

# SOFT POWER AS A LEVER FOR PEACE: THE CASE OF ARTS, CULTURE AND SPORTS

A discussion Chaired by: Frédéric Ramel, Professor of Political Science, CERI, Sciences Po. | Student Greeter: Jakob Brunnengraeber, PSIA student, Master in International Economic Policy.

- Danka Bartekova, Vice Chair of the Athlete Commission, International Olympic Committee; Skeet Gold Medallist
- Alioune Diagne, Choreographer, Visual Artist, Senegal
- Jyoti Hosagrahar, Deputy Director for the World Heritage Center at UNESCO
- Kate Mosse, Novelist, Playwright and Cultural Commentator, UK
- Mareike Peschau, PSIA student, Master in International Security

Although not often recognized, arts, sports and culture play an immensely important role in international relations and peace efforts. They allow us to express ourselves and can bring people together in times of turmoil. When Jakob Brunnengraeber introduced the third panel of the *Youth and Leaders Summit*, he mentioned exactly that. He drew from his own experience as an athlete, describing the overwhelming vibe of international sports competitions and how the exchange connected him to people he now considers friends.

More stories and discussions like this were about to be shared. To start the conversation, the Chair of the session Frédéric Ramel posed the following questions: what is peace today? How do you see your global role as a practitioner, an artist, or as an athlete in the international system?

## Sports

“Sport has some of the best attributes for peacebuilding,” says Danka Bartekova. One of those attributes, is a global reach: “Everyone loves sports, and if not, every second person loves sports.” She pointed out the last time the Olympic Games were held, in 2018 in Pyeongchang South Korea, which were estimated to be watched by 28% of the entire world.

Her second point emphasized the values of sport, which make it a universal language. "It's all about excellence, friendship, respect, and understanding. The athletes are bearers of those values," Bartekova explained. Not only do they bring people and nationalities together, events like this also foster diplomacy since leaders use the platforms to communicate. Ahead of the aforementioned Pyeongchang games, for example, North and South Korea engaged in high-level talks for the first time in two years and even decided to enter the games together under the Korean Unification flag during the opening ceremony.

## Dance

Regarded as a sport by some and an art by others, dance is another form that can foster peace. Alioune Diagne from Senegal confirms this and explains how he draws his inspiration from those around him: his children, family, his dance students, etc. But above all, he emphasizes the role of peace: "To dance, you need peace in your body."

Peace, or lack thereof, also affects dance as a profession. Diagne explained how he invited a friend from Mauritania to perform with him. However, his friend was not able to join: due to bombing, racial issues, and the general state of his region, he was not able to get a passport. When the dancers were invited to perform in Europe, he still wasn't able to join. But Diagne was set on making him part of the performance: "I do my best to bring him with me." To highlight this story, and to call for justice, Diagne captured a video of his friend and used this for the dance shows.

## Music

Music is another integral part of peace. Mareike Peschau, a PSIA student writing her master thesis about the effect of music on peacebuilding, knows all about it. Her work, at first hand, is sometimes regarded with skepticism. How can music help? "Surely, singing 'Give peace a chance' like John Lennon won't replace international peacebuilding efforts," Peschau jokes.

Nonetheless, music offers a promising approach since it 1) has “the capacity to imagine and to generate constructive responses and initiatives to enable the transcendence from violent conflict;” 2) is widely regarded to be therapeutic, and 3) it brings people together by fostering deep emotional connection and thus creating a platform for dialogue. She offered the example of a musician and herder in Uganda who, before joining peace meetings about conflicts that have affected the region and the ethnical group for extended periods of time, would write and perform music with the rest of his people. He expressed that this activity is a tool to deal with his own personal experiences of conflict.

Peschau concluded: “Even though music might not be the ultimate tool to achieve lasting peace, personally I am convinced that the different perspective that it offers provides us with a good point of departure to question our understanding of peacebuilding and to rethink how lasting peace might be built.”

## Cultural heritage

If there is one organization that is dedicated to peacebuilding, it's UNESCO. Although set up nearly 80 years ago, at the end of the two World Wars, the need for peace is not any less relevant than it was back then. Jyoti Hosagrahar explained: “We witness a new awareness of unprecedented challenges.”

She connects the discussion to cultural heritage which “is a precious link with history and a vital component of our identity.” UNESCO, at first, focused a lot on preventing cultural heritage from being harmed during times of conflict. But it's also about nurturing and celebrating this type of cultural diversity since peace still remains fragile. “In those circumstances, very often, the heritage property becomes the background for enabling peace, for bringing people together... it brings people together from multiple interpretations.” By also focusing on the interactions between different types of heritage (local communities, build heritage, the environment), the process becomes incredibly relevant for sustainable

development as well “which is another side of peacebuilding,” concluded Hosagrahar.

## Literature

Literature was the last medium discussed in the panel. Kate Mosse offered her thoughts. She explained that, when writing her historical fiction, she is inspired by three things: 1) landscape and place, 2) history; and 3) imagination. These three are all invariably linked to peace. “It helps you stand in other people’s shoes.” The job of a writer, then, is “to slip between the gap of what we know and what we can imagine.”

She highlights her position as an author in this regard: “It’s a wonderful privilege to be a full time writer and it is a great privilege to be a writer of historical fiction. There is optimism there.” In times of war and conflict, the goodness in people does triumph in the end, she explained.

Mosse’s work has been translated into 37 different languages. This is the final point she made: translating stories makes them available to a wider audience that transcends borders. “People who are in a refugee camp in Syria can be reading a book that has been written by a man or woman in Finland.” This type of border bridging allows for more understanding of one another, which hopefully leads to peace, or at the very least less conflict.

## Art or propaganda?

During the Q&A session, students brought up a darker perspective: how can we prevent art from being manipulated? In response, Hosagrahar emphasized the importance of dialogue and its ability to gain an understanding of one another. Bartekova mentioned the significance of political neutrality, especially for sports – political protests, for example, are not allowed to happen during the Olympic Games. Peschau referred to the existence of power structures that sometimes prevent the arts and sports from being understood. Diagne brought up an example of a young rapper reminding his audience about the political changes happening in

Senegal at the time. Mosse explained how staying connected to each other, through whatever form of art you like, can make the difference.

The overall consensus came down to the need to continue having conversations and to continue educating yourself and each other. And although the arts have no age limit, the speakers did emphasize the importance of the younger generation. "We look towards you, the young people!" Hosagrahar declared.

*(c) An article written by Meike Eijsberg, PSIA student in the Master in International Public Management, 2021*