

# Dialogue, Not Hate

**Best Practices for Citizen Dialogue**

Connecting  Actions



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## Foreword

On November 15, 16 and 17, 2021, Connecting Actions ([www.connectingactions.net](http://www.connectingactions.net)) convened its 5th symposium of experts and leaders in the field of dialogue. Over 20 Civil Society Leaders who work with dialogue gathered online for three days of rich discussions. They brainstormed common objectives and analysed common challenges, sharing skills and knowledge about their respective practices. They also reaffirmed their commitment to join forces for higher impact, including through the coalition created in 2018, called the European Institute For Dialogue (EIFD; [www.eifd.eu](http://www.eifd.eu)).

This book emerged from this group and the broader Connecting Actions network's willingness to share their common philosophy and diverse approaches and tools to tackle division and hate among the many communities that comprise a diverse European society. As hate speech and hate crimes coming from and targeting many different groups are on the rise, dialogue practitioners have much to share, based on decades of experience bridging polarized communities.

The organisations offering their contributions here come from various countries including France, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Sweden and Finland. Some of them are small, in terms of operations and team size, while others are much bigger. Some have existed for decades, while others were established much more recently. Some are focused on local actions, while others have a global outreach. Some focus on deep discussions, while others are all about joint action. Some are operating in the interfaith realm, while others engage in citizen dialogue. Some use educational tools, while others use art to bridge communities.

All of these organisations represent only a partial overview of the vast array of tools and approaches used by the hundreds of initiatives and movements that are based on the concept of dialogue. Simultaneously an art and a science, dialogue is constituted through multiple actors, all using different approaches, philosophies, pedagogies and programmes. Each one offers a critical part of the response to the spread of hate and division and repairing and consolidating the social fabric locally or at the European level.

This book presents some of the organisations within the Connecting Actions network and the EIFD, featuring concrete examples of what dialogue looks like for each of them. The goal of this book is to show that dialogue, not just as a concept and a value but also as a practice, is worth investing in. The reader is invited to contact those organisations should they wish to know more, or even join their efforts. The hope is also that readers may be inspired by the concepts and tools presented here to launch their own initiative, and continue to reinforce the field of dialogue.

This book was coordinated by Rafael Tyszblat for Connecting Actions.

*We are thankful to each contributor who generously shared their time and knowledge in order to create this book.*

# An Invitation to Understanding Interconvictional Bridge-Building as Diplomacy

By David Joseph Wellman, Associate Professor and Director,  
[The Grace School of Applied Diplomacy](#) at DePaul University, Chicago

As a student of diplomacy, I view the work of interconvictional bridge-building by such organisations as the European Institute for Dialogue and Connecting Actions as compelling examples of network diplomacy. These are multilateral coalitions of people whose interconvictional bridge-building work in their respective countries allows them to see the possibilities of what could be envisioned and accomplished when like-minded organisations and individuals work together. The work of these organisations cross boundaries of not only religious, but also racial, cultural, ethnic, geographic and economic difference.

Today, I have the privilege of directing a school of diplomacy where our students study the efforts of the EIFD, Connecting Actions, Coexist, the Muslim Jewish Conference and many other such groups around the world, in order to learn about the contributions that 21<sup>st</sup>-century Citizen Diplomacy is making to build meaningful bridges across boundaries of difference. On a grander scale, we also study these groups because of what we view as their extraordinary ability to push back against the efforts of those who would leverage the fear of difference for their own political ends.

While we are located in the United States, the curriculum of our School - The Grace School of Applied Diplomacy at DePaul University - was inspired by the work of three of the most important contemporary European scholars of Diplomatic Studies working today: the Cypriot Costas Constantinou of the University of Cyprus, the Spaniard Noé Cornago from the University of the Basque Country, and Fiona McConnell, who grew up in Northern Ireland and is a faculty member at Oxford University. Together, these three scholars wrote a book to describe diplomacy as it is actually practiced today, to which they refer as *Transprofessional Diplomacy*.<sup>1</sup> Transprofessional Diplomacy acknowledges that while diplomacy is practiced by nation-state representatives, it is also practiced by community organizers, artists, scientists, businesspeople, religious leaders, educators and activists, among others – many of whom are often in a better position to address a number of areas of conflict and build coalitions on the ground than traditional diplomatic representatives could ever aspire to be. To this end, the Grace School trains its students to become practitioners of diplomacy in all of these vocations. Our goal is to create cohorts of students, who, upon graduation, acquire or move to jobs in diplomacy at all levels: as state-sponsored professionals, non-state actors, and grassroots diplomatic practitioners. Our intention is for our graduates to complete their studies with an extensive network of practitioners among their fellow students, who together can address problems which no one type of diplomatic practitioner could ever hope to comprehensively address alone.

I recognize that when the words “diplomat” or “diplomacy” are broached in a conversation, most people immediately – and often exclusively – think of members of a nation-state diplomatic service, and for good reason. The title of *diplomat* has long been associated almost entirely with an elite group of people, who practice a craft rooted in a profession, which was historically represented by members of the nobility. For this reason, many who travel in activist circles often do not look favorably on this designation and those to whom it is most often attributed. I recall being at Jum’uah prayers with one of my favorite citizen diplomats in Chicago, Rami Nashashibi, who co-founded and leads an organisation called the Inner-City Muslim Action Network, IMAN.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Constantinou, Costas, Noé Corago and Fiona McConnell, *Transprofessional Diplomacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

2 To learn more about the work of IMAN, visit its website @ <https://www.imacentral.org/>

IMAN meets the needs of residents in an economically and racially marginalized neighbourhood on the South Side of Chicago, creating coalitions across multiple boundaries of racial, religious and economic difference. IMAN has established a medical and dental clinic, created a Green Market, founded an art therapy program, and is fighting for the re-opening of a metro station in the neighbourhood it serves. The people leading IMAN have also established their Green Re-Entry program, which trains formerly incarcerated individuals to rehabilitate abandoned buildings and turn them into affordable housing. IMAN has accomplished these goals by building a network of Muslims, Jews, Christians, Atheists, African-Americans, Latinx and White Chicagoans who support and participate in their efforts, in what is the highly segregated city of Chicago, where many people do not have friends outside of those who share their same social location. For this reason, on that day in the mosque, I told Rami that I thought he was one of the most brilliant diplomats I had ever met. His response was to say, “Oh no. I am definitely not a diplomat. My father was a diplomat in the Jordanian diplomatic service. For me, diplomats are men who drink whisky and smoke cigarettes behind closed doors, while making decisions for everyone else without consulting them.”

In time, I believe I helped to persuade Rami to expand his definition of what he considers to be a diplomat, and to see that in fact what he is doing is a most vital form of diplomacy. This reflects what the scholar of diplomacy Costas Constantinou describes as *everyday diplomacy*, when he writes: “diplomacy can be broadly understood to emerge whenever someone successfully claims to represent and negotiate for a territory or a group of people or a cause or successfully claims to mediate between others engaging in such representations and negotiations. In this quotidian, diplomacy ceases to be a professional skill or special technique and thus captures a wider spectrum of social activities.”<sup>3</sup> This is what is coming to be known as the *democratization of diplomacy*, and this new understanding has in my estimation not come a moment too soon, for the world we live in is in desperate need of more people understanding themselves as practitioners of diplomacy. Why is this important? Why isn't it enough for those who are activists or community organizers to view themselves simply as advocates for a group or a cause? I would submit that this is important because seeing oneself as a practitioner of diplomacy opens the door to giving oneself permission to practice what one does on an even larger scale, in concert with larger numbers of individuals and communities.

British scholar of diplomacy Paul Sharp refers to the diplomat as “the useful stranger:” one who is not only of service to their own community but, by virtue of their skills, understanding and worldview, is capable of being of real service to others who are not members of their own group, and is also concerned with the sustainability of the larger social system.<sup>4</sup> Such people use their abilities in mediation and negotiation to bring people to the table who were not originally drawn to sitting with those from different groups – let alone conversing, sharing a meal, or working together to create communities and networks which no one person or group could have ever created on their own.

As we watch the accelerated growth of divides between people, of suspicion of those who are seen as “Other” by dominant groups, or the leveraging of such fear on the part of those who see the promotion of such divisions as a political opportunity to secure power, it is increasingly apparent that such efforts to promote dialogue and bridge-building cannot be limited to those who are already ideologically predisposed to doing such work. We need to reach a broader cross section of people and invite them into these efforts, and we need to do it as soon as possible.

My fellow faculty member at the Grace School, Geoffrey Wiseman, along with Paul Sharp, edited a

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3 Constantinou, Costas, “Everyday Diplomacy: Mission, Spectacle and the Remaking of Diplomatic Culture,” in Dittmer, Jason and Fiona McConnell, eds, *Diplomatic Cultures and International Politics: Translations, Spaces and Alternatives*, (Milton Park: Routledge, 2016), 1.

4 See Sharp, Paul, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

book entitled *The Diplomatic Corps as an Institution of International Society*.<sup>5</sup> In it, they make the argument that those who choose to become diplomats comprise a body of people who form a transnational community, through which the nations of the world have the possibility of cooperating. This book also serves to illustrate that by becoming members of a diplomatic service, many people enter into a liminal space, where in certain respects they come to have more in common with diplomats from other countries than they do with their own fellow citizens. They do this by many means – as people who speak more than one language, as people who understand the universal cultural etiquette of diplomatic practice, and in many cases, as people who have come to acquire a profound empathy and identification with those from countries and cultures other than their own – much like the members of the European Institute for Dialogue do through the work of their respective organisations. This is not to say, however, that I am going to romanticize state-sponsored diplomacy. While not at all descriptive of the vast majority of work in which members of a national foreign service are engaged, state-sponsored diplomacy – particularly in the hands of wealthier nations with powerful militaries – can at times be deployed as the means of coercion through spoken or unspoken threats of violence or economic punishment.

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Citizen Diplomacy opens the door to the possibility of embracing diplomacy in its most idealized form: as a means entirely devoted to the prevention of conflict, the reduction of violence, the work of peacebuilding, the healing of rifts, the dissolution of false perceptions and the building of bridges across multiple boundaries of difference. So why do I think that it’s important for the members of groups such as the European Institute for Dialogue, Connecting Actions, the Muslim Jewish Conference or Coexist to see themselves not only as activists, community organizers, or practitioners of dialogue, but also as diplomats? Because I think that it is through claiming this title – or at least feeling comfortable when others use it – that one learns to value their work and what they bring to the table even more than they already do, and in turn to invite a broader audience to do the same, with an eye to working on a much larger scale than ever before. My invitation for such people to name themselves as diplomats is not intended as a means of gaining prestige, but rather as way to connect what they do to a bigger project – one that is central to so many things I believe most people value. For instance, the environmental crisis will never be solved by the work of any one level of diplomats working alone. If state-sponsored diplomacy on its own was going to accomplish that it would have done so long ago. Environmental sustainability – and with it the political, social, cultural and economic sustainability upon which it depends – will only be achieved by the simultaneous efforts of individuals working on an intimate level to build consensus among neighbours, family members and colleagues at work and school.

In the same regard, countering the fear of those who are different – which populist movements are leveraging to gain power – cannot be adequately achieved by any one expression of diplomacy. In fact, I would argue that those who pursue the work of groups such as EID or Connecting Actions are in a better position to address this phenomenon than any state-sponsored diplomat. Such groups are the ones on the ground. Their members know the names of the neighbours who must be brought together, and they will still be there after the next election – or next coup d’état – regardless of who is in power. In this regard, citizen diplomats are arguably

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<sup>5</sup> Sharp, Paul and Geoffrey Wiseman, eds., *The Diplomatic Corps as an Institution of International Society*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

among the most important expressions of diplomacy now. Whether it is through the efforts of Black Lives Matter, or Greta Thunberg's Climate Strikes, movements which on their face appear to be purely those of activist efforts are in fact highly dependent on sophisticated, often taken-for-granted, acts of citizen diplomacy to build the coalitions they have, which have gathered highly diverse groups of not just hundreds or thousands of people, but millions. Why does scale matter? Because I submit that we need more people doing what these groups are doing to make the transformative difference which must be made.

When one considers the number of migrants who have arrived in Europe in hazardous circumstances, and the degree to which their presence has been successfully leveraged through fear and grievance by the far right, one must also consider the number of people who will be coming in the future, which many believe will dwarf the numbers who have so far arrived. How does one prepare for that? How does one manage to invite a far larger percentage of one's fellow citizens to be welcoming than have been credibly invited thus far? While I do not claim to have *the* answer to these questions, I do believe that the choice of understanding oneself as a diplomat opens the door to deepening such work, while simultaneously connecting what one does to efforts that help more people to see that interconvictional, intercultural and interfaith bridge-building is even more valuable and more vital than many have realized. That is because I view what such groups are doing as foundational to building the kind of international society in which most people want to live, while lacking the tools and the strategies to realize it on their own. Understanding oneself as a practitioner of diplomacy also opens the door to more intentionally and systematically working to acquire the skills associated with diplomacy, and to therefore become an even better mediator and negotiator, while endeavouring to improve one's cultural, historical, political and economic literacy. Such an understanding allows people to better understand phenomena, which intimately touches the lives of everyone they are working to reach and collaborate with.

Understanding oneself as a diplomat also invites people to look for allies, which include and go beyond the communities of practitioners with whom they currently collaborate, and to include other grassroots practitioners in other fields, NGOs, and state-sponsored diplomatic actors who share complementary concerns, worldviews and aspirations. This is because it is not only one's neighbours who can benefit from what such practitioners do. I believe that the organisations participating in the efforts of EID, Connecting Actions and other like-minded coalitions are in possession of knowledge and skills that many state-sponsored diplomats would envy, and very much like to learn from and align themselves with. For while most state-sponsored European diplomats decry the rise of Orban, the unfolding events in Poland or the increasing number of votes which populist parties and candidates draw in many other EU member states, they are unable to adequately address many of the root causes of these groups' popularity – like fear, religious and cultural illiteracy and a disregard for history. They also struggle to inspire more people to understand that the promotion and preservation of democracy through participation in elections is dependent upon people neither giving into cynicism nor into the false belief that they are powerless to make a constructive and positive difference in the world. Countering such sentiments is what the groups gathered through the EID, Connecting Actions, the MJC and Coexister do most wonderfully.

I believe that claiming or accepting the title of “diplomat” or “practitioner of diplomacy” can serve as a means of increasing the number of people who view the work of interconvictional bridge-building groups not just as admirable, but also as vital and central. This act of self-naming also opens the door for such practitioners to identify an even larger circle of allies and future collaborators who they might not currently understand as such. There are many diplomats all around us. You have no doubt seen many, but there are even more than you imagine who are pursuing many different vocations. It is therefore the task of all practitioners of diplomacy to cultivate their ability to identify such allies, such fellow diplomats, as they endeavour to collaborate with more and more people.



