

Synergy between Transdisciplinarity and a Culture of Peace



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Abstract

This special issue of *CIRET's Rencontre transdisciplinaires* concerned the continuation of transdisciplinary sharing and reflection on the crises erupting around and disrupting the world. The Call for Contributions queried "Where are our talents and intelligence to collectively create a more harmonious world and develop a culture of peace?" This paper proposed that the answer is seeking and finding a deeper appreciation for what constitutes both transdisciplinarity and a culture of peace and respecting the rich synergy between them (discussed herein). They complement each other bountifully and open doors for collective work to create a more harmonious world that is immersed and steeped in the qualities and influences of a culture of peace.

Résumé

Ce numéro spécial de *Rencontres transdisciplinaires*, le bulletin du CIRET, porte sur la poursuite du partage et de la réflexion transdisciplinaires sur les crises qui éclatent et bouleversent le monde. L'appel à contributions demandait « Où sont nos talents et notre intelligence pour créer collectivement un monde plus harmonieux et développer une culture de la paix? Cet article a suggéré que la réponse est de chercher et de trouver une appréciation plus profonde de ce qui constitue à la fois la transdisciplinarité et une culture de la paix et de respecter la riche synergie entre elles (discutée ici). Ils se complètent abondamment et ouvrent des portes au travail collectif pour créer un monde plus harmonieux, immergé et imprégné des qualités et des influences d'une culture de la paix. [Google French Translation]

The 2023 Call for Contributions to *CIRET Bulletin* Issue 26 contained the following query: "Where are our talents and intelligence to collectively create a more harmonious world and develop a culture of peace?" A culture comprises the customs, norms, values, institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or group. Culture sanctions certain values, goals, and attitudes. It aids people in interpreting any social situations they encounter. And cultures map out ready-made behaviour patterns that impose limits on people's activities, life paths, and choices (Samiksha, ca. 2013). Cultures also influence how people and their community respond and react to life scenarios. And, depending on its character or nature (e.g., positive or negative), cultures influence continuity and peoples' degree of feeling security, safety, belongingness, and sensations of longevity and authenticity. Because a culture sets up expectations for how people should act and influences their daily lives, attention must be paid to its character (Painter, 2020).

A culture of peace does have a unique character (to be discussed). Inspired by the Centre International de Recherches et études Transdisciplinaires' (CIRET) focus on transdisciplinarity (TD), this paper explores the synergy between transdisciplinarity and a culture of peace. Renowned peace scholar Johan Galtung (2010) called peace a transdisciplinary issue, and I agree with him. He believed that "the focus on a trans-disciplinary issue such as peace generates trans-disciplinarity" (p. 25). I would further argue that building a lasting culture of peace *requires* transdisciplinarity with the two being very complementary. "A culture of peace is inclusive and complex" (Roque-Hernández,

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2022, p. 2), and transdisciplinarity arose to deal with complexity via inclusivity (Nicolescu, 2002). Let me elaborate.

As a caveat, I discussed this connection in an earlier paper (McGregor, 2005). At the time, I was the coordinator of my university's Interdisciplinary Bachelor of Peace and Conflict Studies Program, and I had *just* discovered transdisciplinarity in 2004 at a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Committee (UNESCO) Canadian Commission public symposium (see McGregor, 2004). In the 2005 article, I explored “the synergy between a culture of peace and transdisciplinarity” (McGregor, 2005, p. 1). Synergy occurs when two or more agents interact and produce a combined effect that is greater than the sum of the separate parts. Sort of like what happens when separate, accomplished musicians create a greater experience by playing a song together in a jazz ensemble relative to performing it individually.

The United Nations (UN) recognized this connexive synergy when it

“identified the following agents of a culture of peace: civil society, the media, parents, teachers, politicians, journalists, religious bodies and groups, intellectuals, those engaged in scientific, philosophical, creative and artistic activities, health and humanitarian workers, social workers, managers, and non-government organizations. The interplay between all of these agents and academia is at the core of the transdisciplinary approach.” (McGregor, 2005, p. 1)

Roque-Hernández (2022, p. 2), referencing both Nicolescu and Galtung, concurred when he claimed that “true transdisciplinarity must be present in all aspects of the human condition, as multiple restricted or skewed perspectives will not provide a clear overview or an encompassing understanding of the whole. [...] There is a direct and inexorable link between peace and transdisciplinarity.” Like UNESCO, he asserted that a culture of peace can become a reality if people use transdisciplinary approaches.

