



Article

Teasing Paradoxes to Explore Transformative Futures of Peace

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Abstract

This paper discusses the outcome of a methodologically innovative foresight exercise. A Futures Clinique was conducted to address paradoxes of peace. For the purpose, a novel method of 'paradox probing' was launched where paradoxes are employed as tools for sense-making for future developments concerning complex issues. Various paradoxes around peace were identified and compared. The results as thematically analysed show us the necessity of constructing preferred futures amidst pressing global challenges and tensions. Such a preferred future is positive peace and implications it encompasses. Further efforts will be made to relate the present-day paradoxes closely to futures contexts.

Keywords

Paradox, Critical Futures Studies, Futures Clinique, Peace

Introduction

This paper is concerned with exploring transformative futures of peace and presents the case of a methodological experiment. We address the concept of peace which is in itself a complex entity. Peace is one of the main objectives of futures research as already defined by Ossip K. Flechtheim (1982). Eliminating war does not, however, reveal the full complexity of peace – it is something more than the absence of war. Achieving a state where not only war is absent but there is also social justice, can be considered a preferred future. How does peace concretely materialise itself in society, in spaces – especially in the new emerging societal transformation? Peace is also socio-culturally contextualised, with a wide spectrum of aspects, characteristics and manifestations. What is the main tension affecting peace and what if anything can be done to it? These are the questions we posed as a starting point for gathering data for our foresight exercise through a Futures Clinique (Heinonen & Ruotsalainen, 2013), a specially structured form of a futures workshop.

The nature of this study and the foresight exercise that we conducted can be characterised as a combination of transformative and critical foresight (Minkinen et al., 2019). It is transformative foresight because our interest lies in whole-of-society change through reflecting on a complex issue and its systemic interlinkages. We are living in a complex world and complexity thinking is one of the key characteristics in futures studies (Masini, 1993). Complexity is a property of systems, of sets of interrelated elements. In a complex system the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014). Our interest also dwells in the critical foresight since the method we adopted uses paradoxes for deconstructing hidden assumptions and for re-thinking concepts. We value critical analysis for understanding the changing world. For this purpose, it is crucial to imagine alternatives leading to preferred futures. According to Inayatullah (1999), the critical tradition is concerned with creating distance from current categories. The task is to make units of analysis problematic and not to take issues for granted. Slaughter's (1998) schematic outline of critical futures studies highlights revision of epistemological assumptions, re-conceptualisation of alternatives, and re-assessment of tasks, change potentials, metaphors etc. Our aim was in a similar vein to think and re-think paradoxes. It is not so much a question of better defining the future but rather, at

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some level, to "undefine" and deconstruct the future.

We sought to explore in our co-creative futures clinique, new ways to understand the relationships between peace and work and how these concepts share similar or interlinking characteristics. In this paper, we focus on the issue of peace since the data gathered concerning it deserves a compact paper of its own. The paradoxes of work are studied in another paper to be later published. Because the concept of peace is both vague and multifaceted, we utilise specific conceptualisations of this term based on earlier research. By peace we mean positive peace, which is understood as the absence of both direct physical violence and indirect structural violence (Galtung 1969, 183). Moreover, the workshop aimed to understand the underlying currents and belief systems related to peace.

The workshop results are to be utilised in the T-winning Spaces 2035 research project, funded by the Research Council of Finland, where our aim is to identify paradoxes of work, and through these paradoxes outline a new future paradigm of work¹. The results of the futures clinique as described here regarding paradoxes of peace, are to be integrated to the project reflections on the double twin transition of digital/green and virtual/physical (regarding EU's twin strategy see Muench et al. 2022).

The futures clinique is also associated with the RESCUE project², which addresses crises of the built environment. Societies are facing various crises, either previously recognised or unexpected (e.g. pandemic, climate change, terrorism, fires, floods etc.). It is important to identify and prepare for them. We studied the role of real estate in crisis management and preparedness as a way to manage crises (Toivonen et al. 2024). Indeed, the built environment has a significant influence on people's wellbeing and the economy. Crisis preparedness policies were proposed to enable a more resilient built environment now and in the future. The built environment can also be seen as supporting social resilience and peace.