## **Defining Dialogue**

**“Dialogue” can mean many different things to different people. One of the most used terms in today’s social and political life, it might have become a victim of its success. Conflated with “debate,” “discussion,” “consultation,” or “conference,” the term is used or proclaimed in all contexts and for all purposes, but would benefit from a conceptual clarification and analysis.**

**Rafael Tyszblat (Connecting Actions) offers clarifications about the concept, scope and guiding principles of dialogue and gives recommendations about making dialogue more professional and impactful.**

**François Becker (G3i) carries forward the analysis of what it means to put different groups and individuals in dialogue, through the rising concept of interconvictional dialogue.**

**Together, they offer insights into how and why dialogue can be among the most powerful tools to combat enmity and hatred.**

# Connecting Actions - Planning and Preparing for Professional Dialogue

By Rafael Tyszblat, President of [Connecting Actions](#)

Connecting Actions is a French non-profit that was initiated at the Muslim Jewish Conference with the objective to reinforce the field of interfaith, intercultural, and interconvictional<sup>1</sup> citizen dialogue. Since 2015, Connecting Actions has promoted and implemented dialogue to build bridges across multiple divides and empower bridge builders to do their work more effectively.

In 2018, twelve European Civil Society Organisations were convened by Connecting Actions to launch the [European Institute For Dialogue](#). This ambitious coalition gathers and supports local, national and European organisations fighting hate, ignorance, prejudice, racism and discrimination through constructive conversations and activities between members of various identity groups. Today, Connecting Actions and its partners continue to lead this effort to enhance the field of interfaith and intercultural dialogue and cooperation, by bringing together its main stakeholders around common projects and professionalizing the field through ongoing training and evaluation.

## Our Vision of Dialogue

In the past two decades, the world has witnessed crisis upon crisis in many areas, such as the economy, the climate, health, and identity issues. The dominant means to address these conflicts remains the same: people engage in advocacy, pushing for certain policies and public actions to be put in place. While advocacy is certainly valuable in many contexts, it is obvious to most bridge-builders that the practice of dialogue can and should be better considered as a tool for social change. Connecting Actions believes that it is not useful to tell people what to think when they start developing hate towards other groups. The value of dialogue is to acknowledge each individual experience as unique, and to refrain from establishing any hierarchy of oppression,<sup>2</sup> or considering individual and group experiences as equivalent. By avoiding feelings of identity threats, dialogue has an advantage in the fight against hate.

Dialogue is not as simple as most people think, which is why it is not used as much as it should be. Many people, even outside of our field, call for dialogue as a value, but very little actual dialogue takes place. Many issues need to be addressed, and one needs to be clear about the strengths and limits of dialogue. What does it take to ensure that conversations about the most divisive issues unfold in a healthy, constructive, respectful and authentic manner? Can we really have a dialogue about any topic? Many dialogue practitioners consider some conversations to be too difficult to have and choose to not try a dialogue-informed approach for those topics. Connecting Actions believes that dialogue's true value comes when dealing with the topics that are most divisive. But it needs to be done well, with thorough process design, professional facilitators who have gone through extensive training, inclusive outreach efforts and convening processes, as well as robust institutional partnerships.

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1 See the following article by François Becker.

2 Audre Lorde, "There is No Hierarchy of Oppressions," in *Homophobia and Education* (New York: Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1983).

Dialogue practitioners and promoters also need to address some of the criticisms that are emerging towards the field. Bridge-builders can be attacked from all sides of the political spectrum. Some conservatives blame this field for being naïve and tolerant towards the intolerable. Some progressives condemn the idea of neutrality as being equivalent to siding with the dominant view or the oppressor. When so many people consider that talking to the “Other” means compromising or surrendering, it is essential to show that dialogue can never mean forgoing one’s dignity and fundamental rights.

## **“When done right, dialogue helps participants shift their attitudes towards each other and towards the idea *and* practice of dialogue itself.”**

This is why training facilitators and preparing them to detect and help the group manage power dynamics and conflict is so important. Facilitators should be very thoroughly prepared to detect the power dynamics that may affect their dialogue, and to manage them in order to help the relevant groups grow and be agents of change. It is crucial to ensure that dialogue “does no harm,” and tackles societal problems by empowering participants to learn from one other, from the interaction, and from themselves. When done right, dialogue helps participants shift their attitudes towards each other *and* towards the idea and practice of dialogue itself.

Here are some guidelines to conceive, design, prepare and implement such a process.

### **Facilitated Dialogue**

Let us first suggest a definition of facilitated dialogue: it is a form of third party intervention, in which trained and experienced facilitators help participants who are usually coming from polarized groups to engage and learn from each other through a structured and productive conversation over a contentious issue, a question and, sometimes, a course of action. This process has been found to be extraordinarily useful in bringing hitherto polarized groups together.

### **The Scope**

Let us now explore the scope of dialogue. The primary goal of dialogue should be to gain greater understanding of each others’ points of view and feelings. The goal should not be to agree over the issues discussed, but rather to effectively communicate about both commonalities and differences as a way to learn from them and to build deeper relationships. The participants may, at the end of the process, resolve some issues, find resolution to conflicts, or even embark on a joint plan of action, but that is not the goal of dialogue itself. Dialogue can also take place in action, of course, but it is best used as a means to establish some solid foundations prior to a consensus-building process. The facilitators’ role is accompany the process to help participants achieve the goals that they set for themselves.

### **The Space**

The space of dialogue is meant to be as safe as possible, knowing that full emotional safety is impossible to guarantee at all times. The space is supposed to be one where participants can learn from each other, which can be uncomfortable at times. Mistakes are considered to be a part of the process, though participants are encouraged to remain mindful of their impact on others. In this space, participants learn from one another through a mix of

intellectual and personal levels of engagement. Facilitators accompany this process, in which emotions as well as intellectual discourses are equally welcome. Opinions, perceptions, feelings, needs, values all contribute to enhancing mutual understanding and collective learning.

Although “dialogue” and “debate” are terms that are often used interchangeably, it is useful to identify several conceptual differences between them. Debate may present the following characteristics:

- Threatening atmosphere
- Attacks
- Interruptions
- People talking past each other
- Participants identified as representatives of their group
- Difference within sides denied or minimized
- Participants sticking to their opinion
- Inquiry made as hidden advocacy
- Closed-ended questions
- Entertainment happens

And dialogue should seek to foster the following:

- Safe atmosphere
- Cooperation
- Respectful exchange
- People responding to each other
- Participants speaking for themselves
- Differences within sides presented as normal and raised
- Participants expressing doubts
- Genuine inquiry happening
- Open-ended questions
- Learning happens

## **The Facilitators**

The role of third-party facilitators is mainly to manage the dialogue process, structure the conversation, ensure clarity and understanding, help the discussion progress and stay on track, and ensure full participation. They help avoid circular, conflicted, or conflict-avoidant conversations. They do not express any point of view or suggestion, nor provide resolution to the conflict. Their role is to create a space that is as safe and non-threatening as possible, where people of different convictions can engage in constructive and non-adversarial conversation.

Ground rules are set collectively and through a participatory process to ensure the authenticity of expression and the inclusion of all participants. They usually include confidentiality, non-judgement, respect, non-violence, authenticity, sharing airtime, speaking for yourself (without trying to represent a group and without asking others to be representative of a group), avoiding generalizations, and so on.

Equipped with active listening skills, nonviolent cross-cultural communication awareness, emotional literacy, and conflict resolution and group management tools, facilitators guide participants through the various stages of the dialogue process and work to improve the quality of communication between them, ensuring better

understanding and/or deepened collaboration. In so doing, facilitators may reflect to participants what they see in terms of the process, including power dynamics. Participants will be invited to engage in critical and meta-thinking to gain more autonomy and agency on their own way of engaging over difficult topics and with different people.

Facilitators' tools include active and empathetic listening, meta-cognitive listening (that listens to the discourses as well as the emotions and intentions behind them), sound questions (that invite participants to engage in critical thinking), mirroring discourses and emotions, and syntheses of dialogue. They notice and mirror power dynamics based on imbalances related to language barriers, choice of words, choice of framing, air time, emotional vs. analytical speech, types of stories and origins of emotions, the competition between those "who know" and those "who don't know," etc. In so doing, they help the group become aware of those dynamics. Facilitators ensure that the power dynamics inherent to any interconvictional and inter-identity dialogue are handled in a way such that participants can learn from them, instead of letting them lower the level of authenticity and inclusion.

## **The Process**

It is important to not rush dialogue, and instead to build a structure where participants can progressively feel comfortable enough to address the toughest questions. Based on experience, dialogue needs to go through certain "stages," with the understanding that the progression is never that simple or linear.

The first stage is extremely important: fostering the space where the dialogue will take place. It usually includes mutual introductions, icebreakers, a presentation or reminder about the goals of the facilitation process, and the reasons and objectives of the dialogue. Ground rules are collectively adopted and participants can express their expectations in terms of the issues they want to address. The goal is to ensure participants get a sense of ownership over the process.

The second stage starts with the actual exchange, usually with an opening round during which everyone gets to share their first thoughts, one after the other, without interruption. The opening question needs to be open-ended, to invite participants to share their general opinion and/or their personal connection to the topic at hand. During that phase, it can be relevant to also spend time sharing everyone's understanding of the main terms being used. Facilitators help participants clearly express themselves and listen to others through clarifying questions and summaries of what is being said; they help participants avoid talking past each other and help them go beyond antagonistic statements; they bring participants back on track, should they digress; and they identify the core issue(s) of contention as well as the areas of agreement.

In the third stage, the facilitator tries to dig deeper in the exchange by exploring the origins and the nature of the differences that exist between participants. Facilitators enquire about feelings and about where they come from. They ask the participants to share the personal experiences that led them to come to the conclusions they adopted, and help them to realise the connection between their own experiences and opinions, as well as that of others.

The fourth stage aims to build more meaningful and stronger relationships, despite the differences that remain. Participants have the opportunity go beyond their initial antagonism and reach an enhanced understanding of themselves and each other. It also provides the opportunity to ensure that every issue has been addressed in the process.

The fifth stage provides the possibility for agreeing on a course of action. Participants brainstorm creative

ideas to translate their experience into a broader context and transfer the knowledge that they acquired in dialogue to their respective communities.

With these stages as guiding principles, it is also important to keep in mind that the objectives of dialogue can be anything from simple contact and mutual understanding, to reconciliation or joint action.

Another crucial, and too-often overlooked, element of dialogue is intra-group or intra-convictional dialogue. We know, according to Carl Schmitt's very cynical thinking, that any group needs an enemy to preserve itself. What is meant by that is: every group necessarily has internal conflicts that constantly threaten its ability to keep its members together. The existence of an enemy group is indeed an effective way to maintain unity in the face of a common outside threat. But it is also possible to look at this dynamic from a different angle, and realise that if one really wants to reconcile with their community, one does not *need* enemies to address one's own internal conflicts in order to find a healthier and more sustainable way to keep strong.

Concretely, facilitators are encouraged to put each identity group together for at least one session, addressing questions such as:

- How are we feeling about meeting and engaging with the “Other”?
- What are the things that are difficult to talk about with the “Other”? Why?
- What are the conflicts within our group that would be wise to address before trying to solve inter-group conflicts?
- What can we do to convince other people in our community to also engage with the “Other”?

In fact, we see through many individual experiences that intra- and inter-group dialogue reinforce one other. Meeting the “Other” is not a betrayal of one's identity, it is an opportunity to have a deeper and stronger sense of self. That is why dialogue is a tool for empowerment, without antagonism or violence.

If hate is taking up more and more space in the public sphere, it is because the system allows it to. Dialogue, if practiced well and at scale, can introduce radically new ways of regulating our interactions.



# G3i - Interconvictionality in Society: A Way of Being and Acting in Mutual Respect

by François Becker, President of [G3i](#)

We live in a pluralistic society made up of people with different convictions and ways of being, whose links and relationships are increasingly dissolving. Each person is thus often alone in his or her own world of thought, or in the computer bubble of his or her social networks, or even in a community that often makes it difficult to relate to anyone outside its members. This “archipelization”<sup>1</sup> of our society, which makes it increasingly difficult to cross from one island to another, often leads each person to misunderstand others and therefore not to understand their way of being and acting, which can cause a person to believe that she is alone, possibly with her community, in “having the truth.”

The encounter with the “Other” and the discovery of the differences that it makes us perceive, in their way of being, living, believing, too often generates fear. Many of us fear that this discovery might burst the bubble that gives us the illusion of “preserving” what we think is the truth, and in the end, our identity (often reduced to a particular belief or one of our multiple identities). This fear can lead to hatred of the “Other” who disturbs that identity, who unsettles the “certainties” that give us the “security” in which we have sometimes locked ourselves.

How can we create bridges between these islands that make up our society? How can we get to know each other better and acknowledge each other in order to form a more cohesive social fabric? How can we stop being afraid of our differences? How can we accept and acknowledge each other’s differences and recreate social links in our very diverse society? How can we replace hatred with conviviality, and thus create a society in which it feels good to live together among people of different convictions and ways of being, with mutual respect for each other?

This article does not attempt to give one definitive answer to all these questions, but to propose an approach that can lead to the creation of bridges between these islands and contribute to developing cohesion in our archipelagic societies. This approach is proposed by the G3i (the International Intercultural and Interconvictional Group), which has long engaged in relevant reflections and debates, in particular within the Council of Europe. The approach consists in implementing “interconvictionality.” The various aspects of this concept have been presented in several publications<sup>2</sup> and collected in the special issue of the magazine *Diasporiques*<sup>3</sup> dedicated to interconvictionality, and entitled in French “Osons le néologisme interconvictionnalité.” They are briefly summarized below.

The adjective *interconvictional* and the neologism *interconvictionality* characterise practices, spaces and institutions whose specific purpose is to organise the encounter, the dialogue and the confrontation between

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1 See Jérôme Fourquet, « The French Archipelago , birth of multiple and divided nation » in French 384 p Seuil 2019

2 B. Quelquejeu Article « Interconviction », published in French Wikipédia ; G3i, suggestion for establishing an « European Charter for Interconvictionality » (in French : in the special issue 50 of *Diasporiques* « Osons le néologisme interconvictionnalité “(see note 3) pages 40-43 (<https://www.diasporiques.org/r-5008>), in English on request) ; « Social cohesion in a pluricultural Europe : role and impact of schools of thoughts and of religions » edited by F. Becker, 179 p, Editions Publibook 2009 in French (<https://www.publibook.com/cohesion-sociale-dans-une-europe-multiculturelle-sous-la-direction-de-francois-becker.html/>); « Becoming citizens of a plural Europe: interconvictional space and practice » edited by François Becker, 132 p Editions Publibook 2014 (<https://www.publibook.com/becoming-citizens-of-a-plural-europe-interconvictional-spaces-and-practices.html>)

3 G3i, « Osons le néologisme interconvictionnalité », special issue of *Diasporiques*, n°50 July 2020, 99 pages quarterly intercultural magazine co-published by the Association *Diasporiques* and the ligue de l’enseignement (<https://www.diasporiques.org/n-50> et <https://www.diasporiques.org/numero-50>)

people of different convictions, without exclusivity, and with the purpose to promote mutual understanding, maturation of convictions, and decision-making within a community for its common good, provided they respect the conditions of these practices, including mutual respect and reciprocity.

