Imagine IMPACT
An emerging strategy to strengthen the arts, culture, and conflict transformation ecosystem

IMPACT is an initiative of the Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts at Brandeis University, in collaboration with the Baker Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies at Juniata College and Maseno University in Kisumu, Kenya. The planning phase was supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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Photo of reconciliation ritual in Cambodia from Notes on Pchum Ben by Ly Daravuth.
Greetings!

Welcome to the Imagining Together Platform for Arts, Culture and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT), a worldwide, values-driven collaboration to design and activate strategies to strengthen the arts, culture and conflict transformation ecosystem (acct). This ecosystem includes individuals and organizations working from local neighborhoods to the international stage - sometimes at great risk - creating festivals and crafting policies, documenting practices and developing theories, enlivening communities and building bridges across differences. In this ecosystem, we imagine and embody a more just, more vibrant, less violent world.

The grand challenges confronting humanity – climate change, growing inequalities, wars and legacies of past wars, displacement, the rise of authoritarian regimes, political and social polarization, and more - call for urgent creative attention beyond the linear, rational approaches that have proved insufficient and often counter-productive. The acct ecosystem addresses these challenges in distinct, constructive, transformative ways. With investment and support, this ecosystem could be even more effective.

As IMPACT’s writing team, we invite you to explore this report, which is grounded in real world examples and:

▪ makes the case for the power of arts and culture to transform conflict
▪ summarizes learning from exchanges - with hundreds of artists, peacebuilders, scholars, funders, policymakers, and others - about the strengths of the acct ecosystem and the challenges it faces
▪ advocates for a platform to support the acct ecosystem
▪ proposes an emerging platform: a web of teams crafting virtual and in person spaces where knowledge can be shared, ethical dilemmas can receive sustained attention, advocacy strategies can be developed and advanced, risks of harm can be minimized, and relationships of reciprocity can be formed

Based on the sense of urgency and commitment of diverse and remarkable leaders directly involved with IMPACT, we are experimenting with a platform designed for distributed leadership and coherence, flexibility and stability, accountability and credibility.

However you are connected to the ecosystem, whether as an artist, cultural worker, scholar, conflict transformation practitioner, educator, diplomat, activist, policymaker, funder, or friend, we hope that this report engages your imagination and inspires action. IMPACT is still very much in process, attuned to emerging possibilities. We are eager for your suggestions, participation, and support.

Armine, Cindy, Emily, and Toni
The Imagine IMPACT Writing Team

“How do we think about futures, let alone imagine them?” - Refilwe Nkomo:
https://youtu.be/mn482AjmvAI
The power of arts and culture to transform conflict

Imagine humanity embracing the ways arts and culture uniquely transform conflict, mobilizing their full creative power to overcome violence and related challenges of extremism, environmental degradation, injustice, inequality, displacement, and more.

The power of arts and culture comes from the ways they invite imagination of what we have yet to know or create, linking wisdom from the past with acknowledgement of the present and dreams for the future. Arts and culture are key to transforming conflict because they open new possibilities for listening, seeing, imagining, engaging, and creating together.

Arts and culture go beyond the purely rational, engaging senses, emotion, and thinking all at once. They allow us to experience, reflect deeply on, and experiment with complex realities. They can be crafted to transform conflict by: drawing attention to urgent concerns, bearing witness, memorializing the past, dignifying humanity, resisting oppression, and cultivating empathy and trust among former enemies.

