

# ICTs for a Global Culture of Peace

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*“War is not inherent in human beings. We learn war and we learn peace.  
The culture of peace is something which is learned,  
just as violence is learned and war culture is learned.”*

-- Elise Boulding

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# 1. Introduction

The widespread availability of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has led to the globalization process and continues to have a large influence on social, economic, political and cultural structures around the world. Much work has been done in the academia to get to a good scientific understanding of the causes, nature and consequences of today's interconnected world<sup>1</sup>, and to analyze both opportunities and threats that ICTs pose to humankind. In the context of Peace and Conflict Studies, ICTs can play an important role in many ways. On the positive side, communication technologies such as the Internet can support nonviolent, democratic movements, promote education, capacity building, intercultural dialogue and the establishment of a beneficial global civil society. They can also play a liberating role in processes to overcome authoritarian regimes, as has been demonstrated by the 2011 revolutions in the Arab world<sup>2</sup>. On the negative side, ICTs can be used for cybercrime, cyberwarfare, surveillance, the spreading of extremist propaganda, the suppression of democratic processes and other destructive purposes.

One promising and noble strategy to work toward the ideals of the United Nations charter has been and continues to be the concept of a Culture of Peace, which embodies respect for cultural diversity and the idea of promoting tolerance and intercultural dialogue. The purpose of this paper is to explore this concept and its foundations, as well as to examine the role ICTs can play in it.

## 2. Culture, Identity and Peace

For the term culture, many possible definitions exist<sup>3</sup>. One way of describing it would be as the distinct set of behaviors, habits, rules, traditions, customs, attitudes, values and beliefs of an individual or a group of individuals. This definition can also include language, history, religion, ideology, cosmology, art and one's overall way of life. Elements of culture that are not so visible at first sight, but only unfold after some time

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see (Castells, 2000)

<sup>2</sup> The term sometimes used for these movements – “Twitter Revolution” – is of course an exaggeration, but still illustrates the importance of modern ICTs in political movements.

<sup>3</sup> For a long list of possible definitions, see (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952)

of interaction, are sometimes referred to as “deep culture”<sup>4</sup>. According to the international organization most concerned with culture, the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO), culture is one’s “way of looking at the world”. Within a society, the world views embodied in the society’s culture are expressed through laws, political policies and social norms.

The concept of culture is closely linked to that of identity. Our identity is what defines us as an individual. Identity is complex and always in transition. It can be defined by oneself, or it can be observed by others, and it exists on multiple levels. On the micro level, our personal identity includes features that are specific to us alone, such as our name, address, phone number, or our educational and professional curriculum. On a higher level, our social identity determines our role and position within a society. It includes our overall social roles and status, our friends, and our social responsibilities such as being a parent. Finally, on the macro level, our cultural identity determines cultural features that we embody within ourselves and share with others to a more or less extent.

Identity is the set of properties that distinguish us from others. In some interpretations, a culture can therefore only exist if it can differentiate itself from other cultures. From this point of view, it may be possible to define a measure of distance between cultures, and some cultures may be closer or more related to each other than others. Also, some cultures may be more “open” than others, i.e. better able to integrate new members.

Peace is similarly complex to define. In its strictest sense (“negative peace”) it means the absence of war and violence. In a broader sense (“positive peace”) it can encompass many more desirable conditions, e.g. spiritual, inner peace as well as happiness, a just social order, the absence of structural violence, a democratic political system, gender balance, the fulfilling of basic needs, and harmony with the environment (“gaia peace”).

One interesting question to ask is whether some cultures are inherently more peaceful or violent than others. Cultures may tolerate or encourage violence to a greater or lesser extent, in other words, the barriers to resorting to violence and war may be different in some cultures than in others. Also, the ways in which conflicts are perceived and

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<sup>4</sup> For achieving intercultural dialogue, the appreciation of this “deep culture” is especially important. See (Shaules, 2007)

handled (one party may not even acknowledge the existence of a conflict), and the ways in which peace and war are viewed, valued and conducted can vary between cultures. Cultures that are inherently peaceful may express themselves through the glorification of peace heroes in their narratives, through the erection of peace statues and monuments, through emphasizing peaceful events and periods in their history, or through the practicing of peace journalism in the media.