Concepts and Theoretical Framework

In this section we shed light on the concepts used and on the theoretical framework adopted for the foresight exercise. First, we present our arguments for how and why we choose to think through paradoxes which are turned into a methodological apparatus. Second, we propose conceptions about peace, especially the dichotomy between negative and positive peace (Galtung, 1969). Our approach is possibilistic (Tuomi 2019), reaching for preferred futures instead of being probabilistic in the same manner as scenario planning focuses on possibilities whereas strategic planning is built on probabilities (Cornelisse & van Klink, 2024). The theoretical framework for employing these concepts is founded on acknowledging the uncertain and ambiguous nature of ongoing societal change. Paradoxes – in a similar manner as crises – can be conceived as symptomatic of the VUCA world (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) (for VUCA see Kaivo-oja & Lauraeus, 2018). If these presently prevailing factors can be deconstructed, better sense-making of future developments and futures-orientated knowledge, as well as a choice of alternatives can become available.

Paradox probing as a cognitive teaser

Paradoxes are seemingly illogical statements, packed with contradictory ideas. In general use, paradoxes are almost synonyms for contradictions or tensions. Paradoxes can be used for thinking deep and deconstructing present assumptions. Paradoxes are kind of provocations – they tease you into thinking and re-thinking phenomena, issues and contexts. They open up perspectives – they may represent 'painful' truths. Or they may just be used for instigating reflections and questioning current assumptions.

As an illustration, there are several other concepts of futures approaches that offer useful comparisons to studying paradoxes. They are those that deal with managing future uncertainties, futures fallacies and disowned futures, briefly introduced in the following. The first example associated with strategic foresight for organisations (and scenario planning) is horizon scanning for sense-making of uncertainties and complexity. The pursuit to collect early warning signals provides firms with synergic capabilities to help frame top management attention on possible future contexts and how they might develop (Ramírez et al., 2013). This deliberate scope seeks to manage uncertainty to lessen its complexity. It slightly differs from our paradox approach which rather accepts uncertainty and complexity as a perpetual part of the problematique, often leading to additional complexities. Instead of managing uncertainty, the paradoxes can be studied in order to embrace and understand the complexity and

subsequent emerging issues. In practice, the engagement towards futures through signals remains essential for both activities (horizon scanning and analysis of paradoxes).

The second relevant reference point for the concept of paradoxes is ‘futures fallacies’. When considering paradoxes and the concept of futures fallacies that are “detrimental thinking patterns about the future”, one can state that they are not synonyms (Milojević 2021, p1). However, studying paradoxes can be used as a tool to make sense of complexities and can lead to visioning of preferred futures. Here the common ground between futures fallacies can be found, since futures fallacies may inhibit our ability to think about the truly preferred futures in the long run (Milojević 2021, p1). In this sense, paradoxes can be conceptualised as a type of futures fallacy since not acknowledging them, may lead to a situation where preferred future seems unattainable. This may be because some tension related to a paradox is not recognised and therefore not dealt with in one way or another.

The third concept that paradoxes can be compared with is the ‘disowned self’ as discussed by Inayatullah (2008). He claims that a goal-orientated futures approach by setting a certain direction may ignore or hide i.e. disown other personal and organizational selves. Therefore, a softer and more paradoxical approach may be a better choice for moving futures closer. Such a ‘reflective self’ helps to perceive resources beyond the mere search for effective strategy building. Thus, deconstructing paradoxes may discover some ignored resources or opportunities and avoid ‘disowning the self’.

Social mood is imbued with paradoxes (for social mood see Casti, 2010) and thirty years ago Handy (1994) characterised that paradox has almost become the cliché of our times. Paradox is used to describe the dilemmas facing governments, businesses, and individuals. For example, with all the advanced heavy armaments people only watch helplessly while parts of the world kill each other. We grow more food than we need on planet, and still cannot feed the starving. Servigne & Stevens (2020) claim that the more powerful our civilisation grows, the more vulnerable it becomes. This paradox is symptomatic to our era. Along these lines, peace can also be perceived as a vulnerable complexity. Further paradoxes are presented by Bardi & Pereira (2022) who question, how we can live with the fundamental contradiction of humanity thriving and committing suicide at the same time. Andriopoulos (2003) states that while humans are usually searching for certainty and order in their actions, paradoxes threaten that order.

