CREATING HOPE TOGETHER

VIRTUAL SERIES

CONFLICT KALEIDOSCOPE

**An Introduction to Systems Thinking for Arts and Culture-Based Peacebuilders
April-June 2025**

IMP ACT

TRANSFORMING CONFLICT WITH ARTS AND CULTURE

Session 1
April 14, 2025

with Dr. Benjamin Broome
and Dr. Polly Walker

REPORT

Armine Avetisyan

May 2025

Content:

INTRODUCTION

The inaugural session of *Conflict Kaleidoscope* workshop series (a part of *IMPACT: Creating Hope Together* Virtual Series) introduced systems thinking as a vital approach to peacebuilding through arts and cultural. Hosted by Rosanna Lewis of IMPACT, the session featured **Dr. Benjamin Broome**, who shared his long-term peacebuilding experience in Cyprus, and **Dr. Polly Walker**, IMPACT Senior Fellow who highlighted the systems thinking elements embedded in his practice and invited interaction with the audience. Together, they explored how systems thinking can offer tools for deeper dialogue, bridge-building, and long-term transformation.
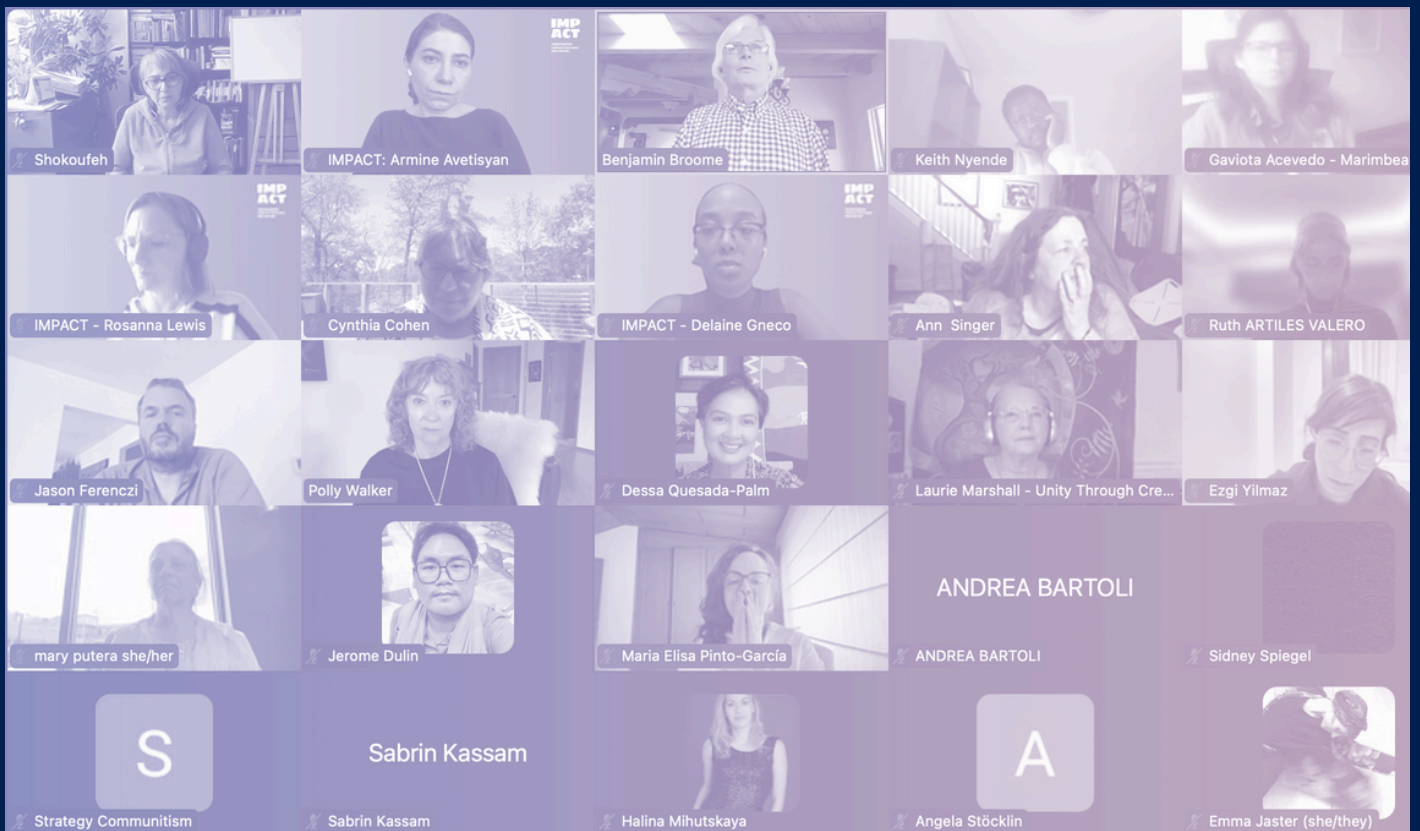
"Conflict Kaleidoscope"
Session 1 in numbers