Based on a common understanding of the terms “identity”, “culture” and “peace”, a “Culture of Peace” is hereby assumed to refer to a set of values, behaviors and beliefs based on respect for life, non-violence, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, a guarantee for human rights, the peaceful settlement of conflicts, and beneficial dialogue between cultures.

### **3. Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue**

In its constitution, UNESCO states:

*“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.”*

This fundamental statement is deeply based on the concepts of identity and culture, the respect for cultural diversity, and the beneficial dialogue between cultures. Many conflicts between and within nations are in one way or the other rooted in cultural differences, the lack of respect for cultural diversity, and the resulting misunderstandings and tensions between peoples. If one’s identity is threatened or denied legitimacy or respect, conflicts can quickly arise and become intractable, i.e. very difficult to resolve. And since identity is a fundamental human need and an essential step of every individual’s growth process, any deprivation of this need is likely to result in a strong, hostile response<sup>5</sup>. If such deprivation is not addressed appropriately, it can lead to polarization, stereotyping and dehumanization. This is true both in the interpersonal context and in a group context when shared, cultural identity is concerned.

Keeping the importance of identity and culture in mind, the basic idea of preventing conflicts by promoting dialogue between cultures is at the same time noble, credible and promising. If we know enough about each other, we are more likely to understand,

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<sup>5</sup> See (Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, USA, 1998)

respect, and perhaps even enjoy each other's identity, and less likely to engage in conflict and violence with each other. And if we recognize each other as humans instead of engaging in mutual processes of dehumanization, we will be able to solve conflicts before they unfold their destructive character.

One historical example which is sometimes mentioned as "proof" for this approach to work is the Spanish city of Córdoba in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when the city population was composed of people from all three Abrahamic religions, who not only lived together in peace, but also created a unique blend of culture and a level of development unparalleled in Europe at that time. The reason for this harmony and fruitful cooperation was the fact that Muslims, Christians and Jews simply knew everything about each beliefs and customs.

Prerequisites for a Culture of Peace are respect for cultural diversity, as well as attachment to one's own cultural identity. As one of UNESCO's most important documents, the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*<sup>6</sup> was adopted soon after the 11 September 2001 attacks, in order to reaffirm the conviction that intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee of peace. This declaration in its preamble mentions the significance of dialogue and cooperation between cultures:

*"Affirming that respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of mutual trust and understanding are among the best guarantees of international peace and security,"*

The same document in its Article 1 explicitly points out that cultural diversity is a desirable good that should be preserved:

*Article 1: Cultural diversity: the common heritage of humanity*

*"Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature."*

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<sup>6</sup> See (Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001).

Another important source is UNESCO's *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*<sup>7</sup>, which among other things states as an objective:

*"... to encourage dialogue among cultures with a view to ensuring wider and balanced cultural exchanges in the world in favour of intercultural respect and a Culture of Peace."*

From these documents, it is important to remember the value of cultural diversity, as well as the beneficial potential of intercultural dialogue for a Culture of Peace. Interestingly, when it comes to technology, diversity is often less desirable. The Vienna Conclusions – a result of the conference *"ICT+Creativity"* held from 2-3 June 2005 in Vienna, Austria during the preparatory phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) – states the following on the topic of cultural and technical diversity in the online world:

*"Whereas ICT is most effective when it is standardised and uniform, content is most valuable when it is varied and unique. Whereas ICT infrastructure strives to be culture-neutral, content is most powerful when it intermingles with local cultures."*

#### **4. Toward a Culture of Peace**

Based on this simple understanding of the value of cultural diversity and of intercultural dialogue as a powerful opportunity for peace, and as a counter-concept to a perceived "Culture of War" that has existed throughout human history, UNESCO has in 1992 started the "Culture of Peace" program under the leadership of David Adams<sup>8</sup>. The program's main scientific foundations were the *Seville Statement on Violence*<sup>9</sup> of 1986, which states that violence and war are not biologically part of human nature, and the *Yamoussoukro Declaration on Peace in the Minds of Men*<sup>10</sup> of 1989, which calls for

*"a new vision of peace culture based on the universal values of respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human rights and equality between women and men"*.