We propose using paradoxes for sense-making – there are pathways through the paradoxes if we can understand what is happening and are prepared to act accordingly. One must bear in mind, though, that even if many paradoxes refer to problems, not all paradoxes represent problems. Anticipation is about using futures in the present (Miller, 2018). We propose using paradoxes as tools to find ways to make sense of the transformation and of complexity, and to employ them to shape preferred futures. We launch here this novel method, which we call ‘paradox probing’. This study draws on the approach used in previous work using paradoxes (Heinonen, 2004; see also Julkunen, 2008).

Definition of Paradox

There are several definitions of paradox, and they can be used in a variety of contexts. Our approach adopts the analysis of paradoxes within organisational change and strategy studies (see e.g. Brorström, 2017). Examining paradoxes can deepen our understanding of organisational complexity and entails questioning how organisations can effectively deepen their understanding of complexity and its implications in the present. Andriopoulos (2003) defines paradoxes as being linked to managing organisational creativity and perceives the concept of paradoxes as intriguing and valuable. By identifying and resolving them we can gain a better understanding of the principles behind obvious contradictions. Paradoxes are defined by Smith and Lewis (2011, 382) as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time”, and by Schad et al. (2016, 10) as “persistent contradictions between interdependent elements”. We use the latter definition.

Contradictions and contradictory elements have been studied in the discipline of peace studies. For example, in Galtung’s conflict triangle, contradiction is one side of the triangle. He defines contradiction as “incompatible goal-states in a goal-seeking system” (Galtung 1996, 71). In this framework, contradiction(s) are seen as a latent part of conflict, which are not empirically observable. (Galtung 1996, 72) In this sense, our framework departs from Galtung’s thinking. Our argument is that even though paradoxes can be hard to observe they can be studied empirically and especially the ways they affect the society can be seen in everyday actions and practices. We demonstrate this in our analysis. Our intention is to probe rather than try to suppress the tensions that paradoxes

generate.

It is only natural that paradox-bound tensions may generate social disruptions. A paradox is a call to think differently, to open up possibilities to find desirable solutions or system changes. It is somewhat similar to the concept of “un-futures” – where the opposite of something is also addressed as of equal importance (Heinonen et al., 2022). If we want to explore futures openly and yet not to be crippled by the surprises therein, more attention should be given to ‘the other side of the coin’ – i.e. “un-futures”. For example, in the case of preferred futures as being sought after, the opposite of preferred futures – undesirable futures – should also be studied and anticipated. It is the only way not to be surprised by disruptions and crises. Seeds for both desirable and undesirable futures are located in these invisible “un-futures” (Heinonen et al., 2022). The very nature of paying attention to these alternative futures can bring to the surface sudden surprises, discontinuities, disruptions and crises and open up new futures in the present that may have otherwise remained unnoticed. Paradoxes may harbour such ‘un-futures’ and, therefore, are worthy of closer scrutiny.

The space between paradoxes represents a liminal space. Liminal can be described as “betwixed or between”, based on the Latin word ‘limen’ meaning ‘a threshold’, with different contexts in physical liminal spaces. A liminal space also resembles ‘Non-Places’ such as airports, shopping malls, spaces between buildings (Marc Augé, 1995) and with also psychological and philosophical links to states between transformation. Sometimes liminality is used as a metaphor, or to represent the inner space of seeking spiritual connection (Franks & Meteyard, 2007), or a liminal state in the fundamental transition from one way of thinking to another, as in the context of environmental policy and sustainability transformation in socio-political turbulence (Hartley & Kuecker, 2022). Liminality is interpreted in a useful way by David Snowden (2018) as being ambiguous, that allows an exploration of a journey rather than a focus or pre-defined goal. This enables liminality to be an effective way to see the whole narrative and traverse several distinct uncertainties, in our case associated with the various conceptions of futures of peace.

