The IPRA conference in Istanbul was a hit. Although the opening was daunting with a late start, long line-up and other organizational and technical inefficiencies from the hosts, the Arts and Peace presentations, with the collegial connections and shared experiences made the lack of effectiveness feel like a distant memory.

The Plenary talks by Prof. Johan Galtung and Kevin Clements were exemplary, providing attendees with a well-rounded view of the condition of peace globally. Clements spoke of “the need to shift from carnage to creation” and that the fall of global peacefulness is largely driven by internal peacefulness. He spoke of the countries that were the most peaceful as being the countries committed to gender equality and were inclusive in their democracies. I suppose that is not surprising, but it was important to have it commented upon.

The Arts and Peace stream of the conference was inspiring. Thanks to support of Toda Institute and the enthusiastic and ever present Olivier Urbain, the offering was vast from academic presentations to practitioners’ experiences from every continent. In his presentation on his work in Kentucky, Gerard Stropnicky spoke of the values of “Agency, Authenticity, Audacity and Accuracy” that are imbedded in the theatre and peace work he does. The presentations by Dijana Milošević, Lee Perlman, Yair Dalal, Polly Walker (and more), echoed these values and reminded me that the work of arts and peace, no matter what the art form, crosses cultural and geographic divides.

It was great to make new connections, to hear about exciting projects and research, and to spend a few days and evenings with like-minded people. What I realized was the field of Peace, and in particular Arts and Peace, is expansive! The work and research that is being undertaken world-wide is inspiring and I cannot help but think that with every small step we will slowly infiltrate those who turn to violence and shift them toward peace. The films reflected this innovation and the discussions that followed gave attendees an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the innovation. As Kevin Clements said “violence is a failure of imagination”. This resonated with me and affirmed my belief that through the strategic use of the arts we can shift perception in times of conflict.

I commend co-chairs Cynthia Cohen, Kiche Magak and María Elisa Pinto Garcia for organizing such an inspiring four days and look forward to the next IPRA conference.