

LinkedIn February 2014

## The legacy of Johan Galtung

A giant has fallen. The “peace professor” and practitioner Johan Galtung died February 17th, 2024. He left us with so many models to understand conflicts and peace building. He taught us that we not only have to diminish direct violence but also structural and cultural violence in order to create sustainable (positive) peace. Stopping the violence with peacekeeping troops or a threat to use excessive force (negative peace) is inadequate in the long run. There is no way around changing inequality, injustice, corruption, and other structural causes of conflict. Just as there is no way around changing the way we think about each other. Ways that make violence, injustice, and inequality possible. This “tribble approach” is still not widely used even by the governments who try to support peace processes – including a number of Danish governments. They focus largely on power-based approaches: war to stop war, or soldiers to stop terrorist. Underfinancing structural and cultural approaches to peace building.

He also taught us another valuable lesson. Namely, to sharpen our creativity and not just try to resolve conflicts through compromises (e.g. dividing an object in two equal parts leaving the parties as both winners and losers) but also through transcendence (creating win-win). His most famous example is the peace park between Ecuador and Peru. Two countries that had been fighting three wars over a mountainous area on the border between the countries. His simple solution was NOT to think in traditional lines of borders. Instead, the area was shared (belonging as a whole to both countries) as was the income from tourism.

His ideas on peace in the Middle East are also rather inspiring and transcending: Build a common market, roll back some of the settlements, Palestinians and Israelis will lease land in Egypt and Jordan, build Palestinian cantons in Israeli dominated areas and visa versa etc. Maybe some of his ideas will be put to use after his death. We need to help the conflicting parties to move away from the lose-lose approach they have taken. Maybe some of Galtung’s ideas can be helpful. Are the powerholders willing to listen and do they have the guts?