Some examples of paradoxes for peace are given in Table 1. They were presented to the participants in the introductory futures provocation at the opening of the workshop. The time horizon was left open to be decided by the small group participants. Apparently, because the paradoxes identified were considered to exist already in the present, no specific temporal speculation of their evolution or ‘solving’ were given. Implicitly though, they were closely intertwined with the societal development in the green and digital transformation, which is of a long duration of several decades.

Table 1. General examples of paradoxes of peace.

| Paradoxes of Peace |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have more conflicts in the world than 20 years ago, even when we have more peace mechanisms than ever before (Global Peace Index) • On the value level, people seem to value overwhelmingly peace, yet more conflicts and wars are appearing (World Value Survey) • Most people want peace, why so many wars? • Si vis pacem, para bellum |

Peace – Dichotomy between negative and positive peace

Peace in practice and at the conceptual level is elusive. The discussion about what peace means and how to achieve it in practice is broad (Sharp, 2020). Here we utilise Johan Galtung’s seminal differentiation between negative and positive peace (1969). This differentiation is based on his understanding of violence and how we can make a difference between personal (direct) violence and structural (indirect) violence (Galtung, 1969)³. This division means that a condition where there is no longer direct personal violence is called negative peace in his classification. This state of affairs is called negative because it means a situation with no social justice or that is negative in various other ways. The only condition here is the absence of direct violence. In Galtung’s thinking, a condition where there is social justice and no structural violence, is called positive peace. He also emphasises that this condition is

characterised by “egalitarian distribution of power and resources”. (Galtung, 1969, 183.) So here, peace is something much more than absence of violence. It cross-cuts the whole society.

Galtung’s division is widely used when studying peace but has been challenged as being too narrow and suffocating the discussion (Courtheyn, 2017, 741) or too vague and wide (Sharp, 2020, 126). Yet, this does not mean that there have not been efforts to make positive peace an operationalised concept which could be measured. The Institute for Economics and Peace publishes Positive Peace Reports, which quantify different dimensions of positive peace. The reports focus, for example, on well-functioning government, equitable distribution of resources, high levels of human capital and sound business environment (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022).

We argue that this dichotomy, and especially the concept of positive peace, is useful when considering transformative futures of peace. In our thinking, positive peace is not a difficult concept, or too wide in content. Rather, we argue that it can be a preferred future where society is free of structural violence and is defined by social justice not to mention the absence of direct physical violence.

Methods and Data

This paper presents the process, methods used and results of a futures clinique held within the 50th Anniversary Conference of the World Futures Studies Federation: Exploring Liminalities – Creating Spaces for Unlimited Futures, in Paris 27th October 2023.

This Clinique was focused on identifying paradoxes of peace and work, combining and comparing them, deconstructing the paradoxes, and arriving at a provocative metamorphosis of these two spheres. This paper focuses on findings of peace. As participation is central to a foresight process, we ensured good representation of different people with different backgrounds, since the conference participants represented wide ranges of thinkers and practitioners from the field of futures studies.

Due to the limited time allocated to the event (60 min), the futures clinique was organised in a concise form, while displaying the core elements of a fully-fledged futures clinique (Heinonen & Ruotsalainen, 2013). The participants were divided into groups by directing them to be immediately seated at tables. Four small groups were formed, the total number of participants being 25 (see Fig.1). Before the start of the elaborations in the futures clinique, a futures provocation was provided to stimulate wide futures thinking and illustrate the idea of using paradoxes. The participants were encouraged to imagine different paradoxes of work and peace and subsequently combine them to see what such paradoxes have in common and dig deeper into underlying currents, structures, belief systems etc. Joint discussion was crucial at the end for cross-fertilisation of ideas, and for bridging the liminal space between these two complex entities.

The workshop had been pre-tested as an in-house exercise. We drew upon two approaches: first, inspired by the agile futures exercises of Willis Harman (1976), which spontaneously force connections between seemingly different uncertainties, linking potential causal relationships. For the second influential approach, we drew from the Causal Layered Analysis (Inayatullah et al., 2022) and its framework of four layers: metaphors, worldviews, systems and litanies. Our interest was to try applying paradoxes as an additional layer or address paradoxes via the CLA layers in discussion⁴.

