

# Weaving Peace in a World of Conflict: Conversations about Participatory Design

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## Abstract

This *Conflicts and Participation* PDC 2026 Conversation examines how global systems intersect with local experiences in contexts of deepening polarization, nationalism, and digital conflict. The collection of papers positions participatory design not as a tool for eliminating conflict through technical solutions, but as a critical practice for transforming antagonism into agonism, where diverse perspectives can coexist and be productively negotiated. Drawing on agonistic political theory, decolonial design, and feminist epistemologies, the papers address conflict across multiple scales, from settler colonialism and Indigenous knowledge erasure to diaspora polarization and youth marginalization within health justice movements. Each contribution demonstrates how participatory design can serve as a site of resistance, negotiation, and transformation by centering marginalized voices, redistributing epistemic authority, and designing for pluriversal futures. Building on the *Design for Peace Ecosystems* initiative, the Conversation foregrounds principles of relational accountability, trauma-informed practice, and long-term engagement, refusing quick fixes in favor of sustained processes that honor local knowledge and cultural practices as tools for fostering coexistence and positive peace.

## CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → Collaborative and social computing; Collaborative and social computing theory, concepts and paradigms; Human computer interaction (HCI); HCI theory, concepts and models; • **Social and professional topics** → Professional topics; Computing education.

## Keywords

Participatory Design, Conflict, Design for Peace, Pluriversal Design

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## 1 Introduction

This *Participatory Design Conference (PDC) 2026* Conversation has been centred on *Conflicts and Participation*. In the call, authors were asked to “explore the interplay between global systems and local experiences, with a critical lens on how globalization impacts peacebuilding efforts and fosters resistance and/or cooperation at a local level.” It was followed by the acknowledgement that “Participatory design can contribute to conflict resolution, emphasising the importance of inclusive strategies that honour local knowledge and cultural practices as tools for fostering coexistence.” In an era marked by deepening polarization, resurgent nationalism, and the amplification of conflict through digital platforms, the urgent question facing design practitioners and scholars is not whether design can contribute to peace, but how. As global crises, ranging from climate displacement to algorithmic misinformation, intersect with localised struggles for justice, dignity, and survival, participatory design emerges as both a difficult practice and a vital methodology for navigating the tensions between universalising systems and situated experiences. This collection of papers, presented at PDC 2026 under the theme “Peace, Dialogue, Coexistence,” explores the interplay between global systems and local experiences through a critical lens on how globalization shapes efforts to build peace ecosystems and fosters resistance and cooperation at the local level. The papers collectively argue that participatory design can contribute to conflict resolution by emphasising inclusive strategies that honour local knowledge and cultural practices as tools for fostering coexistence.

The relationship between design and conflict is neither new nor simple. Design has historically served as an instrument of both oppression and liberation: from colonial cartographies that erased Indigenous territories to community-led spatial interventions that reclaim public space [2]. What distinguishes contemporary participatory design practice, however, is its explicit engagement with

conflict not as an aberration to be resolved through technical solutions, but as a constitutive dimension of social life that demands relational, epistemic, and political engagement [7, 11]. As Chantal Mouffe's *agonistic political theory* suggests, the goal of democratic practice is not to eliminate conflict but to transform *antagonism*, where the other is seen as an enemy to be destroyed, into *agonism*, where the other is recognised as an adversary whose position must be engaged [7, 11]. This theoretical reframing positions participatory design as a critical practice for creating the conditions under which diverse and often conflicting perspectives can coexist and be productively negotiated.

The papers in this PDC 2026 Conversation address conflict across multiple scales and contexts: from the enduring violence of settler colonialism and the erasure of Indigenous knowledge systems [12], to the polarization of diaspora communities navigating intergenerational trauma and misinformation [3], to the structural inequities that marginalize youth voices in health justice movements [7, 11]. Each paper demonstrates how global forces, whether through colonial legacies, neoliberal governance, or technological infrastructures, produce and exacerbate local conflicts, while simultaneously showing how participatory design methodologies can serve as sites of resistance, negotiation, and transformation. Together, these works challenge the notion of design as a neutral or purely instrumental practice, instead framing it as a profoundly political endeavour that must grapple with *power*, *positionality*, and the *ethics of intervention* [2, 9].

