Relational Diplomacy

Innovations in Peacebuilding:
A Case Study of Cyprus

Executive Summary

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Relational Diplomacy and New Communications Technology

How Technological Innovations Can Build Relationships Without Borders and Contribute to a More United Planet; Case Study on Peacebuilding in Cyprus

We can easily agree that the Internet has changed our world. But we have yet to see just how well humans can learn to use this new technology, and how well we can exploit its potential to build positive change. As the early years tick on, we are witnessing some shining examples of people who are using the tool to craft a new way of relating. The citizens' movement for peace in Cyprus, which ended with the opening of the border in 2003, was one of the first to tap into its power.

By its very nature, the Internet reaches beyond borders and boundaries – physical, cultural, religious, ethnic. It is a technology with unprecedented powers to bridge divides, enhance communication, and build communities. It empowers citizens as individuals, and as a movement. This is just the beginning, as we move through and beyond "Web 2.0" into an age where generations are born into instant and constant cross-communication. We have yet to see how the evolution of the technology will unite us – as citizens, as humans.

In Cyprus, it was relational diplomats, from both sides of the infamous green line, who created a citizens movement that eventually led to the opening of the borders. By employing innovative peacebuilding techniques and utilizing technology, these peacebuilders reframed the conflict and planted seeds of peace among the citizens of Cyprus. In a world grown weary of conflict, the lessons and innovations gleaned from the peacebuilders of this small island state provide valuable clues for other parts of the world.

Cyprus Conflict

From 1974 to 2003, the island of Cyprus was torn in two, following a Turkish invasion in response to a Greek Cypriot military coup. Turkish troops took over the northern third of the island, and there were thousands of casualties and explicit reports of atrocities. For nearly 30 years, the island was plagued by violence and torn by cultural and religious differences. Hope finally came in the form of a massive citizens' movement in the 1990s, following peacebuilding efforts by third parties (such as NGOs); in 2003, the border was reopened.

One of the most notable aspects of this broad citizen's movement was the way ordinary citizens used new communication technology. Indeed, the technology enabled them to reach across physical and cultural boundaries in ways rarely, if ever, seen before in such a deeply divided landscape.

This technology enabled and enhanced efforts at *Relational Diplomacy*.

Technology in Cyprus and Efforts to Build Peace

History of Technology in Cyprus and how It Was Used to Build Peace

Cyprus was one of the last European countries to obtain Internet access, not doing so until 1995. Building a communications infrastructure became a very deliberate effort by inside and outside actors, and in fact was often part of a peacebuilding effort.

There were several technology-based initiatives created to further the efforts to reunite the island: Tech4Peace.org, Peace-Cyprus.org, Cyprus-Action.org, and CyprusMediaNet.com.

Peace-Cyprus.org played an instrumental role in online peacebuilding efforts. This organization was remarkable in that it was founded by two Turkish Cypriots and two Greek Cypriots. Interestingly, the co-founders met on the Internet and carried out many initiatives together before ever meeting face-to-face.

Nicos' Email Newsletter

One of the most well-known peacebuilders in Cyprus is Nicos Anastasiou. As a peace leader in Cyprus in the 1990s, he used technology as one of his most powerful tools to spread his messages, organize, and inform people all over the world.

Nicos is known for his email newsletter, which went out on a regular basis to over 7,000 people both in and outside of Cyprus, including politicians, diplomats, students, activists, and friends around the world. This newsletter played a huge role in building the citizens' movement that demanded the end of conflict and reopening of the border.

CyprusMediaNet.com

A Cambridge Foundation for Peace project, called CyprusMediaNet.com, was established in early 2003 and funded by the United Nations and the US State Department. This website allowed people, in Cyprus and around the world, to access accurate translations from the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot press in Greek, Turkish, and English.

Benefits and Uses of New Technology

In Cyprus and elsewhere, new communications technology dovetailed with the Relational Diplomacy approach in a variety of productive ways. Relationships were forged and deepened; dialogues begun and expanded; and vital information was exchanged. It enabled the actors to bridge their differences and find common ground for building positive, peaceful relationships.

As new technologies emerge, new actors will quickly find ways to incorporate them into their efforts. Using new technology:

- **Enhances Educational Efforts**
  Enables distance education.

- **Creates Communication Bridges**
  Allows communication where none existed before.

- **Circumvents Traditional Barriers**
  Provides a borderless venue for communications.

- **Fosters Relationship Building**
  Enables incubation and relationship building.

- **Fosters Relationship Preservation**
  Enables relationships to continue across distances.

- **Provides Safe Starting Point and Recruiting Grounds**
  Provides a safe place to learn more and explore a new cause.

- **Provides Centralized Informational Source**
  Is increasingly important as a media outlet as websites and e-mail newsletters accumulate and distribute vast amounts of information.

- Fosters Intercultural Understanding
  Provides a safe way to explore the identity of the other and also learn to appreciate the other's culture and traditions.

- **Enhances Accessibility & Reach**
  Enables people to reach influential members of the community who might have direct or indirect ties to policymakers.

- **Provides Vital Infrastructure and Continuity**
  Leads to the establishment of vital infrastructure through communication bridges.