By way of background and clarification, the notion of a culture of peace arose within UNESCO at the 1989 *Yamoussoukro Congress on Peace in the Minds of Men* (Conley, 2004). UNESCO characterized its ultimate 1995 initiative, *Towards a Culture of Peace*, as “a transdisciplinary project” (Mayor, 2009, p. 238). Conley (2004) suggested that, by transdisciplinary, UNESCO had meant that the culture of peace idea was a *cross-cutting theme* running through most of its programmes. “Cross-cutting themes are additional issues or areas that intersect with the main project or can be easily integrated into the project without losing focus of the main goal” (The Tenure Facility, 2023, para. 1). Examples of UNESCO's programmes instilled with a culture of peace include but are not limited to (a) Education for All; (b) its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity; (c) its Declaration and Integrated Framework on Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Democracy; (d) the L'Oréal-UNESCO Women, Science and a Culture of Peace Programme; (e) its Women and a Culture of Peace Programme; and (f) the UNESCO Tolerance Programme (Conley, 2004).

However, as will be demonstrated, those who subsequently engaged with transdisciplinarity, and a culture of peace viewed transdisciplinarity differently – more like how it was intended by those who conceptualized it. For them, transdisciplinarity was a call to action to shift away from depending on just academic disciplines (especially science) to name and address complex problems toward a process that “concerns that which is at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all disciplines” (Nicolescu, 2002, p. 44). By beyond all disciplines, Nicolescu (2002) meant that transdisciplinarity entails collaboration among academic disciplines (higher

education), governments (the public sector), the private sector, and civil society (e.g., lay people, non-government organizations). For Nicolescu (2014), the result of successful, inclusive collaboration is the generation of new, co-created knowledge that is cross-fertilized, emergent, embodied, and complex. For those involved in the Zurich approach to transdisciplinarity, the result of *doing science with society* is the generation of reflexive, socially robust, and socially accountable knowledge that is co-created and used in context (Klein et al., 2001) (see also McGregor, 2023).

From the beginning, it was accepted that building a culture of peace was more than an idea – it was intended to be a global, socio-political movement grounded in a transdisciplinary approach (Conley, 2004; Russell, 1998). Russell (1998) explained that “threats to peace take many forms. ... [Building a] Culture of Peace is a response to all such threats and seeks solutions that must come from within society, not imposed from outside. ... Implementing solutions will involve women and men at all levels of society working together across a wide cross-section of activities [and] sectors” (p. 3). Williams (1999) likewise reported that UNESCO would “further consolidate the conceptual and normative foundation of a culture of peace ... by encouraging transdisciplinary studies on the sources and forms of violence and [how] to prevent [it] at source” (p. 13).

Achievement of this ambitious transdisciplinary vision involved the UN’s approval of the UNESCO-proposed *International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World* (2001–2010) (UN, 1998). For clarification, international decades are tools the UN uses to promote its objectives. Decades can be declared by specialized agencies such as UNESCO, sanctioned in UN General Assembly resolutions, or both (UN, n.d.). The UNESCO-proposed culture of peace decade was recognized in the UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/53/25 (UN, 1998). Therein, a culture of peace was defined as consisting of

“values, attitudes and behaviours that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, all human rights, tolerance and solidarity, that reject violence and endeavour to prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation and that guarantee the full exercise of all rights and the means to participate fully in the development process of their society.” (UN, 1998, p. 1)

The UN’s (1999) subsequent *Programme of Action* to actualize a culture of peace globally added the following features. A culture of peace would (a) “meet the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations” (p. 2); (b) “promote sustainable economic and social development” (p. 3); (c) respect and promote everyone’s right to their opinion and freedom of expression; and (d) enable everyone to develop skills for consensus building, dialogue, and negotiation. A culture of peace would also (e) insist on and ensure increased transparency and accountability in governance at all levels; and (f) it would ensure that governments (public sector), civil society (especially women and youth), and all media have an ongoing role in promoting and strengthening this culture. The role of the private sector (industry) is intimated through sustainable economic development.

