



URBANPEACE

**Gender, Justice and
Environmental Crises**

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I arrived Europe in 2016 and there was a utopian idea in the city regarding the ecological transformation in an urban context.¹ In the sustainability-related transformation against climate change, the sole aim of these actors was ecological activism which was right, but sustainability projects are also carried out politically, financially, etc. by the educated, white-man and upper middle-class local groups, which were and still are concentrated mostly on high-tech energy transitions or utopian ideas. Where was the rest of society in this movement, or what did these people want to transform without considering social injustices or current deep-rooted conflicts in the society? I was thinking about the cause-and-effect relations. This lack of empathy could have led to the development of methods to recolonize the world by reconstructing the knowledge that had shifted to Europe since the Renaissance. Thanks to technological superiority, infrastructure and male dominance, a current of thought was developing under the name of marginalization or control of domination. The creative architects of this supremacy over the working class, or mostly migrant workers and new-comers were not invited to make decisions together about their future. Institutes and universities had already started the ecological transformation process by interfering with politics and were trying

to activate the world in this regard. Science, time and space were ready, but I think the common future of the whole world had to be decided together.

In this regard, we implemented an Urban Gardening Peace Project² with friends from Bosnia, Czech Republic, Syria and local representatives of communities for hearing women's voices. In the past of all of them, there was either the story of a massacre or the effect of the lives that communism or neo-liberal politics had destroyed. No one wanted to live the violence again, nor wanted to make someone else suffer. While doing actor analysis, I realized that the religious groups in the city were numerically superior by a significant margin. For several centuries this city had become a center of religious and sect groups. And which of these groups was the most marginalized and how peace is possible? In this creation process peace within and between persons, within society, between societies, to the mega level within the world (Galtung, 2020) is important period. It is very valuable to think creatively at the intersection of gender equality because there are many mechanisms of control in women's or LGBT people's lives, such as dress, social interaction, freedom of movement, education, work and marriage. Establishing trust and safe environments can create co-knowledge

1 Utopia Stadt Wuppertal <https://www.utopiastadt.eu/>

2 The Urban Gardening Peace Project was founded in 2020 before Covid-19 hit the world. This science-to-practice field research project is based on five foundations. https://www.think7.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Cohesion_Sowing-Seeds-for-Peace-Micro-Level-Peacebuilding-Methods-Towards-a-Just-and-Sustainable-Urban-Transformation-Process_Burcu-Eke-Schneider.pdf

production and sharing open spaces³ in nature to ensure informal flow in this sense. Peace science needs to transform itself accordingly. (Dietrich, 2021) It can establish a support pillar before starting the strengthening process. A Muslim woman religious representative with an Alevi identity - answered this marginalization question clearly. She explained that because she was a woman, she was ignored and not respected enough by representatives of other religions. The belief in peace of this community was very strong and women wanted to evolve from a closed society to an open society.

One of this group's representative Mehmetap Çıplak said:

We (Alevi women) have to explain and open ourselves to the society and take more responsibilities where we live. We have a collective centre of faith and culture, yes that is true, but there are conflicts between nature and us. We need to pass on our nature-based literature and culture, as well as our nature-based art background to the coming generations. We have noticed that many other actors and artists in our city have begun to inspire themselves on the work of the Peace Garden.

In this regard, this movement started especially with women from different cultures in the backyard of the culture and religion center of an Alevi commu-

nity as a symbol for the virtue of justice. This can only be made possible if the male-dominated decision-making structures are made to open up the new spaces for women –especially for the representatives of marginalised groups. By increasing the opportunity for serious consideration of citizens' needs and desires, as well as, providing the chance to take an active part in shaping initiatives, the status quo of the power mechanism's sustainability and injustice can be called into question. (Wittmayer, 2019) Our collective work, which seeks solutions and transforms conflicts without ignoring the problems between groups, continues every day on different platforms with the philosophy of non-violence. For example, we were striving to heal soil in the Peace Garden. For two days an ecologist-activist and the Extinction Rebellion group member man came and said "You are not able to do it. Give me the plow. I have more power" Though our woman friend insisted on not giving him the plow. Even though they considered themselves ecological activists, they could not accept women's equal participation and to share their own power. We decided that women have priority in the decision-making process and continued on our constructive way. This attitude proves that there is a need for the decision-making mechanism to switch from men to women in new spaces. Towards meeting such need in the field and through nature-based solutions,

³ Open Spaces that not only includes physical open spaces but changes in gender equality, decision-making processes with marginalized groups, trust-building, social justice and so on to promote intensive growth patterns that ensure micro -individual- and local level sustainable and just structural changes for a common future.

the pre-existing peacebuilding methods transformed into micro and local level solutions for a just and sustainable urban transformation process. In this process, peacebuilding⁴ helps to prevent violence, it works with inclusiveness to help enable the emergence of a common understanding in three main ways:

- First, it supports inclusive processes of just transition that respect diversity of cultural backgrounds, ethnicity and gender.
- Second, it promotes more environmentally friendly and sustainable behaviors and attitudes among participants.
- Third, it conveys new meanings of “collective struggle for a common future” in different languages, cultures and sacred places.

