

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 3
June 26, 2025
with Gaviota Acevedo
Espinosa & Polly Walker

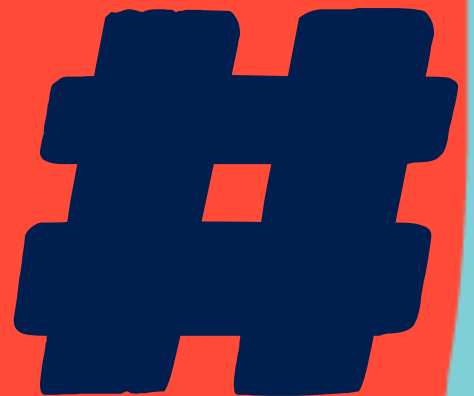
PRE PORT

Armine Avetisyan

July 2025

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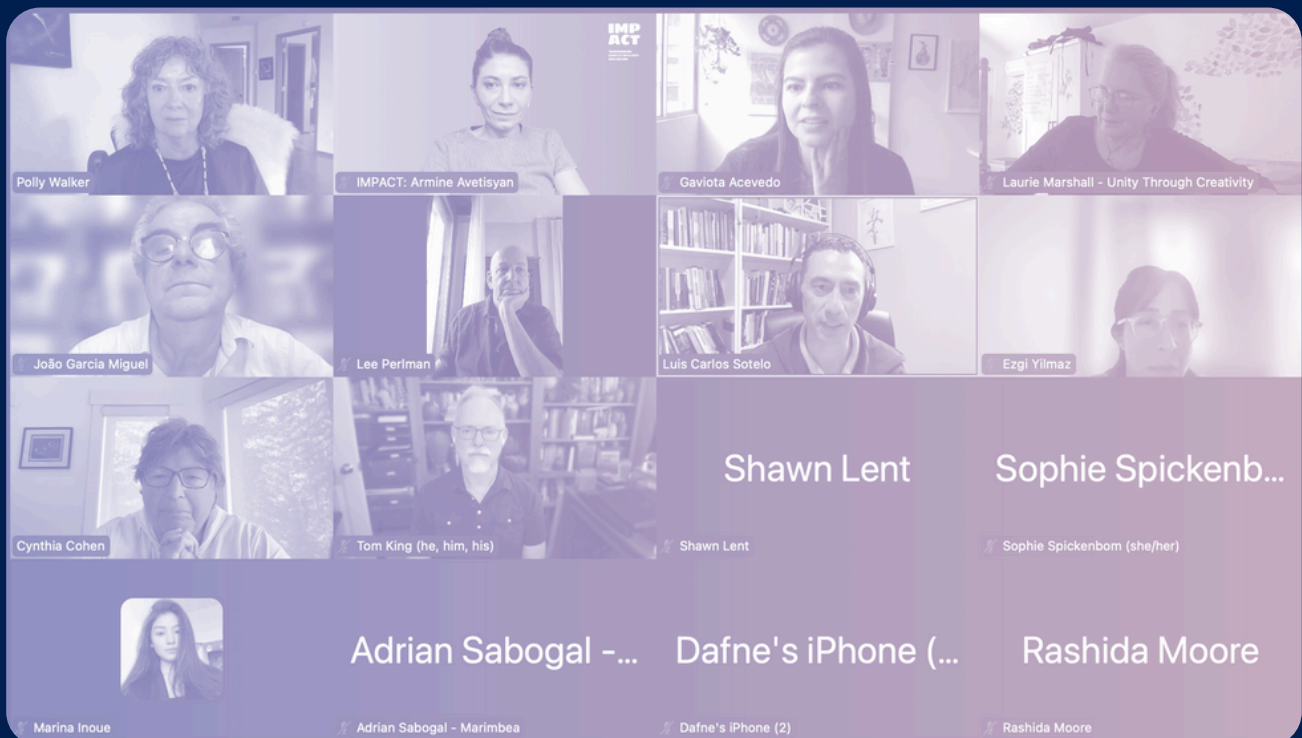


INTRODUCTION

The third session of Conflict Kaleidoscope workshop, part of the *IMPACT: Creating Hope Together* virtual series, explored the intersection of cultural practice, systems thinking, and community resilience through the powerful work of **Gaviota Acevedo Espinosa**, member of *Marimbea*. Drawing on her experience collaborating with Afro-Colombian artists and cultural leaders from Colombia's Pacific coast, Gaviota shared how traditional music and collective memory can serve as entry points for systemic transformation.

The session also featured response by IMPACT Senior Fellow, Dr. **Polly Walker**, who offered insights into how Indigenous worldviews resonate with and enrich systems thinking approaches, followed reflections from the audience.

Together, the conversation highlighted how cultural practice can help us navigate complexity, heal injustice, and reimagine collective futures.



“Conflict Kaleidoscope”

Session 3 in numbers

PRESENTERS FACILITATORS



REGIONS



REGISTERED



COUNTRIES



NEW TO IMPACT



PARTICIPATED



FEEDBACK RESPONSES



CASE STUDY FROM COLOMBIA

BY GAVIOTA ACEVEDO ESPINOSA



1. PERSONAL JOURNEY AND ENTRY POINT INTO PEACEBUILDING THROUGH MUSIC

- Gaviota shared a personal turning point: hearing Daira Quinones sing a song from Tumaco sparked her journey to Colombia's conflict-affected Pacific coast.
- That song served not just as a melody but as a testimony of survival, resistance, and dignity through music.