Therefore, *interconvictional* goes beyond *interreligious*, because these dialogues, practices, and spaces 1) include all people whatever their convictions, be they religious, spiritual (including atheists and agnostics), philosophical, political, or societal, and whether they represent the majority or the minority within their respective convictional group, and 2) address not only convictions and values, but also analysis, reflection and the search for proposals concerning societal and political issues.

## **Convictions and Interconvictional Interactions**

One of the important drivers of diversity that can be a source of division, hatred or enclosure in well-barricaded islands, is the multiplicity and diversity of convictions, their nature and depth, as well as their dynamics. Deeply-held convictions inspire each person in their individual actions and within the groups and organisations in which they participate.

What is a conviction? With Bernard Quelquejeu<sup>4</sup>, a member of the G3i, we define it as an “*acquiescence of the mind supported by justifications judged sufficient to lead to approval and adherence.*” Note the words used: *acquiescence*, and not belief, nor truth; *mind* and not reason; *supported by justifications judged sufficient*, not necessarily totally proven; *to lead to approval and adherence*, i.e. constituting an acceptable progress in the search for the truth.

Each personal conviction therefore has a history. It is received by the child in the trust they place in their family, religious or social environment. Then, in a process of emancipation resulting from their education, from their development to maturity and from their interactions – and possibly confrontations – that they have with other people, this initial conviction evolves through the need to justify it and to establish its veracity in a search for truth, until it becomes personal. As this process unfolds, these convictions can become shared convictions, which increases their strength and importance, and which then clearly differentiates them from a simple opinion.

This is how groups of conviction can be formed, which allow certain convictions to be deepened. The convictions must imperatively remain open to others in order to avoid being locked in, as we shall see below.

Whatever the nature of a conviction, whether religious, philosophical, or political, it is essential that interactions, or even confrontations, between convictions (which are an indispensable tool for their maturation in the search for truth) move beyond the inter-religious framework to become inter-convictional.

## **The Interconvictional Processes**

It is essential to note that these interactions between convictions do not generally occur spontaneously. Indeed, dialogue and confrontation can be painful and even dangerous, insofar as they might be destabilising and may lead to profound existential questions. It is therefore very tempting to consider, at a given moment, that one’s perception of the truth is the truth, that the other’s is false, and then to refuse all dialogue. But this attitude blocks any future evolution and risks prohibiting access to a more robust social fabric. Considering what one’s convictions as “absolutely true,” without having exhausted all possible sources of validation, locks freedom of

<sup>4</sup> See Article WIKIPEDIA “Interconviction” in French <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interconviction>, and Bernard Quelquejeu « Shared convictions in the political arena. A semantic and sociological reflection » in “Becoming citizens of a plural Europe: Interconvictional space and practice » p 39 op.cit.(see note 2)

thought into a bundle of immutable convictions. This can indeed be worse than lying,<sup>5</sup> and engender the violent conflicts we keep witnessing. The “Other” is there to “unblock” these convictions, to liberate thought, thanks to interconvictional interactions, dialogues and confrontations.

Therefore, an interconvictional process needs to be implemented throughout society. The G3i proposes to make this happen through three types of interconvictional dialogues, within spaces and institutions that can enable them.

### Three Types of Interconvictional Dialogues

Interactions between those who hold different convictions are necessary on a personal level, to accompany their process of maturation and validation of personal convictions, as well as for the discovery of convictions other than one’s own. However, these interactions are also necessary within a pluri-convictional society or community in order to prepare and make decisions that are as consensus-based as possible, for the benefit of the common good. Hence the following three types of interconvictional dialogues that the G3i proposes:

- 1) *Non-conclusive* interconvictional dialogue at the level of individuals. The purpose of this dialogue is not to reach a conclusion, but to get to know each other better, to discover the differences that emerge without being afraid of them, to enrich each other’s convictions, and eventually to confront them in mutual respect, without wanting to convince or judge one another. The aim of this dialogue is not to erase differences, conflicts and possible power dynamics, but to make them explicit and understand them.
- 2) *Pre-decisional* interconvictional dialogues and 3) *decisional* interconvictional dialogues, at all levels of collective and political decision-making (non-profits, companies, cities, nations, international). Namely:
  - *Pre-decisional* interconvictional dialogues, to be held within bodies set up for this purpose, aim to *prepare the decisions* that a decision-making body must make, possibly proposing a choice of acceptable decisions with an analysis of the consequences of each of the options proposed.
  - *Decision-making* interconvictional dialogues, within the legally constituted bodies, allow them to *make decisions at the relevant level* on the basis of the proposals of the pre-decision-making bodies.

This distinction is very important, because it leads to different ways of conducting these dialogues or confrontations, and it implies the existence of specific spaces and organisations allowing pre-decisional dialogues (open working groups, popular consultation, neighbourhood committees, etc. organised by the decision-making bodies), as well as the presence of decision-making bodies for decision-making dialogues (parliaments, management committees, etc.).

All of these dialogues must be conducted truthfully. Albert Camus<sup>6</sup> already asked in 1950: “*I will try not to change a thing of what I think nor a thing of what you think (as far as I can make of it) in order to obtain a conciliation that would be agreeable to us all. On the contrary, what I want to say to you today is that the world needs real dialogue, that the opposite of dialogue is both lies and silence, and that dialogue is therefore only possible between people who remain who they are and who speak the truth.*”

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5 Thus Frederick Nietzsche wrote in “Humain, trop humain” (n°483) that “*Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies*”.

6 Albert Camus, *Actuelles – Écrits Politiques*, Gallimard, Paris 1950 in French

These dialogues<sup>7</sup> must be spaces where each of the partners considers their dialogue partner not as a simple object of representation, but as an “Other,” an *individual* who faces him and who also considers them as susceptible to agreement or disagreement. This is a space where the otherness and freedom of the two interlocutors are acknowledged in reciprocity, or else the confrontation will become meaningless. It is only within this space, and nowhere else, that the question of truth is played out.-

In a dialogue or a confrontation of convictions conducted truthfully, it is in fact required for each person participating *to be able to answer for what he or she is saying*. Interconvictional dialogue or, eventually, confrontation, requires *each person to say something to the other about something* and to answer for it. This implies that each of the participants seeks the truth in what he or she expresses, and recognises in the “Other” the intention to seek the truth as well. Note that it is about *seeking* the truth, not *claiming* it. None of the words we speak, none of the dialogues in which we engage, none of our confrontations, would have any meaning without the shared assumption that everyone seeks the truth.

### Attitudes and Aptitudes<sup>8</sup>

All these dialogues, debates and confrontations also imply that participants possess the right attitudes and aptitudes. They are summarised in the “Ten commandments for a successful debate” proposed by Bernard Quelquejeu.<sup>9</sup> These attitudes and aptitudes are necessary to ensure that these dialogues are constructive, do not turn onto a clash, and are not limited to mere debates:

- One must reflect on one’s “convictions:” their origin, the degree of their “credibility,” their validation, their foundation and their importance in the conduct of one’s life. One must be aware of their history: how did I arrive at this conviction and by what process? One must be aware that the way in which each person expresses their convictions depends on their culture, education, etc. One must analyse the differences in the nature of one’s own convictions: are they political/societal, religious, moral, scientific, or philosophical? Furthermore, one must analyse the relationships between one’s own convictions, their coherence and their claim on truth. Finally, one must reflect on the articulation and coherence between one’s convictions and one’s actions.
- This reflection should allow a person to acquire a certain critical distance from oneself, and to monitor one’s emotions when confronting others, especially when it comes to the most fundamental, most intimate convictions. This reflection should also not to reduce one’s identity to one of its components or to a fundamental conviction (often religious<sup>10</sup>), allowing instead for an awareness of the multiplicity of one’s own identities<sup>11</sup> that can evolve and are different from one’s own ipseity.
- One must recognise the “Other” as different, respect their freedom of conscience, of thought and of expression, and therefore accept that they do not share the same convictions as one’s own. But reciprocity is essential. The other person must accept that one does not share their convictions and that they may be

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7 In this section, I draw on the various research papers written by B. Quelquejeu and discussed within the G3i

8 See the debate on "interconvictionality, truth and freedom of thought" published on issue 33 of the magazine *Diasporiques* 2016 page 6 ([https://e07d18b2-edb0-4a5e-8351-a83dd06b039b.filesusr.com/ugd/b92db8\\_75b8d8a505b04ee8813bad945c9fde1f.pdf](https://e07d18b2-edb0-4a5e-8351-a83dd06b039b.filesusr.com/ugd/b92db8_75b8d8a505b04ee8813bad945c9fde1f.pdf))

9 See Bernard. Quelquejeu " dix commandements pour réussir un débat " in chap 8 of Magazine *Diasporiques* n°50 juillet 2020 p 58 (see note 3) ([https://e07d18b2-edb0-4a5e-8351-a83dd06b039b.filesusr.com/ugd/b92db8\\_b8928e1dd1944fe5ae84f9cea742d0b8.pdf](https://e07d18b2-edb0-4a5e-8351-a83dd06b039b.filesusr.com/ugd/b92db8_b8928e1dd1944fe5ae84f9cea742d0b8.pdf))

See also fact sheets 2 and 3 of the “SOciety Cultures and Convictions” (SOCC): "Material organisation of non-decisional debates" (fact sheet 2) and "Role and training of debate leaders" (fact sheet 3) in chapter 8 of Magazine *Diasporiques* n° 50 (see note 3)

10 Common language gives rise to this. We say "I am", or "he is" Christian, Muslim, etc., to say actually I am or he is a person of Christian, Muslim, etc. conviction.

11 Amin Maalouf " les identités meurtrières "(Murderous identities) collection Le Livre de poche, n° 15005 , (May 2007)

challenged, with an explanation.

- In order to achieve the above, one must listen to others without judging them, and seek to understand their convictions with their foundations, as well as the way they formed them. In this listening practice, it is important to take into account the culture of others, so as not to assimilate a difference in expression with a difference in conviction expressed through a different culture, or based on a different memory of the experience, which can be a source of prejudice. Only by listening deeply and seeking to understand the “Other” can one develop the empathy that affords moving from one’s own perspective to that of another, and to align one’s own actions with this deeper understanding – which implies a profound level of responsibility in one’s behaviour.
- Finally, the conditions under which these dialogues take place, and their objectives, as outlined above, must be clearly indicated.

### 10 commandments for interconvictional dialogue<sup>1</sup>

Bernard Quelquejeu

1. **Order** - Follow the guidelines and regulations implemented by the facilitator, as a guarantee of sound process.
2. **Equality** - Don’t take the floor until you are given it: air time should be shared as a common good.
3. **Moderation** - Respect your allocated time for speaking: to not do so means infringing on others’ time.
4. **Politeness** - Don’t interrupt others: let them finish their thoughts.
5. **Open-mindedness** - Start by listening to your partners if you want to them to listen to you and hear you.
6. **Respect** - You have the right to judge speech, but not people.
7. **Reciprocity** – Allow your partners to challenge the grounding of your convictions, since you will take the liberty to challenge theirs.
8. **Authenticity** - Strictly abide by the duty of authenticity, as any breach would negate the very value of dialogue.
9. **Security** - Ensure a good understanding of your words, as they can be deceiving.
10. **Otherness** - Don’t be selective in your listening effort to take what is convenient to you and instead try to truly understand your partners’ deep thinking.

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1 Published in French in *Diasporiques* n°50 “Oser le néologisme interconvictionnalité,” July 2020, page 58

**“Only by listening deeply and seeking to understand the ‘Other’ can one develop the empathy that affords moving from one’s own perspective to that of another, and to align one’s own actions with this deeper understanding – which implies a profound level of responsibility in one’s behaviour.”**

As Article 10 of the G3i Charter on Interconvictionality<sup>1</sup> points out, two attitudes can be adopted towards the existence of a diversity of beliefs: 1) to consider them as obstacles to the sustaining of personal identities or 2) to consider them as factors that contribute to their evolution and enrichment through contact with others. The first attitude tends to lead to a withdrawal into one’s own identity, and exposes one to the risk of possibly violent rejection of the other. The second attitude, the one that should be adopted, implies recognising not only the equal dignity and equal rights of all human beings, but also their potential contributions to individual progress and to the common good as a result of their differences. This is what this article has tried to articulate.

But a fundamental question arises: how can we initiate a dialogue with those who refuse to do so, and who run the risk of locking themselves up in their certainties? These are fundamental questions that give rise to new reflections that go beyond the scope of this article and that will have to be addressed elsewhere. However, it is important to ensure that the refusal to enter into dialogue is not due to a lack of clarity about the reasons justifying this dialogue, or about its objectives and the way it will be conducted.

Acknowledgments: I am indebted to Bernard Quelquejeu and Michel Aguilar for their comments and suggestions that improved this article.



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1 See note 2

## **Citizen Dialogue**

**Learning is at the core of dialogue, and it is a great preliminary action for social change. While dialogue itself offers a collective learning opportunity, it can be designed and complemented with pedagogical tools to build awareness, knowledge and capacity about certain subjects.**

**Casper van der Heijden (Sharing Perspectives Foundation) discusses a specific and growing format for dialogue: Virtual Exchange. With a methodology anchored in the tenets of dialogue, complemented by selected learning materials, he describes an impactful programme to counter hate speech online.**

**Sarah Dolah (Fryshuset) presents the philosophy of, and a couple of examples from, a comprehensive programme to change young people's culture of engagement in their community, drawing from dialogue methods as well as conflict resolution theories and mediation.**

# Sharing Perspectives Foundation - Countering Hate Speech through Virtual Exchange

By Casper van der Heijden, [Sharing Perspectives Foundation](#), Managing Director

The Sharing Perspectives Foundation (SPF) offers contemporary online learning experiences that allow people to interact constructively across differences and divides. We use Virtual Exchange as an inclusive pedagogical approach, offering people a meaningful international and cross-cultural experience.

We believe that all people should have equal opportunities to develop 21st-century skills: namely, the learning, digital literacy, and life skills that students and employees need to thrive in today's diverse, connected, and online world. To this end, we provide relevant and responsive Virtual Exchange courses about current socio-political issues, where deep learning about the personal experiences of peers in diverse contexts can occur. Our initiatives lead to a reduction of stereotypes and polarization, as people gain a more open and empathic attitude towards others by learning to connect and communicate in a constructive and effective way.