A transformative change which aims

at reducing barriers to participation for specific groups, such as the marginalized and working class, especially for women, is a necessity to achieve sustainable development goals and building transparent, accountable and inclusive institutions, has the potential to change indifference to interest. Unfortunately, real-world practices progress lethargically because of knowledge-power structures.⁵

In the line with “that exists institutionally, discursively, scientifically, spatially, politically, poetically, and ethically, and it is our task to interrogate that relationship in order to arrive at a more nuanced and effective sexual and environmental understanding” argument, Peace Garden proposes micro-level peacebuilding methods. (Eke Schneider, 2022) In addition to planting herb beds and growing vegetables in the middle of the city, it aimed to improve a shared understand-

4 Peacebuilding is defined here as taking alternative actions on social inequality and ecological unsustainability in order to create more just and sustainable spaces. A narrow version of peacebuilding term has begun to appear within the bodies of the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, other regional actors, the international legal system, and the international financial institutions.

5 A good example for such a knowledge-power structure in field research was urbanA project’s initiative. It started in Rotterdam, then continued in Barcelona and Berlin before the last stop in Brussel. It was an idea to create a co-research process in between 2019 and 2021 by ICLEI, Central European University, Ecolise, Freiburg University, ICTA, Drift and Ulisboa. It received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, with the aim of being a part of just and sustainable urban development from a top-down and bottom-up perspective. Unfortunately, Covid-19 hit everywhere and the two parts were held on digital environment and one was hybrid. This project aimed to reach communities but the education level of these people was not enough to make a scientific contribution to urban transformation. During the process, as a peace worker and fellow of this project, I proposed to Wuppertal Institute using facilitators like “bridge builders” to build bridges with vulnerable and marginalised communities to be able to hear their voices, to show how mother language plays a huge role for building trust and implemented a peace project to prove that it is possible. This was the first step to establish a new dialogue method via peacebuilders. What should be considered here is that communities have many deeply-rooted traumas. Before the intervention, conflict and actor analyses are necessary for ensuring sustainable innovation.

ing of mutual respect in gender-relationships, taking responsibility for future generations and living together and for good. The study designed experiments, worked with an empirical group, used integrative and transformative tools and helped the researchers to understand the problems between different actors at the root.

Peace Garden's constructive resistance⁶ example is not only gender-based on identity or class conflicts but it is also connected to our nature as humans. Albert Camus attempts to justify a form of solidarity that is not class or gender-based, but is based on human nature. He sees "fundamental conflicts with human nature as the unifying power behind political action" in his book *The Rebel*. He insists that "the obscurely defined concept of 'rebellion' was at the heart

of legitimate revolution." People generally assume that there is no connection between identity-based conflicts and class-based conflicts with human nature as, for example, between groups like feminists who live class struggle, anti-capitalism and anti-patriarchy at the same time. These conflicts should be regarded as part of one struggle for a just transition. A just transition means stopping harmful and violent practices, labour exploitation and resource exploitation with regards to women workers and local communities. Identity like being a woman is a core, and nature-based interactions are valuable to heal traumas first. Then it may be possible to transcend this identity which goes beyond a few temporary distributive measures and seeks to tackle the root causes of the different forms of inequality.

⁶ It is an invitation for all parties for a "constructive resistance" (Rigby, 2022) and change that illustrates the strengths and potential of social innovations in numerous areas of social integration through education and poverty reduction, in establishing sustainable patterns of consumption, or in coping with demographic change. (Howaldt et. al. 2018, 2019). As Benoit Godin has pointed out in his manifold publications on the subject, the terms "social innovation" and "social innovator" first started appearing more frequently at the beginning of the 19th century -and hence, long before the technological and economic appropriation of the term "innovation" (2012, Chapter 1). Semantically, from the outset, they were closely linked to the process of social transformation as specific forms of social change.

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