2. CONTEXTUAL AWARENESS AND POSITIONALITY

- She emphasized the importance of speaking from her own position of privilege (education, urban upbringing) and not as a substitute for the voices from the Pacific, but as an amplifier.

3. FOUNDING OF MARIMBEA

- After early visits to Tumaco, Gaviota's partner founded Marimbea, named after the traditional marimba instrument.
- The organization began with the goal of raising awareness about the cultural richness and conflict realities of the Pacific region, especially through music as a vessel of memory and resistance.

"That song wasn't just a melody. It was also a testimony... a tool to denounce violence, to sustain life, and to narrate dignity in a place where everything else is erased by violence."

"I don't want to replace the voices of the people that live in the Pacific region, but I want to amplify them... I hope this helps so that in the near future they can be the ones to speak for themselves."

-- Gaviota Acevedo Espinosa --

CASE STUDY FROM COLOMBIA

BY GAVIOTA ACEVEDO ESPINOSA

4. EARLY CHALLENGES AND SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

- Initial workshops in Bogotá with traditional musicians were sparsely attended.
- She described frustration and eventual insight: the issue wasn't just apathy, but systemic exclusion—traditional knowledge was often not recognized as valid due to racism, academic elitism, and structural inequality.

5. REFRAMING THE STRATEGY

- In response, Marimbea adapted: holding workshops in informal spaces like cafés and bars, paying artists fairly, and building a committed network of allies.
- Over time, they built an ecosystem of cultural exchange, rooted in dignity and co-creation.

6. MUSIC AS A PORTAL TO A BROADER CULTURAL SYSTEM

- Participants in the workshops became curious about other elements of Pacific culture—traditional food, drink (like viche), and crafts.
- This led to expanded workshops involving food, storytelling, and intergenerational learning—positioning music as an entry point to a whole way of life.

7. CULTURAL RETREATS AND COMMUNITY-BASED WORK

- Marimbea eventually brought participants to the Pacific for immersive musical retreats—first in safer areas, later expanding with institutional support.
- These retreats now form one of the organization's most impactful lines of work, fostering deep cultural connection and systemic understanding.

8. SYSTEMS THINKING IN PRACTICE

Gaviota emphasized how systems thinking helped her and *Marimbea*:

- Recognize interconnected cultural practices as a system.
- Design responses that reveal hidden structures of exclusion.
- Encourage cooperation over competition among local actors (e.g., dancers, cooks, storytellers).
- Shift from transactional workshops to relational, evolving community spaces.

CASE STUDY FROM COLOMBIA

BY GAVIOTA ACEVEDO ESPINOSA

9. LESSONS LEARNED

**1. RELATIONSHIPS
SHAPE OUTCOMES,
PUT THEM AT THE
CENTER.**



**2. COLLECTIVE
AGENCY MATTERS
MORE THAN
OUTSIDER
LEADERSHIP**



**3. INTERDEPENDENCE
BUILDS COMMUNITY
POWER**



**4. SHARED VISION
IS A FORM OF
PEACEBUILDING**



**5. DIVERSITY OF
VOICES STRENGTHENS
THE SYSTEM**



**6. ART IS NOT
DECORATION, IT'S
INFRASTRUCTURE
FOR
PEACEBUILDING
EFFORTS**



SYSTEMS THINKING PRINCIPLES

BY GAVIOTA ACEVEDO ESPINOSA

**1. DON'T FOCUS ON
EVENTS, OBSERVE
PATTERNS.**



**2. SEE THE WHOLE
FOREST, NOT JUST
THE TREE.**



**3. DON'T LOOK AT THE
FLOWER BY ITSELF LOOK
IT IN CONNECTION WITH
THE WATER, THE SUN, THE
SOIL, THE FOREST.**



**4. WISDOM IS WITHIN THE
SYSTEM: WE CAN'T
ASSUME SOLUTIONS COME
FROM OUTSIDE.**



**5. RELATIONSHIPS ARE A
CRITICAL PART OF THE
SYSTEM.**



REFLECTIONS ON SYSTEMS THINKING LENS

BY POLLY WALKER

- Polly connected deeply with Gaviota's presentation, affirming how Indigenous worldviews align with systems thinking, particularly through an emphasis on relationality, interconnection, and ceremony.
- She highlighted that the kind of work Gaviota described mirrors what Indigenous communities have done for generations: using culture, ritual, and storytelling to build bridges, heal wounds, and sustain community life.
- Polly emphasized that Gaviota's efforts are a living expression of dynamic balance—a core principle in many Indigenous cosmologies where justice and cultural vitality emerge through shared participation and reciprocity.



“We are a part of the system. We can decide to do nothing—we’re still affecting it. Or we can engage with that complexity, build deep relationships, and bring our agency into the system in a skillful way.”

Polly Walker



REFLECTIONS AND Q&A HIGHLIGHTS

ON INTERCONNECTED INTERESTS AND COLLECTIVE POWER

Gaviota underscored how helping people in conflict-affected communities see themselves as part of a system—with mutual influence and shared goals—enabled greater collaboration and healing.

ON CULTURAL IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE

Traditional music was described not just as performance, but as communal practice, a tool for narrating dignity, resisting erasure, and constructing shared memory.

ON PRACTICAL TRANSFORMATION

Systems thinking supported the design of inclusive, resilient, and adaptive cultural interventions—especially when formal institutions (academia, cultural centers) failed to provide space or recognition.

ON EVOLVING INTERVENTIONS

What began as music workshops grew into holistic retreats—embodying systems thinking through collaboration across generations, art forms, and regions.

Scot Nakagawa

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



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