- **Facilitates Interdependent Bicommunal Projects**
  Allows for the formation of groups in a wide variety of ways. Bicommunal groups represented the core unit in the Cypriot peace initiative. Some were formed through real world activities (such as

peace camps) and others were formed completely online. During this period, Nicos' newsletter was sent to over 30 bicommunal groups and contributed to the active formation of new groups. According to the author, one of the most successful groups focused on Cypriot dance. "There is a common Cypriot heritage," reiterates Nicos, "and they practice in Greek and Turkish."

- **Provides Organizational Tool**
  Is used by peace leaders (and others) to recruit and organize.

- **Provides Promotional Tool**
  Enhances the power to persuade and influence public opinion.

- **Connects Populations in Diaspora**
  Enables connection to Diaspora communities who often have more severe, less compromising views of the other. In any discussion of technological peacebuilding, Diaspora populations should be considered. The traditional role of the nation-state is being challenged as theorists make a call for a social science that is "unbound" from the nation-state, one that recognizes the existence of "transnational social field." or "transnational social spaces."

Additional Useful Technologies

- **Instant Chat**

- **Twitter**
  Citizens are finding ways to organize thousands of people in an instant, in 140 characters or less.

- **Listservs (eGroups) and Email Messaging**
  In Cyprus, Nicos was able to send a message of peace to over 7,000 people on both sides of the conflict with the click of one button.

- **Online Bulletin (Threaded Discussion) Boards/Foru**ms
  Tech4Peace and Peace-Cyprus.org had discussion boards for both interactive dialogue and organizational efforts.

- **Audio/Video Presentations**

- **Radio Shows**

- **TV Programming/ Live Streaming Webcasts**
  Peacebuilders sometimes used TV as a forum for reaching wide audiences. With technological advancement, we will most likely experience more media convergence and an increasing popularity for web TV.

- **Audio Chat/Video Chat (Teleconferencing)**
  Audio and video chats enhance the sensual encounter with the other.

Obstacles

Any new technology encounters bumps in the road; while the Internet has opened countless paths to communications, it is still evolving to facilitate and enhance that communication.

- **Language barriers**
  Translation tools are increasingly available, but hardly perfect. In Cyprus, English became the language that bridged the gap between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots; that is not always an option in other countries/cultures.

- **Evaluations/Lack of Research of Technological Applications**
  It is often difficult to measure the penetration and use of the new technologies. On the other hand, it is not always necessary. A peacebuilder in Cyprus said: "So, the role of technology for us has been meaningful only as a subsidiary component of the human and cultural dimensions that were at stake."

- **Sustainability, Impartiality and Objectivity**
  When new technologies pop up, it is often up to the actors/organizers to pay for them. If they seek outside funding, they may run into questions about impartiality. The area of financial rewards is wrought with internal rivalries among practitioners and citizen diplomats. Limited fund availability unfortunately necessitates competition among peacebuilders. This remains an obstacle to cooperation.

- **Collaboration and Cooperation**
  Contrary to development work, actor proliferation in peacebuilding is viewed positively; however, greater coordination is required and local voices must be empowered.

- **Capacity**
  The use of technology presupposes a certain technological and economic infrastructure. The use of technology is limited by availability and prevalence of users. In some regions, other more simplistic technological tools are useful.

- **Technology Adaptation Issues**
  Organizers seeking to roll out and use new technology must take care to assess their audience and availability of resources.

- **Transparency and Legitimacy**
  Peacebuilding activities often conjure up suspicion about in-group loyalties. Combine a technological aspect to these efforts and questions about an operation's integrity expand exponentially.

- **Content/Project Quality**
  The Internet is a medium—a new resource for peacebuilders. It is up to peacebuilders to provide creative, innovative, and appropriate interventions.

- **Government Intervention**
  In Cyprus, many of the early technology-based peacebuilders encountered government threats.

- **Assaults and Misunderstandings**
  The anonymity of the Internet, if not properly monitored, can allow for mean-spirited attacks among online participants in certain virtual forums, e.g., discussion boards.

- **Issues of Senior Level Project Control**
  In some cases, particularly in less technologically friendly environments, senior staff is threatened by more technologically savvy junior people taking over control.

The Fit Between Technology and Conflict Resolution Theory

Are these technological interventions rooted in conflict resolution theory? Can such theory take the technological leap?

The Concept of Relational Diplomacy

In attempting to understand the roles of technology in peacebuilding, along with practical applications, we should distinguish between a "conflict-centric" approach; and a reframing approach, also called "relational diplomacy."

- **Conflict-centric approaches** focus on the issues and memory of the conflict, including fear, pain, and resentment.

- In contrast, the **"reframing approach" -- or relational diplomacy --** deals with fostering interpersonal relationships, in the form of friendships, between the people on all levels. The focus of the "reframing" approach is to set the conflict aside completely and focus on the commonalities of the people, including similar personal interests. The premise is that friendship is the first step to peace. Once parties understand and appreciate the humanity in the other, they can begin to focus on harder issues.