We know that the needs for capacity-building, new modes of collaboration, and facilitating sensitive conversations online are far-reaching. We offer Virtual Exchange and training for people to develop core collaboration skills and digital competencies. We consult businesses and educational institutions who need support in the online engagement they offer or use as part of their work. We drive praxis and build community in the field of online international and intercultural learning and engagement through research, resource-sharing, and network-building

SPF combines the use of dialogue and skill-building to enhance participants' learning and agency to address common challenges. What follows is an example among SPF programmes.

## The “Countering Hate Speech” Course

In recent years, the normalization of hate speech has contributed to the radicalization of individuals and collectives against the “Other,” fueling hate crimes towards marginalized groups, from everyday online harassment, cyberbullying, discrimination and stigmatization, to direct attacks on groups including women, LGBTQI+, Roma, migrants, and minority faith communities.

Hate speech doesn't limit itself to physical spaces, but is becoming more and more prominent in online environments; its impact and spread is increasing. That is why there is a need for international and intercultural dialogue against hate speech. Online spaces are suitable to this objective, especially since hate speech takes place online. As such, the Countering Hate Speech virtual exchange course is a suitable and fitting international initiative against hate speech.

[‘Countering Hate Speech’](#) was an Interactive Open Online Course implemented as part of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Project. During this course, participants learn about and discuss current challenges posed by hate speech in their communities and societies at large. Not only do participants engage in dialogue about the topic and get access to expert video lectures, they also collaboratively work towards creating a campaign to counter hate speech in its various forms. This makes ‘Countering Hate Speech’ an action-oriented course where participants are inspired to share knowledge and learn from each other.

Over five weeks, small groups of participants coming from various religious, national, cultural and other identity-based backgrounds meet online for two hours each week via a video conference application. Through this Virtual Exchange course, they address challenging questions concerning hate speech. What forms, causes and consequences of hate speech do we recognize at the individual and societal level? How is hate speech regulated and what is the relevance of a human rights perspective? And above all, what can be done to counter hate speech? Through Virtual Exchange, participants put their own experiences, values, and challenges at the forefront as a primary source of learning about and countering hate speech.

**“Through Virtual Exchange, participants put their own experiences, values, and challenges at the forefront as a primary source of learning about and countering hate speech.”**

The five weeks follow a progression from learning to action.

- Week 1 is about setting the stage. Participants are introduced to the concept of hate speech and how it is defined by various European human rights organisations, such as the Council of Europe or the European Commission against Racism.
- Week 2 explores the impact and consequences of hate speech, including racism, discrimination, freedom of expression, political debate, identity, and how it intertwines with narratives of various crimes.
- Week 3 invites participants to explore what human rights are and how to apply a human rights perspective to cases of hate speech, whether from an individual level or from a policy perspective.
- Week 4 addresses the tension between the necessity to counter hate speech and the preservation of freedom of speech. Participants are invited to reflect on the possibility to draw a line between the limits of both.
- Week 5 concludes this programme by exploring strategies and tactics to respond to and propose alternatives to hate speech. Looking at examples coming from various fields, participants are invited to take action together.

All live sessions are led by trained and experienced facilitators, whose presence is indispensable to ensure participants progress, learn from their experience and do not get stuck into destructive or unhealthy dynamics. In between live sessions, participants get the opportunity to review expert content developed by [European Alternatives](#), with the support of the [Foundation Remembrance Responsibility Future \(EVZ\)](#) and the [Mott Foundation](#). Everyone watches video lectures and weekly readings, and provides feedback in an online form. The weekly content is designed to provide them with food for thought for their weekly online group meetings. They aim to inspire and activate participants by addressing concrete examples, tactics and strategies of how to respond to hate speech.

In addition, each participant is invited to maintain a reflection journal to reflect honestly on valuable insights, strong feelings towards an issue, significant moments in the group process, or key turning points in their thinking. Each week, after the group meeting, participants reflect and record their experience of the day’s session

by answering a short question in a webform. This creates a personal record of their experience and development throughout the five-week virtual exchange process.

Finally, they are asked to design a campaign in response to hate speech in general or a specific form of it, for instance, an awareness campaign on social media, a presentation website, a blog or other written material, a video, a cartoon or animation, or a call to action, with some material output in the form of a poster, video, or text.

This Interactive Open Online course has already been implemented as part of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange initiative, which was part of the Erasmus+ programme, providing an accessible, ground-breaking way for young people to engage in intercultural learning. Working with youth organisations and universities, the project was open to any young person aged 18-30 residing in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean. It was considered to be of special interest for activists, students and passionate citizens from all over these regions, who want to gain a deep insight into hate speech. We hope to be able to implement this virtual exchange course on Countering Hate Speech again soon.



# **Fryshuset - Dialogue for Peaceful Change**

By Sarah Dolah, Program Manager at [Fryshuset](#)

In 2018, Fryshuset started working with the method of Dialogue for Peaceful Change (DPC), with the aim of strengthening young leaders and providing them with conflict management tools, a deepened understanding of what conflict is, and of what their role can be in transforming conflict. Conflict is an inherent part of human existence and an important driver for change. Fryshuset recognizes that young leaders play a crucial role in navigating change, in order to promote peaceful and inclusive societies.

Fryshuset is Sweden's largest civil society organisation for youth. It was founded 36 years ago by Anders Carlberg, who envisioned a society where all youth felt included and therefore would not be drawn into destructive environments. Fryshuset operates in nine different locations, engaging up to 100,000 young persons every month through our various activities ranging from social projects, sports, music, education and schools, disengagement programs, leadership programs, conflict resolution programs, and many more.

Given our range of work, young people in our vicinity are dealing with conflicts related to everything from online bullying, sexism, honor-related threats and violence, migration conflicts, racism, polarization and in some cases, deadly conflicts and shootings. As an organisation, we have invested a lot of time in building trust with marginalized communities and are therefore uniquely positioned to be able to hear, and sometimes affect, conflicts in which youth find themselves, in a way that government agencies and actors are not.

We contacted Colin Craig at Different Tracks Global, an international organisation that works with a method called Dialogue for Peaceful Change (DPC). DPC had been used in similar problem settings – for example, in Antioch, California, United States, which had seen a sharp rise in antisocial behaviour among youth, and where the whole community across different categories of difference came together to find a solution. DPC proved to be an effective language and a common framework for understanding conflict that tied together those efforts. The result was a successful program that is at work to this day, under the name Youth Intervention Network.

## **About Dialogue for Peaceful Change**

The genesis of the DPC methodology was forged during the resurgence of the historic and violent sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland. Initially, this proceeded largely through experiences gained through the work of the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland. Corrymeela is Northern Ireland's oldest and largest Peace and Reconciliation organisation, originally founded in 1965. There were no methodological blueprints or university courses on peacebuilding and conflict management at that time, so the work, in the midst of the fracturing and violence, emerged through trial and error. However, over time a robust methodical praxis evolved.

Colin Craig often tells the story of how the method got its name. In recognizing the need for a method that would heighten the understanding of conflicts and why they emerge, and put an emphasis on dialogue and understanding, various members of an international network came together to suggest ways forward. The name “dialogue for understanding” was suggested, but contentions were raised. The argument was: we can have a dialogue, and end up understanding each other fully, knowing and understanding exactly why we would like to go ahead and kill each other. The presumption that understanding will solve everything was strongly rejected. What needed to be better understood was conflict's inherent role in all processes of change. Understanding in itself would not necessarily support peaceful change without a serious effort to enhance empathic communication,

listening, and a process that is designed to support constructive ways forward. Additionally, it was agreed that sustainable peaceful change needs to be initiated by the parties in conflict themselves, so that they have full ownership over the solutions and the communication of those solutions to the wider community.

**“The presumption that understanding will solve everything was strongly rejected. What needed to be better understood was conflict’s inherent role in all processes of change.”**

All change is, in Colin’s words, conflict. The key is how to prevent it from becoming fracturing or violent.

Dialogue for Peaceful Change is a highly adaptable method, because of its unique focus on human nature during conflict. Everyone experiences conflict, and all human beings are biologically wired to react to conflict in very similar ways. DPC makes it a point to understand this biological aspect of conflict, because it helps us to understand why we react the way we do, and why others react the way they do. This understanding is the first step towards change.

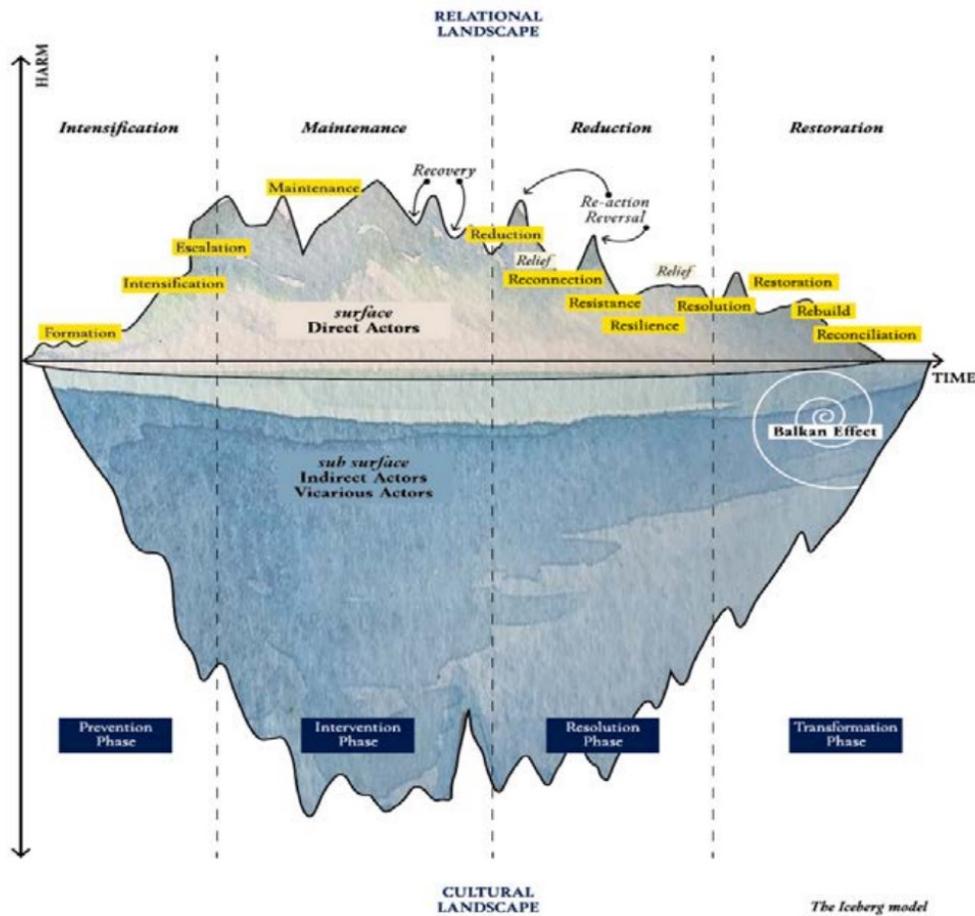
Adding to this, DPC delves deeply into the social workings of conflict and introduces a model that describes how we are often driven by social perceptions of success, which on the flipside create fears of becoming an outsider, alienated, poor, powerless, unfree or scapegoated. Identifying these social influences opens another possibility for change and transformation. We can move to a different value system, where we are not driven by fear of losing influence or not belonging, and instead see the value in interdependence, equity, transcendence and diversity in creating lasting change.

At the heart of DPC lies the Iceberg Model, which has spoken most strongly to our various participants so far (see page 26).

In DPC, the Iceberg Model looks at the evolution of a conflict and its beginning, middle and end. However, it is not very often that we can truly see the end of a conflict, given that true resolution and transformation of a conflict is rare.

This iceberg recognizes that in addition to the direct actors in a conflict, the indirect actors are also involved at all times, brewing and cementing the storyline of the conflict. The fire might die, and the guns might be put away, but at any time a small spark can draw on the deep story that is stored in the bottom of the iceberg and rapidly ignite an escalation of the conflict.

The iceberg is normally drawn on two axes: the level of harm on the y-axis and time on the x-axis. As we move through the conflict, the direct actors go through a series of stages. What happens under the surface is what is perhaps the most interesting, from a conflict resolution point of view: as the direct actors engage in conflict, they are continuously creating an underside of the iceberg that involves many more actors – indirect actors – who also have very real feelings and opinions about the conflict in which the direct actors are involved.



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In terms of the iceberg, as peacemakers, we need to know where we are in the conflict in order to know which action to take: whether we are in the preventative phase, intervention phase, resolution phase or the transformative phase. Equally, we need to address the underside of the Iceberg, even if the direct actors have come to a resolution and have managed to transform their relationship, and have reduced the damage in their relationship to 0. If they do now address the indirect actors' and the story that they hold about the conflict, then the risk will always be that the conflict recycles itself whenever there is a spark.

What is needed is a deeper understanding of, and ways of dealing with, the underlying storyline of the conflict. In DPC, we teach a method of how to do this, and participants get to experience first hand the effects and benefits of approaching a conflict this way.

## The Training

Of course, none of this would be possible without proper training. Fryshuset has trained 90 young leaders in the ages of 15-29 around Sweden in the DPC method over a three-year period. Those leaders are working in youth centres, organisations, and schools to prevent and mediate conflicts that arise, saving young people from ending up in destructive environments. Our experience tells us that without support, recognition and appreciation for the knowledge they are accruing, as well as rest from the intensity of conflicts, they are also at risk of burning out. Being on the frontlines is hard, stressful and extremely emotionally taxing work. Therefore, Fryshuset is running experiential mediation training to prepare them in dealing with daily situations at work, in school, on the streets or in their families. We often talk about "mediative behaviour" versus "mediation," arguing that the former is what we are more likely to engage in after the training.

## **The Concepts of Dialogue and Mediation**

The word “dialogue” is in the name of the method, yet mediation seems to be at the centre of it. How does DPC view the difference between these two concepts? We recognize that there is a range of ways to deal with conflict, from the very informal to the formal, and that dialogue is a part of every such process. What makes mediation unique is that it fully surrenders the ownership of the problem, and the solutions, to the parties in conflict. The mediators are simply there to be in charge of the process, which is what will hopefully enable the parties to find a constructive way forward. Equally, if the path is blocked, a mediator does not suggest solutions or present ideas. That would remove the ownership of the solution from the parties, and such a process would then become an arbitration or a negotiation, and our understanding is that it would negatively affect the sustainability of the peace process and ways forward. Mediation, in the world of DPC, is a facilitated dialogue directed at empowering the parties to arrive at joint problem-solving by enhancing their ability to listen empathically in a situation of conflict.



