the meeting was carried out not in such a big room as the general auditorium (with capacity for over 200 people, and we were only 44).

Sensitive and Confidential Information

This report will be submitted to the relevant ESF Standing Committees for review.

In order to promote transparency, it is ESF policy to also publish the Scientific Reports on its website. Any confidential information (i.e. detailed descriptions of unpublished research, confidential discussions, private information) should therefore not be included in this report. Confidential issues can be addressed in the next page, which will not be published.



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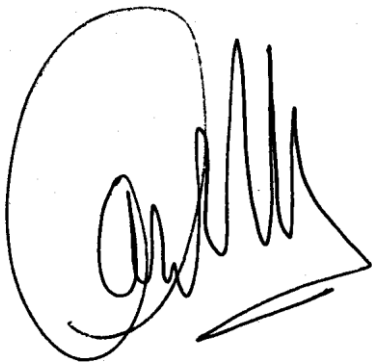
Confidential Issues

▪ *Any other issues, not to be included in the published report.*

One uncomfortable situation was maybe the fact that one of our key-note speakers took the chance to sell his books in the event. This would not have been a problem if all scholars or participants would have been advised to do so, but it created an uncomfortable situation for me as chair, since that was not the case, and it was a totally unexpected behavior. It would be good in future events to explicitly keep the encounter in a collegial atmosphere – which it was in general – where the dissemination of information is free and commonly shared.

Aside of this, no confidential issues to report.

Date & Author:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'D' followed by several vertical strokes and a horizontal line at the bottom.

Dr. Daniela Vicherat-Mattar
The Hague December 20, 2012