Inductive thematic analysis was chosen to analyse the data collected from the workshops (Naeem et al., 2023). The workshop focused on paradoxes, which is the reason why a values-based approach was chosen as the coding method to identify the tensions in the paradoxes and interpret the inputs of the participants in relation to our key research question of identifying different perspectives towards the futures of peace and work. Based on the values coding, eight themes were created⁵. Derbyshire et al. (2022) have underlined the value of experimentation in futures methods and with that in mind we wanted to develop qualitative and deliberative methods into a new direction.

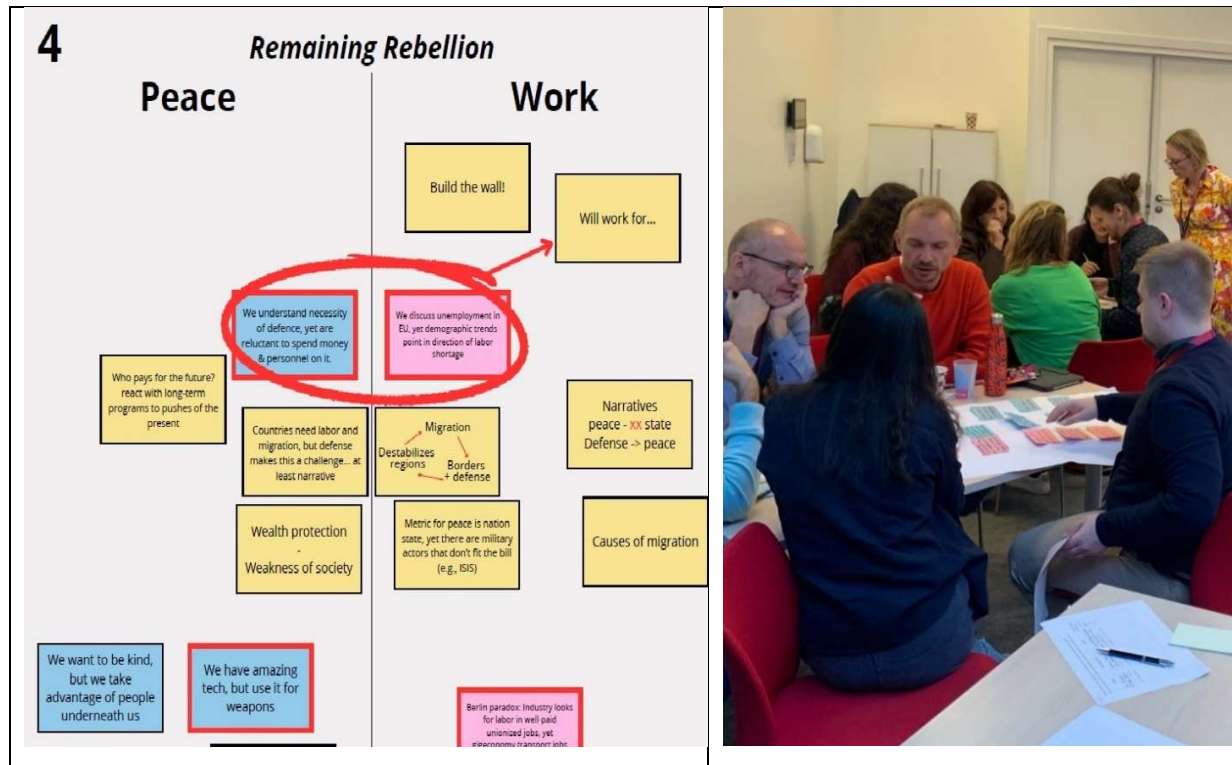


Fig. 1: Paradox Probing futures Clinique in action, showing group 4, at WFSF XXV Paris conference.

