

Update 5/2025

Bridging Divides: Evaluating the Impact and Methodology of the SFP Environmental and Climate Justice Course in Conflict-Affected Communities

Background

The Environmental and Climate Justice Course at the School for Peace (SFP) addresses the intersection of environmental justice and conflict resolution, fostering collaboration between Jewish and Palestinian communities. Given the escalating political tensions and environmental crises, a thorough evaluation of the course's methodology is essential. The evaluation aims to assess how effectively the course promotes dialogue, addresses environmental injustices, and encourages joint activism despite growing challenges. By collecting qualitative data through interviews, focus groups, and observational research, the evaluation will offer valuable insights and recommendations to improve the course's relevance, impact, and potential for future initiatives.

Over view of interviews so far

In a context where even saying the words peace, connection, or dialogue can be seen as controversial, where political discourse is hyper-polarized, and the urgency of environmental (in)actions collapses time into a perpetual present, the act of imagining futures becomes both subversive and necessary. This research explores how participants in a dialogue-based course on environmental justice, Palestinian and Jewish Israelis envision near and far futures. It asks: What is their political imagination? What kinds of future relationships, dialogues, and solutions do they dare to imagine within, and beyond, the constraints of the present? And how can facilitated dialogue process can serve the needs of the participants? What methodological or other strategies and tools will foster better understanding of the other and how can we talk and act on environmental injustices.

The course itself acts as a rare space, arguably one of the only ones, where these conversations can occur in an intentionally aimed, equalized setting. Early stages of the research involved mapping participants' needs, their reasons for joining, and the tensions they face in doing so. This includes grappling with asymmetries in power and presence: what happens when people leave the group, when others feel abandoned, and when institutional or emotional neglect reasserts familiar hierarchies.

A short chapter is dedicated to the challenges faced in developing the opening questionnaire. The process of deciding which questions to ask and how many of them

would reflect future-oriented solutions, was contested. Some facilitators and project organizers viewed these questions as condescending or disconnected from the immediate realities participants were facing. Negotiating the content of the questionnaire became itself a form of participatory inquiry, revealing underlying political tensions and divergent pedagogical commitments. This reflexive, participatory design process is central to the research methodology.

Scheduling interviews and meetings with participants amid the sound of sirens, waves of grief for lost loved ones, and the ongoing sense of helplessness and hopelessness presented additional layers of complexity. The research does not aim to abstract from these conditions but to engage with them directly, as constitutive of the very realities' participants are attempting to imagine their way beyond.

A dedicated chapter explores the concept of "crossing", physical, emotional, and political. In the current climate, where large-scale systems of violence, surveillance, and separation actively work to keep people apart, simply enabling participants to take part "to cross to the other side of the course", to stay in the dialogue space, to complete the course together, is both an aim and a form of success. Meeting face-to-face, continuing to show up, remaining in relationship across painful divides, these acts are among the most radical things one can do in times of devastation. In this sense, meeting is not neutral; it is subversive.

The research traces how "crossing" is sustained, not as a one-time gesture but as a daily practice. It documents the strategies, low points, tensions, and mechanisms developed by Organizers, participants and facilitators to navigate, and survive, the journey. These include logistical strategies, emotional strategies, and educational and political. Through these acts, the group and the organizations supporting a dialogue and activism, one step at a time.

The research process aim to offer a situated understanding of what it means to build dialogue in the ruins: not as a linear process of reconciliation, but as an ongoing struggle to stay, to witness, and to imagine otherwise. It asks not only what futures participants can envision, but what forms of solidarity, justice, and environmental belonging can be created now, in the thick of uncertainty.