The Conversation's focus on *Conflicts and Participation* builds upon the growing recognition within the design community that peacebuilding cannot be imposed from above or designed through *universal templates* [2, 4, 5]. Instead, sustainable peace emerges from processes that are culturally grounded, relationally accountable, and attentive to power asymmetries. This insight resonates with broader scholarship on decolonial design [2, 12], feminist epistemologies [3, 9], and critical participatory action research [5], all of which emphasise the importance of centering marginalized voices, redistributing epistemic authority, and designing for pluriversal futures, that is, "a world where many worlds fit" [2]. In this light, participatory design is not merely a method for gathering user input but a radical practice of world-making that challenges dominant ontologies and opens space for alternative ways of knowing, being, and relating.

The conceptual origins of the Conversation can be traced to the *Design for Peace Ecosystems* project (<https://designforpeace.net/>), which began in 2023 seeking to build international networks of practitioners, scholars, and activists committed to using design as a tool for *positive peace*, defined not as the mere absence of violence but as the presence of justice, equity, and structural transformation [6]. This initiative recognises that design interventions in conflict contexts must navigate complex ethical terrain, including the risk of extractive research practices, the perpetuation of colonial power dynamics, and the potential for well-intentioned interventions to cause harm. As such, the papers in this PDC *Conflicts and Participation* Conversation foreground principles of relational accountability, trauma-informed practice, and long-term engagement, refusing quick fixes in favour of sustained, transformative processes.

Central to this collection is the concept of the "*cultural interface*," a term coined by Indigenous Australian scholar Martin Nakata to describe the contested space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems meet [12]. Rather than viewing this space as a site of inevitable clash or assimilation, Nakata frames it as a complex, dynamic zone of negotiation where multiple epistemologies can coexist and mutually transform. This framing proves particularly generative for participatory design practice, offering an alternative to both the colonial impulse to subsume difference within dominant frameworks and the well-meaning but often superficial gestures toward "inclusion" that leave power structures intact. The cultural interface, as deployed across several papers in this collection, serves as a methodological and ethical compass for navigating difference, honouring Indigenous protocols, and creating space for genuine epistemic pluralism.

Equally important is the concept of "*agonistic design*," which draws on Mouffe's political philosophy to reframe participation not as consensus-building but as the creation of infrastructures for productive disagreement [7, 11]. In agonistic design, the goal is not to eliminate difference or arrive at a singular solution, but to design processes and spaces where conflicting perspectives can be held in tension, power can be contested, and marginalized voices can gain epistemic authority to challenge dominant narratives. This approach acknowledges that in contexts of structural inequality, whether in healthcare systems that marginalize youth, heritage projects that privilege Western frameworks, or carceral systems that deny dignity, meaningful participation requires not just a seat at the table but a fundamental redistribution of who gets to define the terms of engagement.

A third conceptual anchor running through these papers are "*ethics of care*," understood not as a soft or apolitical gesture but as a rigorous political practice [3, 9]. Drawing on feminist scholarship, particularly the work of Joan Tronto [16], Nancy Fraser [3], and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa [14], several contributors argue that care must be understood as both a set of embodied practices, listening, attending, responding, and a critique of systems that devalue reproductive labor, emotional work, and relational maintenance [3]. In the context of participatory design for conflict transformation, an ethic of care demands attention to trauma, recognition of vulnerability, and a commitment to processes that do not extract knowledge or labour from already marginalized communities. It also requires designers to engage in ongoing reflexive practice, interrogating their own complicity in systems of oppression and remaining accountable to the communities with whom they work.