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<sup>7</sup> See (Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 2005)

<sup>8</sup> See (Adams & True, 1997)

<sup>9</sup> See (Seville Statement on Violence, 1986)

<sup>10</sup> See (Yamoussoukro Declaration on Peace in the Minds of Men, 1989)

Following UNESCO's lead, in 1998 several noteworthy resolutions of the UN General Assembly have dealt with the concept of Culture of Peace, its importance, and its implementation:

- Resolution 52/13 was the first major general resolution on a *"Culture of Peace"*.
- Resolution 52/15 proclaimed the year 2000 as the *"International Year for the Culture of Peace"*.
- Resolution 53/22 proclaimed the year 2001 as the *"United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations"*. It emphasizes  
*"the significant role of dialogue as a means to reach understanding, remove threats to peace and strengthen interaction and exchange among civilizations"*
- Resolution 53/25 proclaimed the decade 2001-2010 as the *"International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World"*. It points out the fundamental importance of a Culture of Peace for core values of the United Nations, by stating that  
*"the task of the United Nations to save future generations from the scourge of war requires transformation towards a Culture of Peace, which consists of values, attitudes and behaviours that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, all human rights, tolerance and solidarity, that reject violence and endeavour to prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation."*

Finally, in 1999, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 53/243, the *"Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace"*. This document is often considered one of the great documents ever produced by the United Nations, on a par with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and directed toward the organization's primary goal to abolish war. On several occasions, the resolution emphasizes the importance and potential of intercultural dialogue for the United Nation's original goals to prevent war, e.g. in the following section of the text:

*"Recognizing that peace not only is the absence of conflict, but also requires a positive, dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation,"*

## 5. ICTs for a Global Culture of Peace

Having examined the value of identity, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, as well as the concept of a Culture of Peace, this section attempts to examine the role of ICTs in working toward these goals. Cultures emerge, evolve and interact with each other over time. With this interaction comes the potential both for connecting and for separating. Today, with the widespread availability of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet and mobile phones, it appears that the potential for such interaction is now greater than ever before. Barring several obstacles that have to be considered (see section 0), modern communication technologies are a powerful asset for fruitful dialogue between cultures.

International organizations have long recognized the role that ICTs can play in achieving this goal. For example, in 1990, UNESCO has established the new operational sector “Communication and Information”, which since then has become equally important as the three traditional sectors “Education”, “Science” and “Culture”.

UNESCO’s *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* contains a statement on the influence that the development of ICTs has on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

*“Considering that the process of globalization, facilitated by the rapid development of new information and communication technologies, though representing a challenge for cultural diversity, creates the conditions for renewed dialogue among cultures and civilizations,”*

Within this last sentence lie both risk and opportunity: The spreading of ICTs and the resulting globalization process can on one hand mean a threat to cultural diversity, and on the other hand an opportunity for intercultural dialogue.

The *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* is accompanied by a 20 point Action Plan, whose points 9, 10, 11, 12, 16 and 17 specifically address the topics of cultural diversity and dialogue in global information networks, stating for example the following as an important objective:

*“Encouraging the production, safeguarding and dissemination of diversified contents in the media and global information networks ...”*



UNESCO's website on the Culture of Peace program<sup>11</sup> mentions (as one of the cornerstones of the program) the need to:

*"Support participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge."*

Elise Boulding, whose research has served as a significant inspiration to the Culture of Peace program, mentions that in peaceful cultures<sup>12</sup>,

*"Secrecy and control of information by those in power is replaced by the free flow and sharing of information among everyone involved."*

Following the establishment of the Culture of Peace program, several reports have been published during the course of the *"International Decade for a Culture of Peace"*:

- A 2005 report<sup>13</sup> describes the Internet as a useful tool for promoting the idea and values of a Culture of Peace.
- A 2010 report<sup>14</sup> states:

*"With access to the Internet and greater global movement people are connected with different cultures, ideologies, ethnicities, etc. that helps break down barriers."*

According to the „Global Movement for a Culture of Peace“ website<sup>15</sup> started by Culture of Peace architect David Adams,

*"Early on, we recognized that Internet could play an important in the development of a global movement."*

He also states that an early draft declaration and programme of action on a Culture of Peace mentioned that

*"[The media's] technological advances and pervasive growth have made it possible for every person to take part in the making of history, enabling for the first time a truly global movement for a Culture of Peace."*

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.unesco.ca/en/interdisciplinary/peace/default.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> See (Boulding, 2008)

<sup>13</sup> See (Foundation Culture of Peace, 2005)

<sup>14</sup> See (Foundation Culture of Peace, 2010)

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.culture-of-peace.info/>

At an early stage, the project had even included concrete plans to design and implement ICT services that would encourage dialogue and Culture of Peace principles. One such plan was the *Culture of Peace News Network* (CPNN), where Internet visitors could describe a newsworthy event or write a review of a film, TV program, video game or book, along with a rating system indicating how it contributes to the Culture of Peace. Ultimately, this project did not succeed due to financial and organizational problems.

