

Creative Dialogue: Using Arts for Expression and Communication *Introducing Peace Tiles at NCDD*

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Arts, 'a process and symbolic expression of human creative effort which is intended to stimulate some kind of an effect in the artist's and public's eye and lives' has been a universal link in interconnecting the social, cultural, political and economic spheres at local and global scale¹. Art fosters self-analysis, group mediation, conflict resolution, civic engagement in global community issues, and more.

The **Peace Tiles**, an international project that intends to raise awareness about issues people feel are urgent in their lives by creating colorful tiles made of wood, was invited to join the **National Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD)** in August in San Francisco, USA. "The NCDD aims to bring together and support people, organizations, and resources in ways that expand the power of discussion to benefit society. NCDD envisions a future in which all people--regardless of income, position, background or education--are able to engage regularly in lively, thoughtful, and challenging conversations about what really matters to them, in ways that have a positive impact on their lives and their world"².

Peace Tiles workshops create opportunities for participants to learn about the tile making process and its outcomes; primarily self-expression, communication starter, and advocacy. During the NCDD conference the Peace Tiles Project provided a workstation for participants to visually express their thoughts and ideas about NCDD, those topics being discussed at the conference or any other subject that mattered to them the most.

Throughout the 3-day NCDD conference the arts has been also utilized in many other ways by various participants such as the *Brazilian Drumming Ensemble Maracats* that used drums to create unity from sounds and rhythms; the *Illegal Arts* from New York who performed their 'Suggestion Box' project to initiate interactive public participation; the *Poets for Global Justice* who voiced the voiceless through their poetry; and more.

Arts in dialogue *builds fun and non-threatening environments* as well as *stimulates individuals and groups to discover similarities, differences, and opportunities for addressing issues together*. Arts creates tangible and intangible assets in connecting people and communities at:

- Intra-personal
- Inter-personal
- Familial and Organizational
- Community | Societal

¹ Sismanyazici Navaie, N. (2004) 'Societal Arts Marketing: a multi-sectoral, interdisciplinary and international perspective', in Arts Marketing. Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.

² NCDD Website-Internet Source: <http://www.thataway.org/main/about/about.html>

- Inter-cultural
- International and
- global levels.

The use of arts helps *deal with internal and external values* such as:

- emotions (joy, anger, guilt, confusion, fear, anxiety...)
- senses (pain, emptiness, ...)
- thoughts and ideas (violence, racism, peace...)
- physical capacities (ability vs. disability)
- societal concerns (freedom, justice, community life, war and terrorism, natural catastrophes, ...)
- developmental issues (environmental challenges, poverty, universal education, gender empowerment, health pandemics...)

Peace Tiles participants at NCDD focused on such issues as:



- Global Warming
- Active Civic Participation
- Empowerment for Voice
- The Need for Love and Tolerance
- Intra-personal Concerns and the Fear of Taking Risks
- Thoughts on Future
- The Importance of Listening
- The Notion of *'not knowing more, rather knowing differently'*
- The Significance of Collaboration
- Internal and Community Peace
- Diversity and Unity
- Internal Duality and Self-Analysis
- Freedom
- Habitat
- ...



Peace Tiles Workstation at NCDD

Some of the Peace Tiles creators saw the project and the workstation as a refuge to be alone and reflect; some perceived it as a fun way to relax in between sessions – an opportunity to 'play', and others wanted to learn more about the technique, understand the process and ways of implementing it in community development programs. The NCDD attendees visiting the Peace Tiles workstation and those producing their

individual tiles have all affirmed that *'creating arts is a great way to engage people of all ages in the exploration of key issues and building connections from personal to global level'*. NCDD participants were from across the world; including Canada, Nigeria, Barbados, Congo, Burundi, Uganda, Germany, India, and Russia.

To learn more about the project and see the NCDD Peace Tiles please visit www.peacetiles.net.

* Nil Sismanyazici-Navaie is the Founding Director of Arts For Global Development, Inc (www.art4development.net); a partner of the Peace Tiles Project, supporting its communication worldwide and organizing workshops in the Washington DC metro area.