The Afghanistan National Institute of Music supports girls’ leadership while preserving cultural heritage and building inter-ethnic trust. [more: p12 in the Full Report]

Tokay Tomah, a Liberian singer and dancer, defies ongoing violence and supports movements for peace. [more: p43]

In Peru, Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani opens doors for witnessing, truth-telling, healing, and enacting transitional justice in the aftermath of violent conflict. [more: p26]

The Lamenting Forest performance confronts environmental exploitation and community devastation in Indonesia. [more: p16]
IMPACT’s Path

Voices from over 500 people and groups in 7 regions of the world shared thoughts on the strengths, needs, and challenges of the acct ecosystem. Over 60 thought leaders from 19 countries engaged in 2 creative, collaborative design labs (one led by youth) to shape ethical strategies to support the ecosystem. Here are highlights:

Learnings

▪ The acct ecosystem is uniquely effective, and versatile in complementing other fields
▪ Acct is a vast, diverse, and rich ecosystem; strategies to support it need to be multi-faceted and flexible
▪ Acct enjoys many strengths, but is limited by unmet needs and insufficient resources aligned with its potential [see: “Emerging Story”]
▪ The impact of the acct ecosystem is limited by power divides that erode trust
▪ Acct players in different regions of the world have developed different expertise
▪ IMPACT has sparked the imaginations and unleashed the energy of experts and influential institutions
▪ IMPACT can strengthen the influence of acct by drawing on complexity and emergence theories and systems thinking

Accomplishments

▪ Inspired acct players to think about one another as part of a dynamic ecosystem
▪ Led powerful in-person and virtual learning exchanges, engaging 300 diverse participants in thinking deeply
▪ Shared learnings with acct through newsletters in English and Spanish and the Arts Education Policy Review
▪ Created a web of teams focusing on strategy, ethics, advocacy, virtual learning exchanges, regional hubs, and working groups [more: p31]
▪ Distributed power and strengthened trust by launching a diverse, global Leadership Circle
▪ Developed partnerships and strengthened collaborations with international, national, regional, and local organizations [more: p22].
▪ Secured seed funding to ensure near-term continuity of IMPACT’s basic functions

Next Steps [more: p27]

▪ Develop, test, and share tools for embodying IMPACT values
▪ Craft advocacy strategies for acct by working with funders committed to the ecosystem
▪ Continue convening global virtual learning exchanges in multiple languages
▪ Meet regionally to design hubs in Southeast Asia and the Middle East and North Africa in 2019 and follow up on interest from 9 other regions
▪ Reach out to cultural heritage, transitional justice, and human rights fields through publications, meetings and trainings
▪ Test and share approaches to evaluation that align with excellent practice in acct
▪ Design an online journal and other virtual spaces for exchange, documentation, and collaboration
▪ Plan IMPACT global gatherings, including ICAF 2020 in Rotterdam
The need for a platform to support acct

Imagine stable, interconnected structures and processes designed to:

- Link acct players in active communities of inquiry and support, both in-person and online
- Craft creative ways to address global challenges as well as local and regional issues
- Support acct players to document efforts, assess results, and share learnings
- Form strategic collaborations to advocate for the acct ecosystem and influence related fields
- Embody principles of reciprocity, equity, and distributed leadership
- Acknowledge and work creatively with power differences, cultivating trust across individual, group, and regional inequalities

Through a platform, ready connections could be made between similar initiatives, like the REDress Project - which highlights gendered racial violence against North American Indigenous peoples - and Australian Indigenous rituals addressing ongoing racial and colonial violence [more on both: p42 & 25]

The IMPACT platform plans to advocate for resources to sustain projects like “Haven’t We Shared Much Salt and Bread?”, which strengthened the role of grassroots women in bridging the persistent divide between Armenia and Turkey. [more: p17]

We invite you to connect with IMPACT

Whether you are an artist, cultural worker, conflict transformation practitioner, scholar, arts educator, funder, policymaker, diplomat, activist or are doing related work, we invite you to explore how you could benefit from connecting to IMPACT and what you could offer to such a platform.

➢ Explore the Imagine IMPACT | Full Report: bit.ly/ImagineIMPACTfull and share with your circles
➢ Join an upcoming virtual learning exchange
➢ Find updates and resources in the Peacebuilding and the Arts Now e-newsletter
➢ Contribute to and invest in IMPACT’s emerging platform by contacting IMPACT@brandeis.edu
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