### **5.1. Technical Considerations**

Dialogue between two or more individuals requires a medium. The principal properties that are generally mentioned when examining modern ICTs as a medium – as opposed to more traditional media such as the telephone, television or postal mail – are their high speed, low price and interactivity. It is faster to send an e-mail than to send a letter, it is cheaper to use Skype than to make a traditional international phone call, and unlike television, on the Internet everybody can interactively both publish and receive information.

Extensive academic work has been done on describing ICTs and their properties as a medium, both from a technical, mathematical perspective<sup>16</sup>, and as far as their social effects are concerned<sup>17</sup>. When considering the Internet, it is important to point out that the Internet by itself is not a medium. Instead, it is a technical infrastructure on which applications can be built which then serve as a medium. In this aspect, Internet applications can exhibit very different characteristics. For example, a text-based discussion forum is a very different medium than a video conference.

In addition to a suitable medium, communication between two or more individuals also requires mechanisms for interactively conveying semantics – information that is meaningful to human beings. In its most common form, dialogue is conducted by people who meet face-to-face. In this case, the medium is the air between them, and the mechanisms for conveying semantics are mostly verbal communication (speech) and non-verbal communication (gestures, body language, facial expressions, etc.). This is generally the most effective form of communication, capable of transporting large amounts of information in a short time. Compared to face-to-face communication, any

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<sup>16</sup> For example, see (Shannon & Weaver, 1963)

<sup>17</sup> For example, see (Castells, 2000)

electronic medium is necessarily more limited and less able to efficiently convey all the semantics that are typically found between humans. Sometimes, limited technologies such as text-based systems can be semantically enhanced in creative ways, such as by spatial arrangement of words or the use of emoticons.

## **5.2. *Identity Online***

The concepts of culture and identity are interdependent and influence each other. Our culture is part of our identity, and in turn, our identity determines which culture we belong to. One key question in exploring how ICTs can help to promote a Culture of Peace must therefore be how identity is established and communicated on the Internet and other new media. Since the medium properties vary a lot, the way identity functions also varies and depends on the concrete application being used, e.g. identity on Facebook is different from identity on Skype. It is useful to distinguish between personal, social and cultural identity, and to examine how they are expressed online.

### **Personal Identity Online**

The concept of personal identity online refers to the extent to which applications and websites such as Google, Facebook or Skype are able to distinguish one individual (one user of an online application or service) from another individual. Personal identity can be approached in an “anonymous” way (not being able to identify an individual), in a “pseudonymous” way (being able to identify an individual, but not knowing their real identity), and in a “veronymous” way (knowing the real identity of the individual).

In the original design of the Internet, no need for a universal mechanism for handling personal identity has been anticipated, and therefore it had not been built into the network’s infrastructure. However, different online applications and services have over time introduced various ways of registering and identifying individuals, and by today, these mechanisms have evolved much. By identifying a user, a website or application becomes able to offer personalized services for the user, and to store the user’s personal data and preferences.

The traditional approach of establishing personal identity involves registering with some kind of identifier (e.g. a username, or an e-mail address), and some way of proving ownership of the identifier. This process of proving one’s identity is usually referred to

as authentication and can involve secret knowledge (e.g. a password), a physical item (e.g. a USB device) or a personal feature (e.g. fingerprints). In other words, it is possible to prove who you are either through something you know, something you have, or something you are. Technologies such as cookies<sup>18</sup> make it easier to maintain personal identity after it has been established.

It should be noted that no authentication mechanism is perfect: Something you know can be forgotten, something you have can be lost, and something you are can change. In addition, the fact that different Internet applications and services usually approach personal identity independently from each other can lead to inconsistent user experiences and as a consequence, to confusion, inconvenience and security problems. In short, current approaches to personal identity online have severe disadvantages. Alternative approaches are being explored, for example technologies such as OpenID<sup>19</sup> or Facebook Connect<sup>20</sup>, which among other things allow the re-use of identity across many websites.