  Relational diplomacy is an approach to sustainable peacebuilding, which recognizes that individual interpersonal relationships are the most essential and basic element—the building blocks for peace. Interconnectivity, based on mutual understanding, allows a fundamental shift in the perception of the other from fear to greater acceptance. Momentum towards sustainable peace expands exponentially as this relational constellation expands.

Technology can be used for both approaches, but is perhaps best suited for broader-range, citizen-based initiatives.

Conflict Resolution Theory

Intractable Nature of Protracted Social Conflict

According to Edward Azar, a new type of conflict -- protracted social conflict (PSC) -- has increased in prevalence since World War II. PSC occurs among diverse religious, racial, or cultural communal groups and originates as these groups strive to maintain and protect their distinctive identities. Since protracted social conflict is rooted deeply in the societal need to protect and maintain distinctive group identity, traditional diplomacy is unlikely to yield sustainable peace. Traditional diplomacy is more equipped to resolve resource-based issues (e.g., control over land, poverty). The deeper human needs and values must be addressed by changing the underlying human relationship, promoting mutual understanding and acknowledgement of these concerns.

This is where the need for **citizen diplomacy** enters the stage. Technology bridges the human divide and allows communication among a mass group of individuals, thus affecting the "hearts and minds" of the people.

Stereotypes and Images

According to Elizabeth Bronfen, "The Stereotype of 'the other' is used to control the ambivalent and to create boundaries." The roots of the conflict exist in the hearts and minds of the people, not in the policy decisions of diplomats. Only when the will of the people changes will politicians truly begin to listen**. The Internet provides the potential, in some environments, for unparalleled reach.**

Approaches

John Lederach argues that peacebuilding is fundamentally rooted in the building of relationship and trust; his position represents a paradigmatic shift away from a concern with the resolution of issues towards a frame of reference that focuses on the restoration and rebuilding of relationships. Lederach encourages a focus on middle level dialogue, versus a top-level or bottom-level dialogue, among communal groups rather than politicians or diplomats.

Intergroup Cohesion and Contagion

One of the success stories of peacebuilders in Cyprus was their ability to form bicommunal coalitions of the willing. Many of these bicommunal groups were organized and maintained primarily through cyberspace. By weaving intergroup relationships, peacebuilders were able to mobilize diverse populations for collective action.

Interactive Dialogue

When conflicts involve deep animosity among the opposing groups, it is the hearts and minds of the populace which must change. Who, then, should come into dialogue if not the masses? The governments as representatives of the people will only truly be motivated to change when the voices of the people resound. How can dialogue of such scale expect to be facilitated if not through technology, namely the Internet?

Intercultural Communications and Cultural Adaptation Theory

In areas such as Cyprus, where divides exist along ethnic lines, important lessons may be drawn from intercultural communications and cultural adaptation theory. One of the major objectives of intercultural adaptation theory is to truly become intercultural—to transcend the "us" versus "them" paradigm in order to join a greater whole, in which independent parts coexist in harmony within a greater ring of cooperation and understanding.

Sociological Considerations

- **Interdependence**
  Interdependence is the core fact of social life: As we have witnessed, technology can be used to create joint bicommunal projects among diverse groups, even among populations in Diaspora.

- **Increasing Contact**
  Producing more individualized perceptions of outgroup members and more personalized relationships can help reduce bias.

- **Dual Identification**
  The idea of dual identification is based on the recognition that social identities with different groups at different levels of inclusiveness need not be mutually exclusive. Dual identities in this sense have been promoted as an appropriate model for multiethnic societies, allowing for preservation of ethnic differentiation and ethnic identity on the one hand, and integration at the national level on the other.

- **Acceptance of the Other**
  The process of acceptance may be defined as one where relationships become more and more caring and committed as proximity and interaction continue. All collaborators become "one of us." In other words, cooperation widens the sense of who is in the group, and "they" become "we."

- **Prejudice Results from Threat**
  Some theorists argue that prejudice stems from the need to maintain self-esteem and that derogation of the outgroup serves to maintain ingroup self-value.

- **Prejudice Results from Perceived Differences**
  Other theorists posit that prejudice is a consequence of perceiving others as different from oneself or one's group.

Public Diplomacy: Lessons for Peacebuilders

Creative technological applications will further empower peacebuilders to broaden their reach.

Conclusion

The enormity of the peace building task, particularly in deeply divided societies, requires a multi-dimensional approach to peace building. Practitioners must venture into new territory in the conquest for peace. Third party actors must acknowledge the importance of both the conflict-centric approach and relational diplomacy or the "reframing approach."

On a grassroots level, relational diplomacy can inspire the massive societal shifts required to create lasting change. The Internet offers exciting and hopeful opportunities for innovative intervention that provide the interconnectivity necessary to create mutual understanding and shift perceptions. As we have witnessed in Cyprus, there have been successful programs implementing creative technologies to foster peace, but the true potential of the technological domain remains untapped. Effective use of technology by the masses to achieve a goal was evident in the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia in January, 2011.

Surely not a panacea for global conflict, technology still has an important role to play. The hard-earned experiences and dynamic strategies of peacebuilders in Cyprus provide invaluable insights and clues to conflictants in other troubled parts of the world.