## **Interfaith Dialogue**

**Non-theological interfaith dialogue is among the most prolific and advanced fields of dialogue. Connecting faith communities who are often caught in global antagonism, its aim is to help participants escape this antagonism and transcend polarization. Though the criteria for participation is based on religious background, the range of topics addressed by interfaith dialogue is limitless, and one would not suspect the capacity of those groups to tackle any economic, social or political issue.**

**The MJC team offers a glimpse into the rich program it runs annually with young leaders from around the world, using a mix of powerful bonding activities, thematic committees, commemorative work, and action-oriented networking.**

**Samira Fatma Baručija (URI) narrates the story of Cooperation Circles, this effective global model for building strong ties between local communities.**

**The Coexister team describes their general member engagement program with a tool to help youth become aware of their biases.**

# **The Muslim Jewish Conference - An Immersive Interfaith Experience**

By the [Muslim Jewish Conference Team](#)

The Muslim Jewish Conference (MJC) is a dialogue-based leadership and educational non-profit based in Vienna, Austria. For over a decade, the MJC has brought together students, civil society workers, and other young leaders aged 18-35 from around the world for an immersive, multi-day interfaith experience.

The MJC has taken place annually in European locations including Paris, Sarajevo, Vienna, and Berlin, welcoming 50-150 participants for approximately 5 days of thematic presentations, skill-building workshops, capacity-building brainstorming, and informal discussions under the slogan: “we talk to each other, not about each other.” Participants represent a balanced array of Jewish and Muslim identity backgrounds, and atheist, agnostic, and Christian participants are also welcome. The MJC aims to provide participants with the tools and networks to address issues of concern for Jewish and Muslim communities on local, national, and local levels, including antisemitism, Islamophobia, and intersecting forms of race-based hatred. Thematic discussions aim to address topics including “Gender and Religion,” “Hate Speech and the Media,” “Breaking Stereotypes,” and “Commemoration and Remembrance,” and skill-building sessions provide participants with tools to engage in effective communication, to retain volunteers in their organisations, and to secure funding for their work.

The MJC engages uniquely with the tools of dialogue. Living, eating, and learning together for a number of days allows participants to engage deeply with one another, forming long-lasting bonds that humanize the “Other” in ways more deeply than a single conversation, course, session, or dialogue might achieve. When participants have shared stories about their families, workplaces, or hobbies over a meal the night before a dialogue exercise, they are more likely to acknowledge and engage with opposing viewpoints and convictions with compassion, understanding, and a will for personal and political transformation. In addition, strong bonds between participants, achieved through formal and informal dialogue, allow for deeper exchange of best practices and coalition-building for interfaith organisations, including and beyond dialogue work.

**“The MJC engages uniquely with the tools of dialogue. Living, eating, and learning together for a number of days allows participants to engage deeply with one another, forming long-lasting bonds that humanize the ‘Other’ in ways more deeply than a single conversation, course, session, or dialogue might achieve.”**

The 11<sup>th</sup> MJC, which took place online due to COVID-19 restrictions on global travel, was an incredibly successful virtual iteration of the conference. While the usual in-person exchanges that had served as the hallmark of the previous 10 annual conferences were not possible, dialogue activities took place in an intimate and convivial virtual space that proved productive. One particularly illustrative moment was the dialogue on commemoration.

Discussions and contestations regarding remembrance, memory, and the commemoration of events of atrocity cut across issues of personal and political concern. In past years, the MJC has facilitated visits to sites of historical atrocity, including Babi Yar in Ukraine and Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to work towards interfaith commemoration, prayer, and healing and to remind one another of the necessity to fight for justice and non-violence.

At the 11<sup>th</sup> MJC in December 2021, participants had a dialogue about contemporary remembrance and commemoration practices, and how they affect our daily lives, our political contexts, and global discussions about violence and repair. While visiting sites of violence is a critical tool for combating genocide denial, engaging in a discussion on memory virtually fostered a space for bringing personal and for sharing perspectives that might feel too personal, ahistorical, or contentious to bring up at a site of historical atrocity. Participants from the UK, Israel, Germany, and the U.S. discussed questions such as: does commemoration work always benefit communities who have suffered, or do they sometimes risk conferring prestige on perpetrator that have historically caused harm? How do different experiences of suffering bump up against one another in public space, and how does this vary across different countries? How do we commemorate ongoing violence, such as border violence, as well as historical events? Sharing personal stories to back up their broader convictions allowed participants to engage with opposing viewpoints and with people who have vastly different experiences. For instance, participants discussed the complexity of feeling like a “victim” in their communities, while also supporting the impulse to “never forget.” They discussed the narratives of suffering that are crowded out by a focus on events in the past, as state actors, teachers, friends and family prefer to address bygone eras rather than the contemporary issues that surround them, and in which they may be complicit. Comparisons of violence can often be incredibly divisive both personally and politically, but this virtual exchange invited participants to engage in a controlled dialogue in order to share their feelings and ideas and to form solidarity across lines of difference.

The proof of MJC’s conceptual approach lies in the bonds it fosters among participants. The MJC has led to marriages, successful initiatives to provide asylum for refugees in crisis situations, and over 1,000 young leaders trained in the skills to replicate the interfaith dialogue they experienced at the conference itself.

We look forward to welcoming young interfaith leaders from around the globe to the next MJC.



# United Religions Initiative - Cooperation Circles

By Samira Fatma Baručija, Regional Coordinator for [URI](#) Multi-region

*We, people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions throughout the world, come together to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings. — Excerpt from the Preamble of URI's Charter*

With these profound words, the United Religions Initiative was founded in 2000. Over the past 21 years, URI has grown into the largest grassroots interfaith organisation in the world that includes nearly 1,000 Cooperation Circles (member groups) in more than 100 countries. URI is organized into eight regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, North America, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, and multi-regions.

United Religions Initiative (URI) is a global interfaith network that promotes peace and justice by engaging people at the grassroots level to bridge religious and cultural differences, and to work together for the good of their communities and the world. The purpose of the United Religions Initiative (URI) is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously-motivated violence, and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

URI cultivates and uplifts its global network through eight regional offices around the world and a Global Support Office based in San Francisco. URI is governed by a Global Council of Trustees elected by and from member Cooperation Circles (CCs).

In understanding URI, its values and its core principles, it is necessary to understand what the centre of URI is: Cooperation Circles. So what are the Cooperation Circles and what is their significance in URI?

URI has a network of member groups. These grassroots groups, called Cooperation Circles (CCs), are the foundational unit, the centre and the life of URI. Self-governing and self-funding, they bring people of all beliefs together to address the most pressing issues facing their communities, building bridges of compassion and understanding between people of different religious and cultural traditions. The global network presently consists of over 1086 CCs in 111 countries.

Working together, groups of URI members from diverse belief traditions identify and address pressing problems with grassroots ingenuity. Projects and programs undertaken by our CCs serve one or more of 14 Action Areas, including the Environment, Health & Social Services, Human Rights, Indigenous Peoples, Peacebuilding, Women, and Youth.

Cooperation Circles range from large interfaith organisations tackling violent extremism to small groups of neighbours getting together to support a local cause. The requirements of being a Cooperation Circle are simply to have at least 7 people representing 3 different faiths or traditions.

By coming together from our different backgrounds, being grounded personally and spiritually, we are able to build constructive relationships with others. Once relationships are formed, there is space for sharing our skills and ideas, and helping and inspiring one another. This, in turn, leads to our taking effective action together

to address core issues facing our communities and to work together in building a culture of peace, justice and healing.

## **Benefits of Belonging**

URI's network has been growing, and Cooperation Circles grow with it. Belonging to a network means a wide range of different things for different groups. Certainly, belonging to a network offers benefits to groups which are its members.

CONNECTION  
to opportunities for collaboration and collective action  
SUPPORT  
for projects and programs from URI and CCs  
GLOBAL REACH  
that elevates local groups and provides a platform for partnership  
GROWTH  
through training, education and visibility  
HOPE  
for a transformed, more peaceful world

Cooperation Circles bring unique diversity to URI. Each of them represents at least three different faith, religious or indigenous traditions. This diversity makes the network a great place for interfaith and intercultural encounters, dialogue and bridge-building.

Cooperation Circles have an important role in the URI's grassroots governance. URI's primary governing body, the Global Council, is comprised of Trustees who are elected from – and by – URI Cooperation Circles. Each region selects three Trustees to serve on the Global Council for a four-year term, providing guidance and overseeing URI's strategic growth.

By being part of the URI network, member groups experience connection across the world and feel supported in their work. They are able to share their skills, reach out for help where needed, and bring their stories and experiences to a global community. It's the power of relationship-building and honouring our collective desire for peace and justice that makes the model of Cooperation Circles so effective.

**“Each Cooperation Circle represents at least three different faith, religious or indigenous traditions. This diversity makes the network a great place for interfaith and intercultural encounters, dialogue and bridge-building.”**

## Cooperation and the Network

URI is calling on groups and individuals to join its network and explore many of the benefits of belonging to a global community. To bring the philosophical framework of URI into perspective and give it an actionable dimension, we need to list at least a few of practical benefits of being in our network.

Cooperation Circles often look for partners from the network for their local and global initiatives. Working with partners from the URI network offers great cultural, faith, geographical and age diversity. One great example of this kind of collaboration that continues to have an impact many years after its launch is 1000Kalema, meaning 1000 words. URI's Cooperation Circles were invited to share photographs that encompass interfaith and peacemaking, responding to the needs of their communities, sacred spaces, moments of inspiration, poignancy, or epiphany, faith, respect, and service.

Perri (P.K.) McCary is a Houston artist, educator, and social activist who works tirelessly to cultivate relationships across racial, gender, generational, and cultural divides. P.K. is a founding member of URI, and the co-founder of Think Peace International, a communications media network for peace activists and Cooperation Circle of URI. Perri McCary currently serves as a Global Council Trustee for URI. Here is Perri's story about the history of 1000Kalema, a generational and multi-cultural story:

*Morad al-Jarrah and I met in Jordan at a URI conference in 2010. He was a young, hip, college student who liked Rap music. I am an aging, educated storyteller/writer, black woman and I like jazz and classical music. He is Muslim. I am Christian. He also was interested in photography. I did marketing and graphic design. We started Skyping as soon as I got back to the States, and 80,000 Skype messages later, 1000Kalema was born. It started out as a Cooperation Circle for the Middle East and North Africa region, where Morad took storytelling to a new level. It was called NaYa (meaning "new"), a blog of uplifting photographs and stories that represented Middle Eastern culture and lifestyles of harmony. He became a youth ambassador for URI and he was excited about URI becoming a beacon of hope, a place to heal the wounds of conflict.*

*With the launch of Interfaith Harmony Week in 2011, it became clear that progress began with showing the world all the ways in which peace and justice manifest. We learned that it is not just about what we do, but who we are and what is created. The pictures are a testament that peace and justice can be witnessed in the stroke of a pen and in the vibrancy of a photograph. – P.K.*

1000Kalema gathered people from many different backgrounds, all working at the grassroots level to solve issues burdening their communities. Photographs that were submitted for the competition and the campaign showcased what interfaith means for different people, how important it is and how much interest the global community has for hearing stories from the grassroots. Photographs helped to elevate everyday stories from the lives of people who do and live interfaith. Stories from the photographs started important conversations about what challenges people doing interfaith work had to overcome, and how important an interfaith approach is for their communities because it addresses many of the issues with which they struggle. The exhibition of all the photographs that were submitted travelled around the world and were presented in different interfaith venues, telling the stories of URI's Cooperation Circles and the impact of their interfaith work locally and globally. Besides the impact this initiative had on the wider community, it created a long-lasting impact on the team that worked on the project together, and a partnership that continued over years.

A more recent effort of bringing Cooperation Circles together and using the benefits of belonging to the

Network is the URI Youth Connection Café.

The URI Youth Connection Café is a virtual meeting place where young people across URI can meet each other, network, share projects and discuss relevant issues from different contexts. It invites members of URI once a month to join a conversation between young people around the world. These monthly encounters offer a chance to meet like-minded peacebuilders and interfaith activists in URI and to engage in dialogue about meaningful topics for young people around the globe.

A very important aspect of these encounters is the process of preparing for each of the meetings, as a different youth-based CC takes the lead in hosting the conversation and shaping the agenda with current questions, previous experiences, and meaningful stories. This model inspires a sense of shared leadership amongst CCs, and encourages the agency of grassroots organisations to be the leaders of global conversations. Young members of URI have successfully engaged in finding global solidarity, discussing relevant issues, and finding ways to tackle them through their local and global work.

One of the greatest outcomes of these encounters are long-lasting partnerships and projects CCs implement through their work. The Youth CC space continuously offers an opportunity to hear different perspectives, learn about cultural, religious, faith or indigenous backgrounds that inform our thinking and actions, and find ways to work together to heal the divides of our communities through joint action and compassion.



# Coexister - The Meaning of Active Coexistence

By the [Coexister<sup>1</sup>](#) Team

Coexister is an educational movement fostering peace-building among young people of different religions and beliefs. Coexister aims to develop a more cohesive society by facilitating and encouraging interconvictional exchanges. Coexister aspires to create systemic change that allows the development of positive, sustainable peace through the model of Active Coexistence.

Active Coexistence is a societal model and pedagogy implemented by Coexister. *Diversity of convictions, unity in action* is the challenge Coexister wishes to take up. We develop Active Coexistence via three types of action: Dialogue, Solidarity and Storytelling/ raising awareness.

## Dialogue

Activities of dialogue are useful to learn about each other and understand each other. At Coexister, dialogue workshops can take different formats such as: icebreakers, a ‘debate coffee’ (Kawaa), games, cultural visits, etc. On the next page you will find a detailed example of a dialogue activity called the “icebreaker.”

## Solidarity

Solidarity actions allow us to go beyond dialogue by acting together, in service to society. Under the slogan: “diversity in convictions, unity in through action,” Coexister organises various donations (clothes and toys), blood donations, as well as popular mobilization tools. For example: during the 2016 solidarity week, 15 members of Coexister participated in activities in a refugee camp with the non-profit *Utopia*. The actions of solidarity are easily accessible for any member, and allow young people to meet each other and learn to work together.

## Storytelling and Raising Awareness

Storytelling and awareness workshops allow our members to become agents of Active Coexistence by sharing their experiences at Coexister and learning to de-construct prejudices. For example, Coexister members go to various schools or public events to raise awareness around various convictions, teaching participants to de-construct prejudices through games, alongside essentials to listen to and understand each other.

## Example of a Dialogue Activity: The Icebreaker

The objective of the icebreaker activity is to get to know each other, develop a friendly and safe space to create a first contact and facilitate exchange, get to know the people in the group, and set a convivial mood and a dynamic energy for the event.

Take 10 minutes to go through one of the icebreaker activities proposed here with the participants of your activity.