Once personal identity has been established, it consists not only of an identifier that has been used for authentication, but it also involves a varying number of so-called attributes that are associated with an individual's identifier. Such attributes can be anything which can be known about an individual, ranging from name, address and phone number to photos, education and political views. Together, the set of attributes constitutes a profile of an individual.

## **Social Identity Online**

When it comes to social identity, it is of course social networking services such as Facebook or Google+ that attempt to incorporate it as well as possible. These are a special kind of web applications designed to model relationships between people, to accumulate and share data such as personal profiles, messages and photos, and to

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<sup>18</sup> A cookie is a little piece of information that is stored on a computer when a website is used. When the same website is used again at a later time, the cookie is sent back to it and therefore enables it to identify the computer.

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.openid.net/>

<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.facebook.com/help/?page=730>

provide a set of additional information and communication services based on the participating individuals and relationships between them.

While social networking services try to model our social identity online, they can only express it to a limited extent. While they allow individuals to share information, they do not typically incorporate support for the different roles that one might have in society. For example, on Facebook, one cannot behave differently in one's role as a "father" from one's role as a "co-worker". Instead, there is only a single "account" which is used for all activities. Also, relationships between individuals are often not accurately represented, for example the single possible relationship "friend" on Facebook is a drastic simplification of the great variety of relationships that actually occur between people. From this perspective, Google+ is an improvement over Facebook insofar as it provides at least basic support for a more advanced notion of social relationships through its "circles" functionality.

### **Cultural Identity Online**

Similar to social identity, cultural identity is also expressed only in limited ways by today's popular ICT applications and services. On social networking services, cultural identity transcends all our activities. For example, parts of one's cultural identity such as traditions, religious views or ethnicity are of course reflected in how we use social networking services, in the messages we post, and in the photos we upload. This inclusion of cultural identity could be called implicit, as (by definition) it affects all our activities and behavior.

Despite this implicit cultural identity, as of today, no online social network services or other ICT applications have an explicit notion of cultural identity. For example, it is not possible in Facebook or similar services to systematically express a person's traditions, religious beliefs or ethnicity. If such an accurate expression of cultural identity existed, then for example, it would be possible for a social networking service to suggest new relationships or enable other functionality based on cultural similarities or differences. Such functionality could potentially support beneficial intercultural dialogue and therefor contribute to a Global Culture of Peace.

### 5.3. Example Software

This section contains several examples of ICT applications and services that are specifically relevant to the vision and ideals of a Culture of Peace. For example, the Culture of Peace Initiative (CPI) website<sup>21</sup> offers online resources such as reports, best practices, an events calendar, and other community services for organizations working on peace-building efforts.

Several groups and initiatives promoting the concept of a Culture of Peace exist on social networking services such as Facebook:

- Culture of Peace Campaign:  
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=135306216564758>
- Culture of Peace Press:  
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=119792618049606>
- Youth Team for a Culture of Peace:  
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=196437314231>

The blogging platform “Global Voices”<sup>22</sup> runs a so-called bridge-blogging service where volunteer authors, translators and editors attempt to provide reports from a local perspective that cannot normally be found in the mainstream media, therefore raising awareness and cross-cultural understanding. For example, on this platform it is possible to read English translations of Egyptian blog posts that had originally been written in Arabic.

Another example web application which is specifically designed for promoting respect for cultural diversity and beneficial intercultural dialogue is *Soliya*<sup>23</sup>, which states:

*“Our mission is to improve relations between Western and predominantly Muslim societies by enabling youth to participate in cross-cultural dialogue and education.”*

With *Soliya*, participants can engage in a moderated video conference, discussing specific topics, posing questions, and exchanging personal views, ideas and opinions. It

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<sup>21</sup> See <http://cultureofpeace.org/>

<sup>22</sup> See <http://globalvoicesonline.org/>

<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.soliya.net/>

is exactly this kind of application that has the potential to enable learning how to respect cultural differences and how to transform conflicts peacefully.

## **6. Reservations and Barriers**

The basic idea that global communication enabled through ICTs would lead to beneficial intercultural dialogue is all too seducing. However, it is also important to consider the possible negative effects of increased levels of interaction and communication between cultures. The following is a list of reservations and barriers that may hinder the utopian vision of establishing a Global Culture of Peace.