The *narrative structure of conflict* itself emerges as a critical site of inquiry across the papers. As Emily Prokop argues in "The Story Behind," the stories we tell about ourselves, our communities, and our histories are not neutral accounts but active constructions that shape identity, belonging, and possibility [13]. In contexts of conflict, whether intergenerational trauma within diaspora communities, contested narratives of national identity, or the silencing of Indigenous histories, whose stories get told, by whom, and through what means becomes a matter of profound political consequence. Participatory design interventions that centre storytelling, memory work, and narrative sovereignty thus become not merely therapeutic exercises but acts of epistemic resistance that challenge hegemonic narratives and open space for alternative futures.

The *materiality of participation* also receives sustained attention throughout the collection. Participatory design is not an abstract or purely discursive practice but one that unfolds through concrete materials, spaces, and infrastructures [1, 15]. From the chalk drawings of the Hopscotch project to the digital tools designed to protect protest movements from state surveillance, from the podcasts that carry ancestral knowledge to the workshops that facilitate intergenerational dialogue, the papers demonstrate how materials and technologies mediate, and sometimes constrain, the possibilities for participation. This attention to materiality extends beyond the immediate artefacts of design to encompass the broader infrastructures, legal, economic, and technological, within which participatory processes are embedded and which they must navigate or contest.

A persistent tension animating these papers is the question of scale: how can participatory design processes, which are inherently local, particular, and time-intensive, respond to global crises that demand urgent, large-scale intervention? This tension between the intimate work of building trust within a specific community and the systemic transformations required to address structural violence appears repeatedly across contexts. Some contributors argue for a shift from “projects” to “infrastructuring”, that is, from time-bound interventions to the cultivation of enduring relational capacities and institutional arrangements that can sustain transformative work over time [1, 15]. Others emphasise the prefigurative dimension of participatory design: the idea that the process itself must embody the values and relations of the future world being designed toward, rather than deferring justice to some distant horizon.

The papers also grapple with *profound ethical paradoxes* inherent in design work in conflict zones. How does one design for hope within carceral systems without legitimising those systems? How can researchers facilitate dialogue across polarized communities without instrumentalising trauma? When is participation genuine empowerment, and when is it merely a performance of inclusion that leaves power structures intact? These questions resist easy answers, and the contributors’ willingness to sit with discomfort, ambiguity, and complicity marks a maturation of the field beyond techno-solutionist optimism toward a more nuanced, critical, and humble practice.

Methodologically, the papers showcase a diverse array of approaches, from Community-Based Participatory Design (CBPD) workshops that centre intergenerational storytelling, to Facilitative Listening Design (FLD) that sustains rather than resolves tension, to the use of speculative and playful methods like Hopscotch that invite experimentation and imagination. What unites these varied approaches is a commitment to process over product, to relationships over deliverables, and to transformation over extraction. Many contributors explicitly reject the notion of the designer as expert or hero, instead positioning themselves as facilitators, witnesses, or co-learners within processes that are ultimately owned and directed by communities themselves.

The *role of technology* in mediating conflict and participation receives particular scrutiny. Several papers examine how digital platforms and algorithmic systems amplify misinformation, enable state repression, and concentrate power, thereby exacerbating conflict. At the same time, contributors explore how technologies

can be designed to support democratic contestation, protect vulnerable communities, and create spaces for dialogue that might not otherwise exist. This dual character of technology, as both an instrument of control and a tool of liberation, demands critical vigilance and careful attention to questions of governance, ownership, and accessibility.

Geography and place emerge as critical dimensions of conflict and participation throughout the collection. The papers span diverse geographical contexts, from Indigenous communities in Australia to the Vietnamese diaspora in the United States, from youth movements in India to post-conflict communities in Indonesia, and from Japanese ageing communities to Afro-Colombian territories. This geographical diversity is not incidental but constitutive of the collection’s argument: that there can be no universal template for participatory design in conflict contexts, only situated practices that are responsive to specific histories, ecologies, and relations. At the same time, the papers demonstrate how local conflicts are never purely local but are always entangled with global systems of power, capital, and knowledge production.