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<sup>1</sup> If you wish to learn more about the actions of Coexister and eventually join or create a Coexister group in your city, contact us at [contact@coexister-giym.com](mailto:contact@coexister-giym.com)

Title	How does it work?
Introducing names	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each participant gives their name</li> <li>• Each participant gives their name and an adjective that starts with the first letter of their name</li> <li>• Each participant gives their name and their mood for today</li> </ul>
What do we have in common?	<p>Gather the participants. Propose the participants to explore their similarities and differences in tastes.</p> <p>Some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those who prefer salty tastes to the right, those who prefer sweet tastes go to the left</li> <li>• Those who come from the North and those who come from the South</li> <li>• Those who like football and those who prefer rugby</li> </ul>
The Game of “E”	<p>Place a piece of paper with an E written in the centre of it. The participants are placed around the paper sheet and explain what they can observe from their point of view. The goal is to become aware of the various ways to observe the E. Depending on your position, you will see an E, a 3, a M or a W.</p>
Everyone in a line!	<p>Arrange the participants in two equal groups. The goal of the game is to see which group will be able to stand in a line the quickest, according to criteria given by the icebreaker coordinator. After enunciating the criteria (height, age, alphabetical order, etc.), count until 10 to allow the participants to have some time to organise themselves. If a group finishes before you have counted to 10, the members of the group then raise their hands to signal it. The group who completes the task first and most correctly wins the game.</p>
The questions box	<p>Create a box with questions. Write the questions and write a number from 1 to 10 as well on each question. Give a number to each of the participants; they will have to memorize this number. Then, the participants have to pick a question from the box (at random) and ask the question to the person whose number is written on the question.</p>



## **Interfaith Dialogue in Education**

**Within the broad field of interfaith dialogue, many initiatives exist to educate young children and teenagers on the realities of religious diversity. As learning is at the core of dialogue, it is a privileged tool for educators.**

**Milena Parland, Noor Assad and Joséphine Holmström (Ad Astra) introduce a pedagogical tool, using dialogue and specifically targeted at young children, to help them explore the concepts of privilege and race and increase their open-mindedness towards those with other identities.**

**Henri Foucart (GIP78) considers the possibility of true interreligious dialogue, and provides a detailed answer through a three-step approach. He also describes a specific process and pedagogy to bring this interreligious awareness to schools.**

# Ad Astra - Interfaith Dialogue for Toddlers and Youngsters

By Milena Parland, Noor Assad and Joséphine Holmström – [Ad Astra](#)

How can you promote dialogue when it comes to toddlers? How can faith traditions and cultural heritage be shared respectfully and equally in schools?

Ad Astra offers methods to work with promoting dialogue in educational institutions. We have resources for how to work with toddlers and their pedagogues. Storytelling, arts and shared meals are in focus, and we create spaces and events where children can open their eyes and ears to faith traditions and cultural heritage through sharing gestures, movements and thoughts.



When the children grow older, they are offered more advanced materials, such as stories based on legends linked to feasts from various traditions. We have realized that 6-year-old children are fascinated by tales, and also by different languages. They pick up words easily, they love adventures and bravery, and when their pedagogues stand up for the traditions they introduce, the still-unknown or new becomes something desirable. Ad Astra also helps pedagogues and their young students to highlight and celebrate feasts from different faiths.

**“When children’s pedagogues stand up for the traditions they introduce, the still-unknown or new becomes something desirable.”**

For teenagers, Ad Astra brings in norm-critical workshops and storytelling techniques. The Together for Finland project (TFF) is a community of young people with knowledge about majority/minority issues, cultural and religious diversity. In our work we promote anti-racism and human rights, and we analyze power structures, dig into theories of intersectionality, and engage in dialogue through study circles and workshops. We also provide young storytellers for schools. During the pandemic, we have been able to focus on digital storytelling formats, which will be adapted to our post-pandemic activities as well since, we were able to serve schools that are located outside the Capital area without making crucial compromises in our storytelling sessions. TFF also arranges food-sharing events around different religious feasts, such as Ashura and Diwali, where attendees from diverse backgrounds make traditional food together and learn about the feast. Ad Astra’s TFF team works in cooperation

with Tillsammans för Sverige and Fryshuset in Stockholm, and is part of the international Anna Lindh network.

This year, Ad Astra started a new project offering interactive workshops on anti-racism based on storytelling, drama pedagogy and academic theory for university teachers and administrative staff. So far, workshops have been carried out at Helsinki University. One thing we've been doing is analyzing the power wheel and thinking of our own positions, which is always a very appreciated exercise. Here is the explanation we use in the workshop:

*Our surroundings, both chosen and perceived, have a significant impact on how we navigate through the world and how we interact with one another.*

*The power wheel (see page 40) is a representation of how different social characteristics are divided and ranked in our society. The closer to the centre, the more privilege and power. The closer to the outer border, the more disadvantage we face both socially and economically. This power wheel is applied to a **Finnish context**.*

*It's important to remember that different people have power in different contexts. That's why it is essential to have an intersectional perspective when talking about privilege, power and identity. We will talk more about intersectionality in the second workshop.*

*Different characteristics can mean different forms of power and privilege in different spaces, which make them hard to compare. Aspects such as skin color are visible and impossible to hide, whereas others, e.g. academic education, are only visible on paper. This is an important thing to keep in mind when thinking about privilege.*

Here comes an exercise:

*How do you identify/position yourself in relation to the power wheel? Where in the wheel would you place yourself? Are any important categories missing (e.g. language)?*

*Take a couple of minutes to think about yourself and the wheel and write down your reflections (3 minutes).*

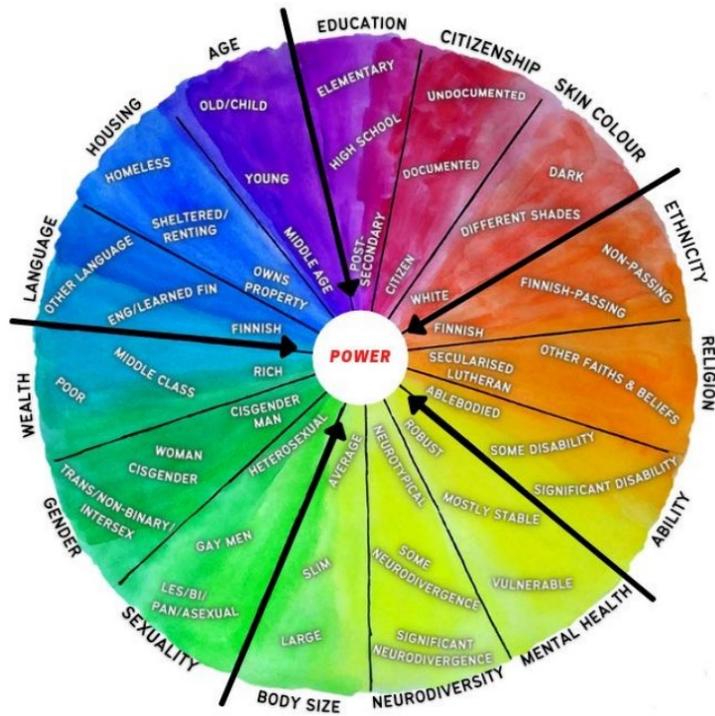
Next exercise:

*Now we'll go into pairs and reflect together (7 minutes). Remember the "braver space" rules when we go into the groups. You choose what you want to share; you always have the choice to be confidential.*

1. How does it feel to acknowledge your position (privilege or lack of it)?
2. How often do you think about privilege and how it plays a role in your life?

*When engaging in a discussion on sensitive topics, it is always crucial to remember the wheel of power and identify your position in the given situation. More privilege means more listening.*

Wheel of power and privilege



Original: [ccweb.ca](http://ccweb.ca) adapted by Sylvia Duckworth  
 Translated to Finnish by Michaela Moua 2021  
 Adapted for Ad-Astra by Vera Lindén 2021

Ad Astra



# **GIP78 - The “three-part contributions in schools” Experience**

by Henri Foucard, [GIP78](#)<sup>1</sup>

## **Our general objectives**

The aim of the Yvelines Interreligious Group for Peace (GIP78) is to contribute to peace and to better “live together” in the city, to develop knowledge of different religious traditions among young people, and to make them curious to meet believers of other religions or representatives of other cultures.

## **Our conviction**

We are convinced that well-interpreted religions are a factor for peace. But we are aware that a great deal of work is to be done to make this goal a success. We work locally so that in the Yvelines French department, people of different religions and/or cultures know each other and respect each other. In our society, the confrontation of different religions and cultures is becoming ever more important. They must meet, not collide, so we can live in peace.

**“We are convinced that well-interpreted religions are a factor for peace. But we are aware that a great deal of work is to be done to make this goal a success.”**

## **Our proposal<sup>2</sup>**

GIP78 offers an exchange of questions and answers between a group of young people and a team from GIP78 composed of a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim. Referring to the three degrees of learning to “live together,”<sup>3</sup> the goal of this exchange is three-way:

- depending on the level already reached in terms of knowledge of other religions and cultures, to complement or create the discovery of the “Other,” correct some misconceptions or prejudice;
- to provide the opportunity for a personal encounter with that person from the other religion and culture since, to each question, the answer is mainly given by a person of that particular tradition;
- to realize that commitment is possible by showing that people, after having met, engage together in an action for peace, with the view of “living better together in the city.”

Practically:

Our program occurs within the framework and the extension of the teaching about religion (cf. Régis Debray report in 2002). It recommends, first of all, to raise awareness about other cultures/religions, whether in the context of informal exchanges, of a teaching program, or through discussions on current events. From this awareness arise questions that young people ask themselves and that they would like to ask others. Teachers

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1 *GIP78: Groupe Interreligieux pour la Paix des Yvelines* (Interreligious Group for Peace of the Yvelines French department) is the local section of Religions for Peace’s global movement ([www.rfp.org](http://www.rfp.org))

2 More information : [http://www.gip78.fr/Files/milieu\\_scolaire\\_2.pdf](http://www.gip78.fr/Files/milieu_scolaire_2.pdf) (in French)

3 See [below](#)

should guide young people towards practical questions and experience-based responses, as opposed to more intellectual and theoretical arguments.

The exchange itself should be focused on these questions and answers, without prior presentation on the represented religions and cultures. Questions may be prepared before the meeting; they may also arise from the first exchanges. The presence of the “trio,” fundamental in our proposal, makes it possible to go beyond the simple exchange of a question about a religion / culture and an answer by its representative. Indeed, the “trio” tries as much as possible to respond with several perspectives:

- reformulation of the question (or the answer) by someone from the same cultural/ religious group of the “questioner” since, from one culture to another, one must first learn to understand;
- extension of the question (or answer) to a similar or different reality in another culture because, from one culture to another, similar words hide different realities, and common realities are obscured by different expressions;
- and, quite simply, details and additions given by someone who took a step back during the response of another member of the trinomial.

## **Important notes**

1. It is not a question of catechism, even less of proselytism, but of showing concretely the citizens of tomorrow that religions, properly understood, may and must be factors of peace and reconciliation in order to peacefully live together, with respect for secularism. In this spirit, we would like one or more members of the school to participate in the exchange.

2. Such a meeting must find its place in an educational project. It must be preceded by

- a presentation to the head teacher,
- a preparation of the intervention with the teachers,
- and followed, if possible, by a review.

Appendix 1 details this process.

3. We have an exhibition that can be part of the educational project and facilitate an awareness for the pupils: the exhibition “Torah, Bible, Coran, Livres de parole” (Books of God’s word: Torah, Bible, Koran) of the National Library of France (10 illustrated panels of 60x80cm). It is presented on the BNF website: <http://expositions.bnf.fr/parole/>; educational links are available.

## **Appendix 1: Procedure**

### *Presentation of the contribution*

1. Meeting with the head teacher: Presentation of the process: its objectives, its progress, articulation with the school project and mode of participation among teachers of philosophy, literature, history, etc.

2. Meeting with the teachers: Presentation of the speakers and their association (GIP78); presentation/discussion of the project, its objectives and its approach.

### *Preparation of the contribution*

3. Work meeting between the project manager appointed by the school head and the GIP78 stakeholders to define the students and teachers concerned, as well as the main modalities of the contribution (dates, place, number of pupils for each gathering).

4. Work meeting chaired by the project manager with the teachers concerned and the GIP78 speakers to present (if necessary) the BNF exhibition, support for contributions, and define how to interest students in it.

#### *Contribution (1.5 hours)*

5. Presentation of the three speakers (a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim) and the objectives of the “living together” project carried by the GIP78.

6. Collecting their questions from the students.

7. Answers provided by the three speakers and debate.

#### *Follow-up*

8. Assessment of the contribution with the head-teacher, the project manager and GIP78 stakeholders: interest aroused, student participation, impact in terms of openness to inter-culturality, possible follow-up.

## **Appendix 2: Founding principles of interreligious dialogue**

*This section is a translation in English of the keynote summary of Henri Foucard's<sup>4</sup> contribution in a conference organized by Religions for Peace – France on May 25, 2021 with the title “Enjeux du dialogue interreligieux dans une société sécularisée” (“issues of interreligious dialogue in a secularized society”).*

*Henri Foucard addressed the question “Un vrai dialogue interreligieux est-il possible?” (“Is true interreligious dialogue possible?”). Minutes of conference contributions (in French) have been published on Religions for Peace – France web site ([www.religionspourlapaix.fr](http://www.religionspourlapaix.fr)).*

The terminology: “Is true interreligious dialogue possible?”

Let's first look at the word “dialogue.” We may speak of a culture of dialogue and encounters. A quote from Pope Francis “Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter.”<sup>5</sup> Clearly a human being spends their life enriching themselves through dialogue with others, integrating what they receive in their own way. This dialogue makes it possible to acquire strong convictions. On the contrary, the refusal of dialogue, the tension of identity, are the sign that we do not perceive ourselves as strong enough to approach with confidence dialogue with someone else, and accept the changes that will result for us and for them. The refusal of dialogue, based on a feeling of precarity amplified by globalization (on which far-right populism, communitarianism and religious fundamentalism thrive, is actually alienating; it is the closed-minded stance that “they're all the same!”

Then let us explore the word “interreligious.” This means “between religions,” between people and

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4 As published on Religions for Peace – France web site ([www.religionspourlapaix.fr](http://www.religionspourlapaix.fr)).

5 Fratelli tutti n° 215 - quotation from VINICIUS DE MORAES, Samba da Benção, from the recording Um encontro no Au bon Gourmet, Rio de Janeiro (2 August 1962).

communities that practise a different religion. What does religion bring to dialogue? It might be the way that the “Other” is considered. When it comes to a Christian sensitivity, one learns to see the face of God deep in the heart of every human one meets, allowing us to respect that person and to recognize their uniqueness.

Now, can this dialogue be true? The words “interreligious dialogue” sometimes make us imagine a preacher trying to convince or convert others. The Christian Church itself asks to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. Can we have a real dialogue without a hidden agenda in this situation? In fact, dialogue and proselytism are two very different things: everyone can testify about what makes them live without necessarily seeking to convince! Religious pluralism is meaningful. As the monk Christian de Chergé says: “Let us show that our religions should not oppose each other, but that they are pearls forming a magnificent necklace thanks to a divine thread. All of them differ apparently, but each contribute to enhance the incomparable lustre of the necklace that God gave to mankind.”<sup>6</sup>

## Different Aspects of Dialogue

We may distinguish between several aspects of this dialogue, and see how to improve it in each of these aspects: everyday life dialogue, dialogue while acting together, theological dialogue, or dialogue around the spiritual experience. These aspects are easily mixed up in the gatherings we have, but let’s explore them one by one.