### **6.1. Cultural Violence**

One threat is cultural violence, which refers to direct or structural violence which is committed and justified by aspects of culture such as religion or traditions<sup>24</sup>. This process may lead to the glorification of one group and the devaluing of another, based on their cultural differences<sup>25</sup>. The suppressor might even appear generous and charitable, therefore rationalizing the unequal relationship with the suppressed. In today's globalized world in which cultures interact in highly dynamic ways, there might be an increased risk of processes of cultural violence.

### **6.2. Cultural Conflicts**

Another threat is that the ongoing globalization process enabled by ICTs may intensify competition and conflict between cultures instead of encouraging dialogue and understanding. As a consequence, new conflicts can arise based on cultural differences, misunderstandings and intolerance. Cultural and religious identities can be major sources for conflict<sup>26</sup>, and culture can often be a source of conflict rather than of synergy<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> See (Galtung, 1990)

<sup>25</sup> See (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1998)

<sup>26</sup> See (Huntington, 1996)

<sup>27</sup> See (Hofstede, 2001)

ICTs offer new ways for conducting such cultural conflicts, for example, Evgeny Morozov states<sup>28</sup>:

*“If you had to choose one weapon for fighting the next religious war, you could do worse than to pick an iPhone.”*

### **6.3. Cultural Imperialism**

In a more and more interconnected world, some cultures may have far higher numbers of adherents than others, and “larger” cultures may have the resources and will to dominate “smaller” ones, and to impose their cultural identity onto others. This phenomenon is often observed in the field of post-colonial studies and described as an effective way of enforcing political power, dependency and hegemony.

A related phenomenon – communication imperialism – refers to a process in which the ownership and control over the hardware and software of mass media as well as other major forms of communication in one country are singly or together subjugated to the domination of another country with deleterious effects on the indigenous values, norms and culture<sup>29</sup>. In other words, control over ICT infrastructure by members of one culture can provide effective means to spread and impose this culture’s particular traditions, beliefs and values, and therefore result in cultural imperialism.

Communication imperialism is not specific to modern ICTs. In 1980, a UNESCO commission published a report<sup>30</sup> that identified inequalities in global media infrastructures and proposed steps to establish a „New World Information and Communication Order“, in other words, make global media representation more equitable and therefore reduce the potential for communication imperialism.

### **6.4. Cultural Homogenization**

When individual, less dominant cultures get assimilated into others, this can lead to a reduction of diversity and in its extreme form to the establishment of a single “world monoculture” in which little distinction exists. The emergence of regional or even global cultures that incorporate elements from many other cultures is not necessarily a bad

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<sup>28</sup> See (Morozov, God Bless This Gadget, 2009)

<sup>29</sup> See (Lee, 1988)

<sup>30</sup> See (International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, 1980)



thing – on the contrary, over the course of time, it has always been a natural process for cultures to evolve, interact and mix with each other. However, it is also important to remember that one’s ability to adapt to new cultural realities is limited, and that processes of homogenization run contrary to the value that is inherent to cultural diversity.

### **6.5. *Techno-Utopism***

Special care should be taken not to fall into the trap of fascination that is often inherent to new technologies. New technological developments from automobiles to television have often been met with strong emotions as well as with unrealistic hopes and fears. For example, when during the 1990s the Internet became widely available in mainstream society, the quick spreading of this then new technology resulted in heavy reactions on both ends of the spectrum, ranging from utopist hopes that new levels of participatory communication would lead to a more peaceful, democratic and just world, to the fear that its effects on humanity would threaten social and political orders world-wide.

Also, it should be noted that the very idea of establishing world peace through a global communication system is not new. With the introduction of the telegraph 200 years ago, as well as with the introduction of the communications satellite 50 years ago, there was a general sense that such technologies would overcome barriers of space and time, and therefore enable all peoples of the world to communicate with each other at a new level, which would avoid conflicts altogether and lead to a perpetual peace<sup>31</sup>. This is a vision that is now again popular among today’s Internet utopists, however, the reality remains that in our present time we continue to face a large amount of conflicts and other challenges.

### **6.6. *Universalist Aspirations***

In the course of human history, on many occasions ideas and ideologies have existed that claimed to be applicable to the whole world and to benefit humanity as a whole. The conquests of Alexander the Great were conducted with the idea that a world order in which a single king had authority over all peoples would ultimately be better for

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<sup>31</sup> See (Standage, 1999)

everybody. Communism had similar universalist aspirations, aiming at uniting all workers and creating a global class-less society where everybody would share ownership and benefits from common goods. Finally, extremist religious movements are also often based on the idea to apply to the whole world, e.g. modern Post-Al-Qaeda Islamist terrorism with its political vision of establishing a global Islamic Caliphate in which people would stand directly before God, free of nation-states, governments and hierarchies in general.