PRESENTERS Facilitators

7

REGIONS

6

BREAKOUT ROOMS

5

REGISTERED

98

COUNTRIES

24

NEW TO IMPACT

62%

PARTICIPATED

45

FEEDBACK RESPONSES

11

Case study from Cyprus by Dr. Benjamin Broome

Background

- Broome worked over 20 years with peacebuilders in Cyprus, particularly during and after his Fulbright Fellowship in the late 1990s.
- Cyprus is a divided island: 80% Greek Cypriot (south), 20% Turkish Cypriot (north), separated by a UN buffer zone.
- Historical conflict began under British colonial rule in the 1950s; deep mistrust and limited contact persisted until 2008.

Benjamin Broome

Barriers to Peacebuilding

- One-sided narratives, mutual blame, negative stereotypes, and reluctance to initiate friendship.

- Structural limitations due to restricted movement and political sensitivities.

Systems-Based Peacebuilding Approach

Developed a multi-phase workshop strategy combining monocommunal and bicommunal processes:

a. **Definition of the Situation** – Uncovering personal and collective obstacles to peacebuilding.
b. **Collective Visioning** – Exploring diverse understandings of what peace looks like.
c. **Action Planning** – Designing a year-long action agenda with concrete, collaborative steps.

Notable Outcomes

1. Problematiques:

- Greek Cypriots highlighted internal and interpersonal challenges.
- Turkish Cypriots focused on external, structural obstacles.
- Initial discouragement due to perception of being "too far apart" was overcome through facilitated dialogue.

2. Vision Statements:

- Greek Cypriots emphasized a broad peace movement and societal change.
- Turkish Cypriots prioritized cautious, trust-building efforts.
- Despite different scales, visions had significant overlap.
- Final shared language: *"To empower Cypriots from both communities."*

3. Agora-Bazar Model:

- 15 action initiatives developed and showcased in a public event.
- 12 were adopted and implemented, engaging thousands across both communities.
- Many initiatives were arts and culture-based and had a significant impact on public engagement and intergroup connection.

Lessons Learned

- Systems thinking enabled a structured yet flexible approach to address layered obstacles and diverse perspectives.
- Starting with relational vulnerability built trust.
- Shared cultural activities and arts helped bridge divides and foster connection.
- Neutral facilitation and iterative, inclusive design were critical to progress.

On the Role of Arts in Systems Thinking

"Many of these 12 implemented projects were arts and culture-based. What is the deeper benefit of this systems approach?"

"It helps us clearly see the obstacles and their impact. It strengthens commitment—even amid resistance—because the dialogue and design process itself creates buy-in."

On Creativity and Community Building

"How did working across divided communities influence your own perspective on creativity?"

"When there's openness and no pressure to be right or persuasive, creativity flourishes. It creates space to play, explore, and imagine."

On Time and Legacy

"From an Indigenous perspective, we ask: What is the impact over the next seven generations? Lederach reminds us: it takes as much time to heal a conflict as it took to form."

On Building Forward Through Arts

"How can we build on your work and continue uniting people through the arts?"