1) *Everyday life dialogue* is dialogue among people who rub shoulders at work, as neighbours, in leisure time, or with their family. This dialogue sometimes deals with elements associated with religion: rituals, food, or other obligations, the community dimension, culture, etc.

Of course, the elements of culture and religion are important; they have enriched each other over the centuries, and can aim to avoid violence, balance relationships, and stabilize the family. It is important, however, not to dwell too much on these elements which are not the spiritual essence of religion.

Moreover, this dialogue of everyday life exists thanks to social and religious diversity and also to a consensual secularism. Public authorities are thoroughly encouraged to promote this diversity. It is actually a cumulative phenomenon: religious diversity in the educational institutions and at work leads to religious diversity in relationships and families.

2) *Dialogue while acting together* takes place, for example, in joint humanitarian work. It is not only about “working together” (through an alliance of religions for a more interdependent world), but also about having dialogue based on one’s own faith’s commandments. It is also an introduction to theological dialogue.

3) To enter into *theological dialogue*, one should give meaning to religious pluralism, respecting the faith of others without considering that all religions are equivalent, which would mean thinking of one’s faith in relative terms instead of enriching it.

Every religion offers spiritual resources to those who seek God, and of course faith and reason are both necessary to find the truth. One has to identify sectarian drifts where all the criteria of a religion are not satisfied. A religion must respect human life, encourage solidarity, allow its followers to reconcile, and accept that the world is transforming.

In this theological dialogue it is possible to come together through the different expressions of the same

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6 Christian de Cherge, *L’invincible espérance*, Montrouge, Bayard, 2010, p. 112

reality. It is also possible to deepen studies on major themes such as evil, sin, God's omnipotence, etc.

The confrontation of different truths can often lead to the discovery of a deeper one. Regardless, the immediate vision of truth is given only to those who contemplate it in God: it is a vision for life in the hereafter.

- 4) In *dialogue around religious experience*, each participant tries, while being true to their own truth, to celebrate a truth which overcomes not only the limits but the incompatibilities between each religious tradition.

In so doing, one gets closer to others as well as to God. Consider the image of the pyramid, with God above, never really accessible on this earth. Each one, in their own spiritual itinerary, climbs on one side of the pyramid, becoming closer to God and at the same time to others. In the end, we will all meet in heaven.

### **Contributions of interreligious dialogue**

What is the value of this interreligious dialogue? There is the individual contribution of mutual conversion: rediscovering with new eyes one's own identity, while being provoked by the elements of truth witnessed by others' religions. But there is also a benefit for the whole society by correctly replacing God in this world.

1. Recognizing that God reveals himself through human history: we look at modernity with a positive eye and acknowledge its achievements, materialised in particular by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: for instance, the equality of men and women, the sacrosanct price of human life whatever the promise of eternal life, the freedom of conscience and religious freedom, free consent to marriage, the right to material well-being, and reciprocal independence of state and religious institutions.

2. Giving space to merciful God: we do not let people get locked in morbid guilt in relation to the collective sin of participating in social injustices, environmental degradation, etc., and on the contrary allow people to face their faults and failures to trust God.

3. There is a need for a religious type of hope in opposition to today's idolatry (money, power, sex, sport, holidays, etc.) where people seek the satisfaction of their existential quest.

As adherent of interreligious dialogue (at least within the scope of the Abrahamic religions), we are convinced that Islamo-Judeo-Christian humanism brings a vision of humans "living with" one another that is a counter-culture and alternative to the cultural imperialism of consumption. And on this subject, we may also motivate agnostics and atheists in the context of an inter-convictional dialogue.

**“We are convinced that Islamo-Judeo-Christian humanism brings a vision of humans ‘living with’ one another that is a counter-culture and alternative to the cultural imperialism of consumption.”**

## Local practice of dialogue at GIP78

After these theoretical considerations, let us have a look at some modest examples of local dialogue in Yvelines, France, as part of GIP78.

For the GIP78, “living together in the city” implies two actions:

- the first is to know, in a fair way, without preconception, the history and the content of the religions and cultures of those other human groups who live next to us; it is the discovery of religions and cultures;
- the second action is to meet faces, real people, among these “Others,” in order to establish bonds of esteem with one and another; it is the gathering of people.

These two actions are not necessarily successive stages; meeting people often leads to curiosity and discovery of each person’s religion and culture. In any case, we may consider that one (meeting) is undoubtedly more important than the other (discovery): mutual knowledge and mutual respect, between a Jew, a Christian, a Muslim, will do more for peace than the intellectual discovery of the other’s religion and culture alone.

- Then we get to a third degree: we learn that beyond differences, there are common values that bring us together and we can commit together to promote them; it is the joint commitment.



## **Dialogue and the Arts**

**Artistic intercultural exchange is probably one of the oldest forms of dialogue and bridge-building. The final contributions of this book describe three experiences of art-focused interreligious and intercultural festivals.**

**Anja Fahlenkamp (Faiths in Tune) describes her format of interfaith arts and music festivals and explains how such events can be a great complement to more “classic” dialogue approaches through the building of arts-based human connections.**

**Danylo Kolasa and Anson Samuel (The Upper Room) narrate the deep transformations that take place in their youth interfaith camp, where participants address and heal religious and political divides through joint artworks.**

**Dennis Kirschbaum (JUMA) describes the Muslim Jewish festival, which presents cultural producers and artists of Jewish and Muslim backgrounds in Berlin to showcase the creative diversity of both communities.**

# **Faiths in Tune - Furthering Interfaith Dialogue Through Music**

By Anja Fahlenkamp, Founder and Director, [Faiths in Tune](#)

The brilliant Jimi Hendrix once said: “music is my religion.” While music may not exactly classify as a religion, few will dispute that music can have a spiritual quality to it, and is a powerful vehicle in spiritual praxis. Moreover, in the context of my work with Faiths in Tune, I have also found that music is an extremely powerful vehicle for interfaith dialogue, and in this contribution I will outline why those wishing to build bridges across religious divides may wish to turn to musical formats, too.

**“While music may not exactly classify as a religion, few will dispute that music can have a spiritual quality to it, and is a powerful vehicle in spiritual praxis.”**

## **A Student Initiative with Unimagined Potential**

During my studies at SOAS, University of London in 2011-2012, I organised an interfaith music festival for the first time, which would turn out to be only the first of many such festivals under the title “Faiths In Tune,” with the motivation to create a comfortable and artistic space for exchange between students of different religious backgrounds. Debates around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had created a tense environment, which made conversation around religion difficult, and I felt that music might offer a good context in which to enjoy each other’s differences and learn about each other. This is not to say that discussions and debates are not important – quite the opposite, since as a political scientist I think such discussions and debate are crucial to our learning and progressing as a society. However, I propose that music and personal encounters can help establish a foundation of mutual curiosity and sympathy, and in the long run maybe even friendship and trust, that can make it easier to have a debate and disagreements around difficult political topics without ultimately parting ways as enemies.

It turned out that music is not just a great way to ease tensions around difficulties of opinions and identities. Very quickly, the Faiths in Tune festivals grew beyond the university walls (as well as beyond London and the UK) to become a regular forum that religious communities would look forward to and rely on because the festivals offer not just an enjoyable vehicle but also a safe space for personal exchanges across the boundaries of religious and cultural background. I propose that dialogue achieves its greatest impact when it takes place in the context of, or in combination with, meaningful personal encounters and shared experiences. Music offers a powerful way of creating or amplifying such meaningful personal encounters and shared experiences. Thus, music can complement and enrich verbal dialogue formats by serving as an icebreaker, as a tool to build sympathy and raise interest, as a facilitator for trust, vulnerability and safe spaces, as well as a vehicle for non-verbal communication.

As a great supporter of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, I have found that conventional dialogue formats often face challenges and difficulties related to scope, content, community engagement and relevance that can be overcome when musical and artistic components are added. In the following, I would like to outline how and why music and art can help overcome common challenges in interfaith dialogue, and thus complement conventional dialogue formats to provide a foundation for a more open, genuine, inclusive and sustainable dialogue.

## How Music Helps Overcome Key Challenges in Interfaith Dialogue

The first set of challenges encountered in interfaith dialogue is related to questions around its content. Firstly, highly politicized debates around topics such as, for instance, the Israeli-Palestinian or the Indian-Pakistani conflict, typically represent variations of “the elephant in the room” that might eventually cause any dialogue to blow up. Most curators of dialogue events will be familiar with the challenge of designing the content of their programme to peacefully navigate such polemic and polarising debates. Music and art can be helpful tools to navigate the politicised minefield of inter-religious interaction, as they offer channels for participants to connect on a human and emotional level, rather than just an intellectual level. Connections that emphasize shared humanity can help to build sympathy, vulnerability and trust, which will eventually also make it easier to discuss difficult topics.

Second, dialogue around religion often focuses on religious labels and categorisations to a problematic extent, by which human individuality and personal stories disappear behind static, rigid abstract images of religious communities. When the content of dialogue focuses too much on what this or that religion or community believes, does, or wants in a generalising manner, participants may feel forced into labelled boxes that do not sufficiently accommodate or reflect the many nuances of intra-faith diversity and of individual belief, practice, or simply human nature. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has very helpfully described this as “the danger of a single story:” when only one singular story is told about a group of “others,” this may lead to default assumptions, conclusions and decisions that reproduce misunderstandings, divisions and conflicts. This is where music, art and other formats of shared personal encounters and experiences can prove helpful, as they are well suited to showcasing individuality and intra-faith diversity, and as they can humanise members of religious communities in a way that makes each and every one of us relatable and likeable.

Another common challenge of interfaith dialogue is its scope. Many practitioners of dialogue will be familiar with the idea of “preaching to the choir,” meaning that those persons who show up to a dialogue event are the ones who are already interested in dialogue and in religion. More often than not, people who are not interested in entering an exchange with others who adhere to different religions will not show up to interfaith dialogue events. This holds even more true for people who don’t ascribe themselves to any religion at all, as negative stigma are increasingly attached to religion, particularly in countries with high levels of secularisation. Faiths in Tune, however, has managed to establish a format that succeeds in broadening this narrow scope. Compared to other formats that emphasize verbal exchanges, music and art tend to have a very low threshold to participation and have thus managed to reel in a very large and diverse audience, including non-religious persons. Here, participants can listen and experience from a more passive point of view and gradually increase their level of engagement, participation and exchange with members of different religious backgrounds according to what they feel personally comfortable with.

**“Compared to other formats that emphasize verbal exchanges, music and art tend to have a very low threshold to participation and have thus managed to reel in a very large and diverse audience, including non-religious persons.”**

Moreover, formats that feature musical components, such as the Faiths in Tune festivals, can reach a broader audience by minimising structural barriers that often hinder participation in other dialogue formats. Such barriers typically include professional status, socio-economic background (the entrance to the festival is typically free), gender, family status (programmes are geared to various age groups, including families and children), language, educational background, and more. By not restricting access to the dialogue event along any of these criteria, music formats and festivals can offer a highly inclusive format that brings together people from all different walks of life.

Linked to the challenge of scope is the question of whether and to what extent a given dialogue format succeeds in engaging and mobilising religious communities. The majority of conventional interfaith dialogue formats and programmes continue to be limited to participants of the Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Islam, Judaism), or sometimes the “big five” (Abrahamic faiths and Buddhism and Hinduism), and occasionally and depending on the location, Baha’i or Sikh representatives; even more rarely, representatives of indigenous faith traditions may be invited, too. This leads to observation that interfaith dialogue often fails to engage a broad diversity of religious communities. This failure is not necessarily due to a deliberate effort to exclude certain communities, but rather due to the fact that conventional dialogue formats are still largely based on positions of authority or scripture-based conversations that make it difficult to accommodate (largely non-Western) traditions which are not scripture-based, institutionalised, centralised or hierarchized like the Abrahamic three, and to a lesser extent the “big five.”

Even when dialogue formats make an effort to include minority or otherwise marginalised religious communities, this often only happens in a token-like manner rather than on equal footing. However, being allowed in the room is not the same as having a seat at the table, and even having a seat at the table is not the same as having a word in setting the agenda. Many conventional dialogue formats are thoroughly hierarchized, dominated by certain religious institutions (most commonly Christian) – reflected also in the choice of non-neutral venues, such as churches – which can make it difficult, if not impossible, for participating communities to meet at an equal level and gain equal ownership of the dialogue.

Faiths in Tune, on the other hand, has created a format that helps surpass these challenges. It makes visible and empowers all participating communities, including small or marginalised communities that are not usually afforded a space at other dialogue forums. In addition, each community stands at equal height on the same stage, curating its own contribution to the programme without having to fit into an imposed agenda. This, in a neutral, non-religious venue, allows the participating communities to engage with each other at an equal level, achieving true ownership of the jointly-created festival, and avoiding hierarchies or the hegemony of any one particular group.

A third challenge related to community engagement is that dialogue formats often also fail to engage a diversity of people within certain communities, when they only invite community leaders but not everyday community members. Musical and other creative formats like the Faiths in Tune festivals, on the other hand, offer a grassroots approach by engaging entire communities beyond leaders both on- and off-stage. In this way, dialogue, rather than hoping for the diluted trickling down of its impact from leaders to the broader community, can actually reach the heart of communities in a bottom-up manner.

Finally, it is important to ask ourselves whether any given dialogue format is ultimately relevant. It is important that dialogue activities that we invest efforts, time and money into do not end up remaining just feel-good-events without any lasting impact. I believe that creating safe spaces to celebrate the beauty of our diversity and foster mutual interest, learning, understanding and trust is crucial to enabling people and religious communities to successfully face common challenges in the future. Recurring events such as an annual music festival series

help to build a sustainable, reliable forum of encounter and exchange which can serve as a long-term platform for friendship and cooperation. Several examples of religious communities that have started cooperations after meeting and engaging with each other at Faiths in Tune festivals prove that this approach can work well to foster cross-community cooperation.

Additionally, Faiths in Tune festivals have combined music and dance programmes with other components and opportunities for dialogue, learning, exchange and engagement. The festivals typically feature interactive workshops, including verbal dialogue sessions, which allow for personal exchanges on a smaller scale and with more intimacy and depth. Moreover, all Faiths In Tune festivals feature interfaith community fairs. At these fairs, which take place parallel to the stage programme within the festival space, attendees are introduced not only to different faith communities but also to civil society organisations, NGOs and charitable initiatives that promote an inclusive society. In this way, musical entertainment serves as a hook and as an icebreaker to attract a diverse audience, and then, once their interest has been stirred, additional spaces like the workshops and the interfaith fair offer them opportunities for further exchange, social engagement and activism, so that participants can continue to advocate for diversity and peaceful coexistence after and outside of the festival as well.