Apart from being universalist, what all of the above movements have in common is that they met resistance to the point where they failed to achieve their goal of spreading across all of humanity, despite their utopian visions of creating a single fit-them-all world order. This fact should be kept in mind when discussing the establishment of a Global Culture of Peace. The possibility should be considered that the idealistic goals of such a process may not be shared by all or be in conflict with other cultural aspirations. In the quest to establishing beneficial intercultural dialogue on a global scale, it must therefore remain a legitimate position for individuals or groups of people to consider such dialogue undesirable.

### **6.7. *Problems inherent to ICTs***

In addition to the threat that ICTs can pose to cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue directly, there are also several problems that apply to ICTs and their effects in general, and can therefore also constitute a barrier to the idea of promoting a Global Culture of Peace through the use of ICTs. Two of the most important ones are as follows:

“Information Overload”<sup>32</sup> is the phenomenon that information can become a problem in itself if available in amounts too large to process and in a structure too hard to search. One of the most-often cited advantages of ICTs – the possibility to quickly access a huge amount of information – is therefore put into question.

The term “Digital Divide” (or “Digital Gap”) refers to the phenomenon that basic access to ICTs is distributed unequally, both between different world regions, and between different parts within societies. This inequality exists when it comes to both the

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<sup>32</sup> This term was popularized in (Toffler, 1970), which discusses social effects of change that happens too fast.

availability of technical infrastructure, and the education and knowledge of how to effectively use it. The nature and scale of this phenomenon have been extensively studied, and numerous commitments and concrete action plans have been formulated on how to overcome it<sup>33</sup>, sometimes going as far as considering basic access to ICTs a human right.

Interaction on the Internet can actually reinforce prejudices, rather than help overcome them. According to one study<sup>34</sup>, people are likely to consume sources on the Internet that match their already existing views. Also, the Internet makes it easier for us to find and join groups that we already agree with, which might, in turn, make our views even more extreme<sup>35</sup>, rather than advance the vision of a Culture of Peace.

## **7. Conclusions**

The view assumed throughout this paper is that a Global Culture of Peace can be promoted through the use of ICTs, if the respective online applications and services are designed in a way that accurately represents cultural identity, that encourages respect for cultural diversity, and that enables the free and beneficial exchange of thoughts and ideas.

Several threats to his idea of establishing a Global Culture of Peace through the use of ICTs exist and must be addressed, especially cultural violence, cultural conflicts, cultural imperialism and cultural homogenization. Developments that result in a significant overall reduction of cultural diversity should be avoided, and on the path toward a Global Culture of Peace, it is instrumental to at all times respect this cultural diversity and to recognize that no culture large or small must be considered superior or more important than another.

It is the view of this paper that if ICTs are to be used for promoting the values of a Global Culture of Peace, then especially the expression of cultural identity in online platforms must be greatly enhanced, so that it becomes possible to learn the value of cultural

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<sup>33</sup> For example, see articles 7, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26 and 31 in (Tunis Commitment, 2005), as well as articles 7, 9, 13, 17, 28, 49, 53, 84, 87, 89, 113, 114, 119 and 121 in (Tunis Agenda, 2005), the two outcome documents of the World Summit on the Information Society's (WSIS) second phase.

<sup>34</sup> See (Hsu, 2009)

<sup>35</sup> See (Morozov, 2009)

diversity and to actively engage in intercultural dialogue. In doing so, one caveat that must be kept in mind is that the more details about one's identity are expressed online, the bigger the risk for malicious use becomes. In the case of cultural identity, this risk is especially high. Abuse of such information can in the extreme case lead to ethnic profiling, discrimination and the reinforcement of existing stereotypes.

It is important to keep in mind that intercultural dialogue, tolerance and understanding cannot be achieved through technology alone. They require respect for cultural diversity, an open mind, as well as political and social precondition that support peaceful dialogue. On the technical level, the main question which will decide whether ICTs will lead to more peace or more conflict revolve around how identity is modeled and handled by online communication systems such as social networking services.

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