"Let's talk. There are many ways to extend this work, and I'm open to exploring options together."

ON GROUP FORMATION

"What guided the selection of participants?"

"They self-selected. Many were already engaged in peacebuilding. It was their initiative, and that made all the difference."

ON INSIDER CHALLENGES AND LONG-TERM VISION

"How can insiders use this model without being neutral outsiders? How do we think long-term?"

In Cherokee tradition, peace isn't only about people—it's also about land, ancestors, and the natural world. Systems thinking must include all these relationships."

"You don't always need a third party—but multiethnic facilitation can offer a hopeful model. The systems approach originated in engineering, but it's highly transferable. We can use this thinking in nearly any field."

ON VULNERABILITY AND RITUAL

"How did you make space for vulnerability beyond just discussion?"

"The social fabric was essential—relationships built through meals, song, and trust. One story: after a tense EU session, a Greek Cypriot began to sing. Soon, everyone joined in—Greek and Turkish. That broke the tension."

6

Discussion Questions

- In arts and culture-based processes of transforming conflict, what do you see as the strengths of a systemic analysis of conflict, looking at how different elements of the conflict are keeping it resistant to transformation?

- How might you envision/design an arts/culture based conflict intervention based on a systems-based approach, such as Ben Broome describes?

Breakout Room 1: Systems Thinking in Challenging Settings

- Systems thinking applied in gang zones, refugee camps, and youth detention centers.
- Photography and performance used to build community resilience and healing.
- Storytelling as resistance in authoritarian contexts.
- Emphasis on blending analytical and creative approaches, fostering cultural safety.

Breakout Room 2: Embodied Starting Points

- Reflections on starting peace processes from shared values instead of problems.
- Emphasis on embodied practices (e.g., image theatre) to surface narratives.
- Artistic processes help connect logical problem-solving with emotional expression.

Breakout Room 3:
Emotions and
Intellectual Integration

- Importance of honoring silence and emotional expression.
- Advocated for blending emotional insight with reflective analysis.
- Hands-on art used to explore metaphor and systemic patterns in conflict.

Breakout Room 4:
Creative Practices in the
Pacific and Beyond

- Participants from Fiji and the US shared experiences of mural-making and storytelling with women and youth.
- Addressed how arts help build trust in patriarchal and race-based political environments.
- Highlighted the need for safe spaces and gentle accountability in creative group agreements.

Breakout Room 5:
Global Insights on Systems
Application

- Participants from Colombia, Italy, Iran/Canada reflected on moving from personalizing problems to identifying systemic roots.
- Zoom in/zoom out approaches to shift perspectives and scale.
- Barriers from government hostility and limited institutional support.
- Calls for collective reflection and cross-national solidarity through IMPACT.

About IMPACT

IMPACT is a diverse global organization, advocating for arts and culture to transform conflict and build more creative and just societies. IMPACT is governed by a diverse and dynamic board comprised of artists, scholars and practitioners in the field of arts, culture and conflict transformation from around the globe, including Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Israel, Kenya, Japan, Serbia, Turkey, and the Philippines.

Join the IMPACT Community

- Partner with Us: we are looking for like-minded individuals, networks and organizations to work collaboratively with in the space of arts, culture and conflict transformation

- Take part in our upcoming events: sign up to our newsletter to receive news about our in-depth event series on the key themes from IMPACT: Creating Hope Together

- Join the IMPACT community: sign up to our newsletter, follow us on social media: @impactartorg

- Find out more about our Virtual Series "IMPACT: Creating Hope Together": read our reports and check out the videos on our YouTube channel

- Find out more about the AHA Project: read the inspiring stories of the IMPACT community

- Donate to IMPACT, so that we can support our growing IMPACT community by advocating to policymakers, funders and leaders for arts, culture and conflict transformation

- Get in touch: info@impactart.org

IMPACT

TRANSFORMING
CONFLICT WITH ARTS
AND CULTURE

WWW.IMPACTART.ORG
INFO@IMPACTART.ORG
@IMPACTARTORG