### **Employing Music as a Tool for Inclusive, Sustainable Dialogue**

Over the years, Faiths in Tune festivals have shown that music is an effective tool to foster a more inclusive and sustainable dialogue: it depoliticizes and humanises interfaith engagement, broadens the scope of its outreach, defuses tensions, facilitates a more inclusive and eye-to-eye community engagement, and enables participants and communities to build long-term cooperation and advocate for a diverse and peaceful society. The success of this model is apparent in the rapid expansion of the Faiths in Tune movement, with festivals and music events in the UK (London, Birmingham), Germany (Berlin, Cologne, Dresden, Lindau) and Italy (Turin), as well as fruitful cooperation with renown interfaith institutions and networks including Religions for Peace, the G20 Interfaith Forum, KAICIID or Dialogue Perspectives. As one of the founding members of the European Institute for Dialogue, Faiths in Tune is keen to continue to promote creative dialogue formats that feature music and art and that emphasize personal encounters and shared experiences, with the aim of fostering a more inclusive, effective and sustainable practice of interfaith dialogue.



# **The Upper Room - Dialogue at Knüpfwerk: a Musical Interreligious Youth Camp**

By Danylo Kolasa and Anson Samuel, [The Upper Room](#)

Quiet: the sole sounds of paper rustling, writing and breathing in the room filled a silence that is drenched with meaning. “Where do you find Job-like characters in the world today?” asks an animator conducting a workshop based on the title of the musical. One sticky note erupts into a dialogue. More than 50 adolescents from ages 14-22, of different countries, cultures, languages and religions in small, mixed groups are engaged in conversation, respect, care, and even admiration at Knüpfwerk, connecting youth through music. What is the meaning that the silence carries? It is common ground, reflection, relevance and reaction; seeing, reading, understanding and empathizing; hearing the meaning speaking quietly in the silence; dialogue.

Noise: the roaring sounds of applause, cries of jubilation, laughter and tears of joy explode in a room that a few minutes ago carried the haunting music of a story that captured the deepest questions of humanity. The story of Job is acted out by these same youth in a gripping, emotional, thought-provoking and joyful manner on the final day of the camp. There is celebration, respect, care and yes again, admiration; common experiences, talents, expression and teamwork; working together, singing together, playing, laughing, crying, creating; dialogue.

As the campfire embers that had just before illuminated the joyful summer night in a roaring flame die down, their glow casts light on some who sit wrapped in a blanket. Some have gone to bed; others spend more time cheerfully being together. The last notes of the closing common prayer still echo in the summer breeze. How did we get here?

## **Knüpfwerk – Interweaving Experiences**

The term *Knüpfwerk* derives from two German words: the first is “knüpfen,” or “to interweave.” It implies, on the one hand, tying together, and on the other hand, leaving enough room for each part to be its own. One could think of a tapestry made up of many colorful patches of fabric, which are distinctly different and set apart, nevertheless united to make a beautiful artwork. The other word, “Werk”, can mean a factory in which something is produced, but also means the result of the production, the product itself, while also bearing the meaning of the act of producing itself.

One could say Knüpfwerk is the place, product and act of interweaving. The name captures the philosophy of the project: creating a space where interreligious dialogue can happen, where dialogue can be lived. This means finding common ground and creating ties in friendship and working together, as well as allowing enough space for everyone to live out their own identity. This form of dialogue is implicit rather than explicit.

The idea for the camp was born out of an already existing musical about the protagonist in the Book of Job. The character of Job is present in three monotheistic religions, as well as a wide array of universal, existential topics, such as suffering, loss, evil, but also love, hope and joy touched upon in his story, offering a perfect common ground.

## Camp Structure

The camp offered many topics for discussion and sharing, and has the added benefit of giving many practical opportunities for dialogue as well as a structure to the time of encounter. By setting a common goal that is being worked toward, the performance at the end of the week, it provides a given structure to the week as well as many opportunities for a holistic exchange between participants. The musical shifts the focus away from a pure interreligious character, which sometimes tends to be artificial and characterized by prejudices, and sets it within a framework which allows for dialogue to happen naturally. One might even say the participants are “impelled” to live out the dialogue in the tasks and challenges of everyday life.

**“The musical shifts the focus away from a pure interreligious character, which sometimes tends to be artificial and characterized by prejudices, and sets it within a framework which allows for dialogue to happen naturally.”**

As a youth camp, Knüpfwerk is mainly aimed at an age group of adolescents between the ages of 14 and 20. This age group allows for a greater openness, willingness to get involved in projects and games as well as making new friends. As it is centred around adolescents, the camp also involves many others in the process: animators, project leaders, religious leaders overseeing the project, parents and many more. Again, this fosters an encounter and dialogue between these parties as they work together to create something good for those entrusted to them.

For now, Knüpfwerk involves participants from Austria, Germany, Israel and Palestine. Youth organisations of many religious organisations in these countries were contacted and invitations sent out to join the project. The result was a group of around 70 young people, well-distributed among the countries as well as (non-)religious affiliations. Faiths in Tune from Germany, and Magnificat Institute from Jerusalem, were the partner organisations who reached out to and brought a diverse group of young participants to the camp. The project thus fostered networking on many levels; first of all, on the level of the individual youth organisations themselves within the country and the local groups, second, the connection of these organisations on an international level, and third, the connection of the young people themselves.

As a musical project, Knüpfwerk was in need of an artistic team. This involved three teams of choreographers, actors and singers, each in groups of 2-3 each. A camp of this kind also necessitates a team of animators, who would keep the youth occupied and also be there for all questions and emergencies. For this purpose, it was important to have animators from all countries and religions in order to be able to best accommodate the needs of the participants. It was made clear to the artists that the intention was never to put up a perfect musical but to focus a lot on the process. To this effect, they were also given the freedom to improvise scenes, songs or dances. The animators also helped create the atmosphere with which everyone else can work. It was therefore essential for there to be robust collaboration and communication among the animators. This was an important factor in the choice of the people who were to be involved. Furthermore, the animators were invited to meetings ahead of time to begin getting to know each other and plan the sessions and mode of working together.

For this inter-religious event, it was important to involve representatives of the three monotheistic religions first in training the core team, in explaining about the topics that would be discussed theologically, and in overseeing the adaptation of a primarily christian musical to an interreligious audience. These representatives, a rabbi, an imam, as well as priest, were then asked to accompany us throughout the camp itself.

The methodology of the camp was not to explicitly aim at dialogue and discussion, but rather to create a space in which dialogue happened naturally because of the circumstances. The goal was to allow dialogue to be lived in a space that fostered respect, openness and friendship. The creation of this space was mirrored in the way each day was very intentionally planned. In order to allow for a more holistic dialogue, the program was designed to address the participants in their merely adolescent, cultural, spiritual, intellectual and artistic areas of life.

First, the adolescent area of life bears mentioning. It is the most important, as it sets the base for all else that was to happen during the week. Sharing the simple fact of being young and full of life makes the best prerequisite for being open to friendships. Relying on experiences the organizers had in other camps, Knüpfwerk made a point to stress this youth component.

### **The Three Main Pillars**

Games are a great way of breaking the ice and allowing for a smoother transition into getting to know one other. They are also a necessary break from the taxing and intense work that happens throughout the day. One important feature is their competitiveness, which helps create a team out of the random individuals that had been thrown together by chance. On the first day of the camp, the groups were divided into five teams of up to 8 participants. These teams were picked from the beginning by the organizers, trying to create groups as diverse as possible. Throughout the week, the teams could gather points with which they could win a prize at the end of the week. These points were given for winning games that were sprinkled into the program.

Meals served as a ritual and social act and a special place of encounter and dialogue. The participants were repeatedly reminded to do their best to sit at a different table at most meals, allowing for new conversation partners. Mealtimes provided a chance for dialogue and growing mutual sensitivity around the questions of dietary restrictions, since some of the participants ate kosher food, while others ate halal food, some were vegetarians, and some others even vegan. The waiting of the tables was entrusted to one team per day. This service allowed the teams to serve their fellow participants and to display courtesy while also working together as a team. The team was also charged with the task of leading everyone in a blessing at the beginning of the meal. They decided upon the form of this blessing among themselves. It was interesting to note that, without special instruction to do so, the prayers were a mix of sharing one's own belief as well as taking into account and respecting the others.

Free time served as the most important level of dialogue. It was the culmination of all the projects and points of the program. If the participants found themselves intermingled and talking, having fun, sharing experiences, exploring the area, then the whole camp has been worth it. To further this intermingling, the room distribution was also intentionally designed. The rooms, usually consisting of 5 or 6 participants of the same gender identity, were inhabited by participants from different countries, ages and backgrounds.

It was our experience that planning for quite an extensive amount of free time, as well as ample opportunities for games, sports, walks etc., substantially furthered the fruitfulness of the exchange among the adolescents. It is what helped build friendships and what caused such tearful goodbyes.

### **Designing the Process**

The artistic work was, of course, tied to the production of the musical itself. Here such talents as acting, singing, dancing, arts and crafts, playing musical instruments and others were showcased. Everyone had to contribute in some, even small, manner. For this particular musical, the participants were divided into four main groups: the singers, the dancers, the actors and the stage crew. There were of course overlaps, but to a large extent, the participants found themselves in their group, selected according to talent, for a large part of the day, preparing the musical. This mix transcended cliques and preferred friend circles, forcing the participants to spend time in a different setting of exchange.

The intellectual aspect of interfaith dialogue was addressed in small daily workshops on the main themes of the musical from different perspectives, allowing for an exchange of views and opinions. The workshops were set up so that they were interactive as well as reflective. They sometimes involved the whole group, and sometimes divided the large group of participants into smaller sub-groups based on the teams. The workshops allowed for a more explicitly interreligious and discursive exchange. Themes such as hope, suffering, dignity and identity drew the participants into a reflection, which naturally was seen through the lens of their background. The confrontation with other views from other backgrounds sparked interest, conversation as well as further reflection about one's own point of view. This area of course at times drifted a bit into the realm of the spiritual.

The spiritual, besides being present throughout the camp because of the themes the musical presented, was also shared through common experiences of prayer such as a daily morning meditation, always prepared by one of the animators of a different (non)- religious affiliation. We also held Friday Muslim Prayers, the Kabbala Shabbat (the welcoming of Shabbat on Friday evening), Alevi meditation and Catholic Mass service. All of these prayer times were optional for those who were willing to take part. They also, however, sparked an interest in each other's backgrounds, religious views and cultures, and saw an increasing number of participants toward the end of the week.

**“Themes such as hope, suffering, dignity and identity drew the participants into a reflection, which naturally was seen through the lens of their background.”**

Culture was shared through learning each other's dances and songs, as well as food and language. Although much of this was planned ahead of time, most of it happened naturally during free time. Some of the participants wanted to share songs and dances from their own culture. The Austrian participants took turns showing friends around the beautiful area of Carinthia that many of them called their home. Some of the Jewish participants were happy to teach the others some Jewish group dances. The number of small cultural exchanges increased over the week.

### **Conclusion: What we Learned about Living Dialogue**

For many of us, a sign of the success of the camp was at first manifested in the final performance of the musical on the last day of the camp. To see the amount of emotion and joy going into the production brought many members of the audience to tears. Each participant gave their all to make the story of Job as alive as possible.

But the real success of Knüpfwerk were the lasting friendships and impressions that remain. Fr. Alberto Pari, who accompanied the group who came from Israel and Palestine, expressed that the most moving thing for him was to find the group that was pretty divided at the departure from Jerusalem gathered in the courtyard of

their common music school singing the songs of the musical. Many of the participants continue to remain in close contact over social media, and send screen shots of their group chats to the animators. Some of the participants from Germany gathered together at a music festival organized by Faiths in Tune in Cologne and performed some songs from the musical. The aftermath of a camp that towered above anyone's expectations takes time to digest and to reflect upon. One line in the musical says: "Life isn't always this or that, black or white. Sometimes I meet you in the grey areas of uncertainty and no expectations."



# JUMA - The Muslim Jewish Festival

By Dennis Kirschbaum – [JUMA](#)

The Muslim Jewish Festival 2021 complemented the diverse program of the festival year “1700 Years of Jewish Life in Germany.” The core team of the festival consists of representatives and/or members of Hillel Deutschland e.V., JUMA e.V., Jewish Centre Synagoge am Fraenkelufer e.V., the Muslim Jewish Conference and the Anne Frank educational institution. Under the motto “Art united - Muslim-Jewish voices,” we invited all interested citizens of Berlin between November 11th, 2021 and November 14th, 2021 to get to know the cultural diversity of Jewish and Muslim life in Berlin. Over four days, visitors could expect eleven events and around 50 different performances ranging from music, dance, poetry, theatre, film screenings to exciting panel discussions.

Berlin possesses incredible cultural wealth; the “Berlin bear” dances on many stages in the capital of Germany. The social, academic and artistic achievements of Jewish people are an integral part of the history of this city. Muslim people have also been enriching these fields for over 60 years. Berlin is the most diverse city in all of Germany; people from over 190 nations have found their home here. Regardless of whether religious, secular, new or long-established, in this city the most varied of life plans can be experienced. This cannot be taken for granted: after all, Berlin was historically the Centre of the Shoah. Today, Berlin is witnessing increasing growth of a colourful Jewish life in the city. Muslim life in Berlin also increasingly determines public debates. Many Berliners nevertheless have few points of contact with Jewish or Muslim communities in their everyday life. Even Muslim and Jewish people lack a holistic overview of the cultural diversity of their “own” community. The interreligious dialogue between Muslim and Jewish people only takes place selectively. An open and progressive cultural festival to invite people of different identities to exchange ideas on different levels represents an enormous gain.

The terrible events in Halle and Hanau recently showed us that our lived reality is being questioned and threatened by some far-right parts of society. For over a year, hardly a week has passed in which Corona deniers do not take antisemitic conspiracy myths and open racism onto the streets, and thus have a say in public debates. The increasing antisemitic and anti-Muslim racist resentments do not fit into the dominant image of an “open” and tolerant Berlin. The Muslim Jewish Festival 2021 thus sent a signal to Berlin’s urban society in the festival year of “1700 years of Jewish life in Germany.” Jewish and Muslim lives have their place in this city: they are here, and at the same time queer, feminist, anti-racist, religious, or secular. Our festival was an invitation to all Berliners to get to know the various realities of life in the city and to enjoy with the Muslim and Jewish life that surrounds them.

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At the end, we counted 750 visitors from all over Germany. Most visitors said that the program of the Festival far exceeded their expectations. They smiled, hugged and shared their contacts. Some of them even organized a Shabbat dinner the following week to continuing their get together: what a beautiful outcome. We look forward to the next iteration of the MJF in 2022.

# Connecting Actions



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