UNESCO’s transdisciplinary project (i.e., the Decade) respected seven aspects of a culture of peace: democracy, tolerance, the free flow of information, human rights, people-centered development, education for peace, and the wider participation of women (Adams, 1997; Mayor, 2009; UN, 1998). Mayor (2009) believed that fostering these elements was the only way to transition from a culture of war and violence to one of

peace and non-violence. Respectively, a culture of peace would best be achieved by (a) replacing existing authoritarian power structures, (b) superseding enemy images (i.e., make it hard to see an enemy), (c) replacing secrecy and information manipulation, (d) eschewing values that benefit exclusive groups instead of the human family, (e) ending economic growth predicated on structural violence and military supremacy, (f) using education to transform power currently informed by a logic of fear and force and (g) confronting the historical inequality between men and women (Mayor, 2009).

These seven aspects of a culture of peace reflect key guiding principles underlying peace: social justice, freedom, solidarity, diversity, inclusivity, security, dialogue and understanding, transformation, empowerment, shared power, transparency, synergy, and equality as well as equity (Mayor, 2009; UN, 1999). These same principles closely mirror, what Nicolescu (2007) called, the *transdisciplinary values* that are engendered in (arise from) transdisciplinary work. They are more important than the value sets of individual participants. As McGregor (2023) explained,

“a TD value set arises because people’s competing values are eventually superseded by agreed-to humanistic values (i.e., humility, respect, trust, tolerance, compromise, empathy, accountability, collective wisdom, commitment, and collegiality). This engendered TD value set will be specific to each context and serves to keep conversations going, move deliberations forward, and ensure sustained commitment to the exercise.” (p. 5)

Furthermore, in a culture of peace, the value system is redefined from power as a reference point to community as a reference point. In the latter, all citizens’ well-being comes before the self-interest of the few. The community concept expands beyond people to include other species and the earth’s myriad ecosystems with all viewed as interconnected, interdependent, cooperative, and mutually supportive. The notion of family expands to include the human family and the human condition. In a culture of peace, there is a deep respect for the role of history, art, and people’s lived stories. And people strive for transformation and transcendence rather than transmission or maintaining the status quo (Nota as cited in McGregor, 2010). It is noteworthy that these are all *key* aspects of transdisciplinarity (McGregor, 2023) with *trans* literally meaning moving beyond to a new space focused on things other than the entrenched way of doing things (Nicolescu, 2002, 2014).

These rich connections were reflected in UNESCO’s ingeniously created logo for the *International Year of a Culture of Peace* (see Figure 1). It comprised two different colored hands (orange and yellow) with thumbs up and down (representing North and South) and fingers interlaced. Each visible finger represented the six goals of a culture of peace as set out in *Manifesto 2000* (created by three Nobel Peace Prize winners): respect all life, reject all violence, share with others, listen to understand (empathy),



UNESCO’s Culture of Peace Logo (used with permission)

preserve the planet, and rediscover solidarity and community (Conflict Education Resolution Connection, 2000; UNESCO Press Service, 1999).

Although the notion of transdisciplinarity was not explicitly expressed in *Manifesto 2000* (see exact wording at UNESCO Press Service, 1999), the nature of these six culture-of-peace goals reflects the true nature of transdisciplinarity with its intent to address complex, wicked problems (including conflict, violence, and a lack of peace) by encouraging people to respect life, each other, and the planet as they engage in empathetic, collaborative work while striving for solidarity (i.e., unity due to commonality) and re-invigorated, inclusive community involvement when addressing the intractable problems that plague humanity (Nicolescu, 2014; Roque-Hernández, 2022).