The *temporal dimension of conflict* transformation also receives sustained attention. Against the neoliberal demand for rapid results and measurable outcomes, many contributors insist on the necessity of slow, iterative, multi-generational processes. Healing from trauma, rebuilding trust, and transforming entrenched power structures cannot be rushed or condensed into project timelines determined by funding cycles. This temporal commitment requires alternative institutional arrangements, funding models, and measures of success that privilege long-term relational accountability over short-term deliverables. It also requires patience, humility, and a willingness to stay with difficulty even when progress is not immediately visible.

*Language and translation* emerge as both practical challenges and sites of political contestation. When Indigenous knowledge systems operate through oral traditions, embodied practices, and relational ontologies that resist capture in written academic discourse, how can participatory design honour these epistemologies without instrumentalising or distorting them? When diaspora communities navigate multiple linguistic worlds and when translation itself becomes a site of cultural negotiation and potential loss, how can design processes attend to these nuances? Several papers grapple with these questions, exploring strategies ranging from the use of mother tongues and untranslated terms to the creation of hybrid communicative practices that acknowledge incommensurability rather than smoothing over difference.

The collection also surfaces questions about *who counts as a participant* and what forms of participation are valued. Traditional participatory design has often privileged vocal, articulate engagement in formal workshop settings—modes of participation that may exclude those who are differently abled, traumatised, or culturally oriented toward other forms of communication. Several papers explore alternative modes of participation, from embodied and sensory engagement to silence and refusal, recognising that sometimes the most politically significant act is the choice not to participate in processes that are extractive or disempowering.

The papers collectively push against instrumentalist understandings of participatory design that would reduce it to a set of tools or techniques to be applied mechanically across contexts. Instead,

they argue for participatory design as a disposition, an orientation, or what some contributors call a “stance” characterised by epistemic humility, relational accountability, and political commitment. This shift from method to stance has profound implications: it means that participatory design cannot be taught through protocol alone but must be cultivated through ongoing ethical formation, critical reflexivity, and embodied practice.

Finally, the papers in this collection *refuse despair*. In the face of escalating global crises, entrenched systems of oppression, and the apparent intractability of many conflicts, the work presented here insists on the possibility, indeed, the necessity, of hope. But this is not naive optimism or techno-utopian fantasy. Instead, it is what one contributor calls “infrastructural hope”: the patient, collective work of building the material, relational, and institutional conditions for more just futures, even when those futures remain uncertain and partial. It is hope as practice rather than promise, as commitment rather than guarantee.

This introduction provides an overview of the 18 papers, three full papers, and 15 exploratory papers that constitute the *Conflicts and Participation* conversation at PDC 2026. Following this introduction, we present a synthesis of the three full papers, which serve as anchor texts for the conversation, and then a thematic analysis of the fifteen exploratory papers, organised into six cross-cutting themes. We then distil these multiple contributions into three overarching themes that structure the conversation: (1) *Conflict as Catalyst: Politicizing Participation to Challenge Hierarchies*; (2) *Infrastructuring Relations: Designing Dialogic Encounters Across Conflict*; and (3) *Prefiguring Futures: Situated Agency as Participation in Conflict Transformation*. We conclude with reflections on implications for participatory design research, practice, and pedagogy, and suggest directions for future inquiry. Throughout, our aim is not to resolve the tensions and contradictions inherent in this work but to hold them in productive dialogue, honouring the complexity of conflict and the difficult, vital labour of building peace through design.

## 2 Full Papers

In total, we have three full papers in the PDC 2026 *Conflicts and Participation* Conversation. The first is *Two-way co-design: Learning from the Solid Lines project* (Australia), where Nicola St John draws on Martin Nakata’s [12] concept of “cultural interface” to frame collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems not as a clash, but as a complex, negotiated space where divergent knowledges coexist. St John proposes “two-way co-design” as a methodology rooted in relational accountability, respect for Indigenous protocols, thresholds for knowledge sharing, and centring Indigenous leadership (e.g., in establishing an Indigenous-led illustration agency). She also highlights the importance of reshaping commercial design industry practices by embedding Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) and values, moving beyond surface-level inclusion to structural and epistemological change. This paper directly addresses the conflict inherent in settler-colonial contexts and the dominance of Western design paradigms. It explores how PD can serve as a site for negotiating power, redistributing authority, and fostering coexistence by creating a “third space”

(the cultural interface) where global industry systems and local Indigenous knowledge can intersect and transform one another.

The second is *Designing community trust through collective intergenerational memory sharing* (USA), which investigates conflict within the Vietnamese diaspora — specifically, polarized narratives around political identity and history — as exacerbated by global misinformation systems. Nguyễn et al. utilise Community-Based Participatory Design (CBPD) workshops to create safe spaces for intergenerational storytelling and processing of deeply rooted memories related to migration and war. They argue against universal, tech-centric solutions to misinformation, advocating instead for pluriversal approaches that prioritise culturally specific, community-based practices of sense-making and dialogue. This paper examines how global flows of information and historical geopolitical factors contribute to local conflicts within diaspora communities. It positions PD as a tool for peacebuilding and reconciliation, using intergenerational dialogue to honour local knowledge and lived experience, thereby fostering cooperation and trust amid systemic distrust and polarized media.

The third and final is *Participants on participation: Agonistic PD processes and implications for epistemic authority, mutual learning, and participant gains* (India & USA) employs Mouffeian [7, 8] political theory to frame PD as an agonistic space where conflicting perspectives are engaged, not resolved, to build “chains of equivalence” among marginalized groups. Amanda Geppert and Maurizio Teli critically examine what less powerful participants (youth in India and the U.S.) gain from PD processes, emphasising the development of epistemic authority and the prioritisation of their “matters of care.” They propose and refine the Design for Equivalence (DFE) framework, a set of principles to ensure PD challenges structural inequality by deliberately building common ground through mutual learning and privileging the concerns of systematically excluded groups. This paper engages with conflict through the lens of structural inequity and power imbalance in health justice. It explores how PD can facilitate resistance to dominant systems (e.g., impersonal healthcare) by creating infrastructures that empower marginalized voices. It demonstrates how local experiences of exclusion can inform the redesign of broader systems through agonistic, yet collaborative, processes.

The three full papers collectively articulate a core thesis: *participatory design is a vital practice for navigating conflict and fostering coexistence in a globalized world often portrayed in dichotomous terms*, an argument advanced through the creation of negotiated spaces for difference where each paper proposes a specific framework for holding conflicting knowledges in productive dialogue: the cultural interface in *Two-way co-design*, trauma-informed intergenerational workshops in *Designing community trust*, and agonistic chains of equivalence in *Participants on participation*. Collectively, these works honour local knowledge as a catalyst for systemic change by explicitly rejecting universal, top-down solutions and empirically demonstrating how Indigenous protocols can transform commercial design practices, how diasporic memory serves as an antidote to global misinformation, and how youths’ lived experiences can reconfigure health systems. Their common focus lies in *deep relationality and long-term accountability*, framing peacebuilding not as an end state but as a continuous relational practice woven from trust, transparency, and shared responsibility — whether to

Country, community, or co-design partners. Ultimately, all full papers are grounded in a *structural critique of power* and aspire to its radical transformation by redistributing epistemic and practical power from hegemonic global systems (colonial, commercial, medical) to local actors, thereby reconfiguring design beyond its instrumental function so that it emerges as a transformative node for modes of dialogue and as a method of cooperative resistance and re-worldmaking.