Ndura-Ouédraogo and Amster (2009) subsequently strived to apply a transdisciplinary perspective to building a culture of peace. In his review of their edited book, Timpson (2012) lauded the collection for exposing readers to the powerful role that art, music, and history play in creating peace. Akin to transdisciplinary precepts, contributing authors also recommended (a) using critical literacy skills to “transform differences into strengths” (Timpson, 2012, p. 203), (b) building alliances to overcome the “‘silo-like’ professional cocoons that [people build] around themselves” (p. 204), (c) drawing on holistic thinking to tap into the intrinsic interconnectedness of the world, (d) connecting people with big-picture thinkers and (e) using cognitive development research to help people “handle the complexity and ambiguity that emerge from a ‘multiplicity’ of perspectives” (p. 204). These well-established hallmarks of a transdisciplinary approach (see Nicolescu, 2002, 2014; McGregor, 2023) further affirm the complementarity of TD and a culture of peace.

Reflecting the true essence of transdisciplinarity, UNESCO further viewed the creation of a culture of peace as involving (a) scientific and cultural (community) collaboration to manage transboundary resources; (b) heritage and contemporary contexts as tools for stimulating dialogue for peace; (c) all citizens (especially women and youth) in democratic participation toward social cohesion and mutually reciprocal identities; and (d) using media and information communication technology (ICT) to build peace and non-violence instead of allowing it to perpetuate and entrench the inequitable, violent status quo (UNESCO Bureau for Strategic Planning & Appadurai, 2013).

In his discussion of building a culture of peace *with* transdisciplinarity, Roque-Hernández said this would require “embracing a complex conception of reality [and connecting] life, humanity, culture, the planet, complexity, literature, art, philosophy, sustainability, and values regardless of field of knowledge” (2022, p. 2). Nicolescu’s (2002, 2014) approach to transdisciplinarity similarly uses multiple levels of Reality (11+) organized into the (a) subjective internal flow of consciousness and perspectives and (b) objective external flow of objective facts, information, statistics, and proofs. Movement among these often-contentious levels is mediated and lubricated by mind-and-spirit-opening venues including culture, art, music, drama, theatre, spirituality, and a connection with nature. This Hidden Third (as it is called) enables people to literally and intellectually gather in a unique space (called the included middle and a zone of nonresistance), where they can temporarily set aside their normal resistance to contradictory and antagonistic ideas and create something new together. That synergistic, cross-fertilized, embodied, and emergent *something new* is complex and inclusive (McGregor, 2023) just like a culture of peace (Roque-Hernández, 2022).

Conclusion

Creating a culture of peace using a transdisciplinary approach will be a daunting, century-long task (Conley, 2004; UNESCO Culture of Peace Programme, 1996). But it is a laudable and worthy goal because “as we enter the twenty-first century, humanity faces unprecedented threats to its very existence. ... [Any future action must respect] the right to a peaceful and fruitful existence, not only of all people, including future generations, but of all life on our planet” (UNESCO Culture of Peace Programme, 1996, p. 251). UNESCO is “charged with building ‘the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind’ [sic]” (p. 253). Toward that end, UNESCO encouraged a transdisciplinary approach to building a culture of peace (Conley, 2004; UN, 1998; Williams, 1999).

Likewise, in recognition of how the disconnect between objective science and the rest of the world (i.e., fragmentation, reductionism, and duality) direly affects the straits of humanity, Nicolescu (2002, 2014) and others (e.g., Klein et al., 2001) called for transdisciplinarity to bridge this gapping hole. Nicolescu believed that “in the transdisciplinary perspective, there is a direct and unavoidable relation between peace and transdisciplinarity. Severely fragmented thought is incompatible with the research of peace on this Earth. The emergence of a culture of peace requires the transdisciplinary evolution” (2002, p. 140). He further maintained that the “universal [co-creation and] sharing of knowledge cannot take place without the emergence of a new tolerance founded on the transdisciplinary attitude ...; whence the direct and indisputable relation between peace and transdisciplinarity” (Nicolescu, 1998/2012, Section 2, last para.).

Regarding the query “Where are our talents and intelligence to collectively create a more harmonious world and develop a culture of peace?” – the answer is in seeking and finding a deeper appreciation for what constitutes both transdisciplinarity and a culture of peace and respecting the rich synergy between them. They complement each other bountifully and open doors for collective work to create a more harmonious world that is immersed and steeped in the qualities and influences of a culture of peace.

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