### 3 Exploratory Papers

15 Exploratory Papers were selected for the *Conflicts and Participation Conversation* of PDC26. Following a thematic analysis [17] of these papers, six central sub-themes were identified to interweave across them, revealing both the profound potential and the critical tensions within design as a practice for engaging with conflict.

The first sub-theme is *navigating ethical and political paradoxes*. Surfacing repeatedly, this sub-theme questions the very premises of intervention. *Hope by design* confronts the core paradox of working within carceral systems, while *Protecting protests from institutional repression* examines the tension between creating open democratic infrastructures and exposing participants to risk. Similarly, the authors of *What's on the (tension) radar?* Invite reflection on the compromises made when scaling participatory design's ideals within constrained realities. This sub-theme underscores that PD is never a neutral tool but a political practice entangled with the systems it seeks to engage.

The second sub-theme had a strong focus on *epistemic justice and decolonizing praxis*, in which authors call for designers to fundamentally reorient who counts as knowledgeable. *Designing dialogues* explicitly re-centres Afro-Colombian ancestral knowledge, invoking Audre Lorde's [10] warning that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." The authors of *Reframing participation in ICH* argue for a decentering of Western authority in heritage projects, advocating "pluriversal participation." *Relearn to coexist as the alternative* grounds itself in the indigenous feminist concept of "body-territory," challenging Western binaries. Together, these papers argue that coexistence requires dismantling epistemic hierarchies and honouring plural ways of knowing.

Third, the reconceptualisation of *design as a relational and dialogic infrastructure* shifts the focus from projects to ongoing processes. *Conflict transformation by design* and *Building participatory design competencies for designing dialogue* both frame dialogue and listening as active, designed practices. *Participation through designing relations* and *Hopscotch* further emphasises participation as an embodied condition of "learning-with" others, materials, and place. This shift from "projecting to infrastructuring" (as noted in *Conflict transformation by design*) is seen as essential for sustaining transformation. *Participatory urban conflict mapping* further highlights a shift from project-based interventions to relational, infrastructuring practices in participatory design.

Fourth, the embodied practices of *care, reflection, and attunement* are highlighted as essential methodological imperatives. *Crafting spaces of and for care* positions reflective, care-based engagement as a pathway to coexistence. *Relearn to coexist as the alternative* reconceptualises care, drawing on Fraser's [3] crisis-of-care analysis as a political practice of community strengthening. *Participation*

*through designing relations* draws on Light & Akama's [9] "politics of care," and *Hopscotch* values caring gestures in its temporary choreographies. This sub-theme asserts that technical processes must be underpinned by an ethic of relational sensitivity and mutual vulnerability. *Conflict transformation by design* introduces Facilitative Listening Design (FLD) as a participatory methodology that structures inquiry as a reflective, care-based practice of listening, holding tension, and nurturing relational transformation through attuned, iterative encounters.

Fifth, a sub-theme of *cultivating agency, ownership, and prefiguration* explores how PD can rehearse alternative futures. *From researcher-led to community-led*, this material and cultural work details the process of transferring ownership to a Japanese ageing community. *Hope by Design* explicitly frames hope as an "infrastructural practice" that prefigures decarceral futures. *When art speaks*, it shows how participatory exhibitions create platforms for collective voice and generate social capital for positive peace. *Participative intimacy* explores affective prefiguration and participative intimacy as means to collectively envision and enact future relational states, thereby rehearsing alternative forms of coexistence through collaborative design. These papers demonstrate the design's role in materialising agency and prototyping coexistence.

Finally, the significance of *cultural, material, and situated specificity* grounds all theories in the local context. *From researcher-led to community-led* described role transitions guided by local norms of *wa* (harmony). *Participation through designing relations* emphasises how space and material act as co-authors. *Hopscotch* treats participation as a situated, impermanent practice like chalk on pavement. This sub-theme resists universal templates, insisting that peacebuilding must be attuned to local rhythms, symbols, and practices.

In summary, these 15 exploratory papers provide a robust and nuanced response to the conference theme of *Participatory Design and Conflict*. They align by critically examining the interplay between global systems and local experiences, demonstrating how participatory design can be a site of both resistance to and negotiation with homogenising forces.

The exploratory papers illustrate how globalised systems — be they punitive carceral models (*Hope by design*), neoliberal privatisation (*Relearn to coexist*), biomedical paradigms (*Designing dialogues*), Western-centric heritage frameworks (*Reframing participation in ICH*), or digital repression (*Protecting protests*) — create and exacerbate local conflicts. In response, the authors position PD not as a tool for imposing external solutions, but as a *practice of mediation and translation* that honours local knowledge as the primary tool for fostering cooperation. It is evident in the centring of Afro-Colombian ancestral knowledge (*Designing dialogues*), indigenous body-territory ontologies (*Relearn to coexist*), and local Japanese communal norms (*From researcher-led to community-led*).

The critical lens called for by the authors is embodied in the pervasive questioning of PD's own complicities — its potential to legitimise oppressive systems (*Hope by design*) or dilute its political ethos in pursuit of scale (*What's on the (tension) radar?*). The authors advocate for a *reflexive, agonistic, and pluriversal practice* that, drawing on scholars such as Arturo Escobar [2] (*Crafting spaces of and for care*), challenges dominant metastructures. They frame conflict not as a problem to be solved, but as a condition to be engaged

through designed spaces of listening (*Conflict transformation by design*), dialogue (*Building participatory design competencies*), and play (*Participation through designing relations & Hopscotch*).

Ultimately, the exploratory papers converge on a vision of PD as a *critical, caring, and infrastructuring practice*. A practice that fosters coexistence by building relational capacities, protecting spaces for dissent, and prefiguring more just relationships, thereby offering a vital means to navigate the tensions between global systems and local lived experiences of conflict.

## 4 Discussion

This collection of research is based on a fundamental premise: understanding conflict not as an anomaly to be suppressed, but as a constitutive and dynamic dimension of the social sphere. It is from this definition, which acknowledges the plurality of interests, values, and needs at play, that PD emerges as a vital relational practice for navigating the profound conflicts of our time. In an increasingly polarized world, where multiple levels of conflict — from the geopolitical to the community level — are in a state of agitation, the papers collectively argue that peace and coexistence do not arise from the elimination of differences, but through the difficult yet beautiful work of engaging with them in a sustained and structured manner. PD offers precisely that framework: a set of practical and ethical foundations from which diverse communities can confront, transform, and inhabit their conflicts. The contributions converge around three overarching concepts (Fig. 1) that outline this approach:

First, PD is an act of *decolonial epistemic justice*, a deliberate and necessary rebalancing of the world's knowledge systems. The papers reveal how globalised frameworks, often centred on the West as the basis for valid knowledge, creation, design, heritage, and healthcare, have marginalized other forms of knowing — such as Indigenous, ancestral, and local knowledges — sowing conflict and erasure. In response, PD stands as a decolonial practice that does not seek to nullify the established nor highlight a single viewpoint — which could lead to a static, museum-like interpretation devoid of dialogue — but rather to create what Nakata [12] calls a "cultural interface." Here, as evidenced in collaborations with diverse communities, design transforms into a genuine dialogue among equals. It is a process that protects Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), centres relational concepts such as "body-territory," and employs tools like communal podcasts to honour oral histories, all while fostering active and reciprocal exchange. Thus, PD moves beyond mere inclusion within a dominant system to aspire to the pluriversal coexistence of many worlds, fostering peace through the restoration of narrative sovereignty and cultural continuity. From this emerges a conversation in PDC2026 under the theme of *Conflict as catalyst: Politicizing participation to challenge hierarchies*. This conversation has *Two-way co-design* as its keynote/ full paper, with *Participatory urban conflict mapping*, *Reframing participation in ICH*, *Designing dialogues*, *Protecting protests*, and *What's on the (tension) radar?* as exploratory papers.

Second, *PD builds relational infrastructures for agonistic dialogue*, in which conflict is transformed rather than silenced. Drawing on the political theory of Chantal Mouffe [7, 8], several papers reframe the purpose of PD. The goal is not to resolve differences,

nor to reduce the process to the mere generation of self-referential methodologies, but to design the conditions so that these differences can be addressed constructively, building "chains of equivalence" among marginalized groups. The core issue here is not the method itself, but the transformative impact and reach this process can generate in communities in conflict. It might involve creating open digital tools to protect protests from state repression or employing Facilitative Listening Design (FLD) to sustain tension in post-conflict communities. These are not one-off projects but relational infrastructures: enduring spaces for storytelling, intergenerational healing, and collective messaging, as seen in Vietnamese diaspora workshops or Indonesian participatory exhibitions. By prioritising listening and safeguarding democratic contestation, PD nurtures the fragile ecosystems of trust necessary for long-term coexistence amidst irreconcilable histories, demonstrating that its value lies in the lasting effects it sows in the social fabric. From this emerges a conversation theme on *Infrastructuring relations: Designing dialogic encounters across conflict*. This conversation has *Designing community trust* as its keynote / full paper, with *Participative intimacy*, *Crafting spaces of and for care*, *Conflict transformation by design*, *Relearn to coexist*, and *Building participatory design competencies* as exploratory papers.

Finally, PD is grounded in a *critical ethic of care and prefiguration*, demanding that we design for both the present and the future we wish to see. The authors confront the inherent tensions of intervening in conflicted spaces. How does one practice trauma-informed co-design in a prison, offering dignity and hope, without legitimising the carceral system? The answer lies in a dual responsibility: to alleviate immediate harm through deep relational care, while simultaneously "rehearsing" restorative futures. This ethic permeates the papers, from cultivating reflective practice among designers to embracing playful, speculative methods such as *Hopscotch*. More than a transient methodology or a trend, it represents the transformation of design into a process of deep social meaning, one that seeks high transformative impact over its own methodological ritual. It calls for a radical shift: nurturing relational qualities — such as solidarity, conviviality, and dialogicity — that can reconfigure social foundations. Ultimately, this body of work proposes that PD contributes to peace by honouring the local, materialising dialogue, and courageously prefiguring, through its process, a more just and pluralistic world. From this emerges the conversation titled *Prefiguring futures: Situated agency as participation in conflict transformation*. This conversation has *Participants on participation* as its full paper/keynote, with *Hope by design*, *From researcher-led to community-led*, *When art speaks*, *Participation through designing relations*, and *Hopscotch* as exploratory papers.

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this discussion synthesises a pivotal shift in understanding PD as an essential practice for engaging with, rather than suppressing, social conflict. It positions PD not as a technical problem-solving tool, but as a profound relational, ethical and political framework for navigating our polarized world. The collective research converges on three core contributions that define this approach: *PD as Epistemic Justice*, acting as a decolonial practice that challenges hierarchical knowledge systems, creating



Figure 1: Conflicts and Participation Conversations listing Full and Exploratory Papers. Diagram by Authors.

”cultural interfaces” for pluriversal coexistence and restoring narrative sovereignty. *PD as Relational Infrastructure*, where it builds enduring spaces for agonistic dialogue, transforming conflict by designing conditions for constructive engagement and fostering trust amidst irreconcilable differences. And finally, *PD as Critical Care and Prefiguration*, grounded in ethics that address immediate harm while simultaneously rehearsing and materialising more just, restorative futures through the design process itself.

Ultimately, the *Conflicts and Participation Conversation* at PDC 2026 argues that PD’s most significant value lies in its in this integrated practice and capacity to honour locality, materialise dialogue, and courageously prefigure - through its very practice - the foundations for a more pluralistic and peaceful coexistence. Peace itself emerges not from consensus, but from this courageous, ongoing work of designing how we coexist.

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