Results and Analysis – Tensions Within Complexity and Agency

During the workshop the participants discussed and created paradoxes of peace and work in four moderated small groups. Each group was asked to choose the most interesting paradoxes for further examination of a combination of a paradox of peace and of another of work. Group 1 focused on agency of peace-actors and healthy workers, highlighting the different identities of actors and generated the paradox “Peaceful mind in a healthy body?”⁶. Group 2’s paradox was “Complexity trap”, by drawing attention to the tendency of creating more machines and international bodies promoting peace but ending up with more work and more conflicts. They also argued that building a cycle of complexity may be perceived as easier than solving the problems. Group 3 discussed the relationship between crime and care, as “Crime is being care(d)” or “Crime is care”. They noted that in countries like Mexico, Colombia and Brazil, people may often feel like they get more care from organised crime than from the government. Group 4 termed their paradox “Remaining rebellion” emphasising the mismatch between defence and the experience of peace as well as between labour supply and demand. They discussed that the structural actions for achieving peace and work may not reflect the reality and objectives of people.

Table 2. Examples of paradoxes ideated by the workshop participants.

Paradoxes of Peace

- Crime is organised, peace is not
- Will to end war, while violent sports are becoming more popular
- We have amazing tech, but use it for weapons
- Everybody tells they want peace, but they act on the opposite way

From the paradoxes imagined, we were able to find the following four main themes for peace paradoxes, presented in Table 3 and discussed after the table.

Table 3. Four major themes identified around paradoxes as derived from the thematic analysis.

Peace

- Peace is part of the political game
- No understanding of the holistic nature of peace
- Peace is seen as being above the influence of the individual
- Complexity of achieving peace – We are afraid of achieving peace (being free)

Peace is part of the political game

Participants noted that peace is not neutral as such but part of a larger political game. In practice, this means that peace is not treated inherently valuable but rather as a means to achieve something. Peace may well be at our grasp but achieving it may not be in the interests of political actors. It may also be that encompassing peace may be something that people do not want to achieve. For example, in the context of peace negotiations after violent conflicts, actors who try to undermine the objective of peace are called spoilers. For spoilers, peace undermines their status, values or general interests and they usually use violence to compromise the peace negotiations. The actions of spoilers can lead to extreme events such as genocides. For example, it has been argued that the actions of spoilers led to the Rwanda genocide (Stedman 1997, 5). Furthermore, it should be noted that we have only discussed negative peace (the absence of violence) in Galtungian terms and how spoilers affect it. However, it could also be asked, what is the role of positive peace in a situation where some actors are even against the negative peace. Mironova and Whitt (2017) have studied this issue in the context of Kosovo. They argue that even after violent conflict, micro-foundations for positive peace can be built. However, this kind of peace building demands a third-party⁷, which plays a role of active peacekeeper for example by building sanctioning institutions. In the case of Kosovo, such peacekeeping has managed to keep possible spoilers in check. However, Mironova and Whitt point out that these kinds of efforts are not enough since the third-party peacekeepers need to depart at some points. Therefore, in the long run, achieving the positive peace demands other activities like building sustainable institutions, which foster cooperation and social order. (Mironova & Whitt 2017, 2095.)

No understanding of the holistic nature of peace

Here it was argued that there is no real understanding about the holistic nature of peace. Participants identified issues like short-sightedness where focus is on immediate threats and not on the bigger picture. Money was seen as one reason for such short-sightedness. Yet, in order to explore the whole-of-society developments and cause-and-effect relationships, long-term thinking is essential, especially for visioning and scenario construction (Masini, 2006; Schwartz, 1996). In the world of immediate threats and money, building enduring and socially just society can be difficult, because achieving both negative and positive peace demands far-reaching decisions, if we want them to last. For example, Tessa Finlev (2012, 59) argues that futures thinking could be utilised in conflict resolution to break the hold of violent past and to think possibility of peaceful future. Considering negative peace, this process could start with the agreement about a ceasefire followed by further negotiations where at least preliminary trust is built. In the case of positive peace, an even more futures-orientated lens is needed. The aim is to build a socially just society which demands decisions that cover a multitude of different policy areas and enable every political and societal group to participate in the planning.

The aim of post-conflict peacebuilding has traditionally been achieving this kind of societal grand bargain at least at some level. In practice, this means building the institutions which nurture democracy and ensure the country in question will be more stable. However, such traditional liberal peacebuilding has emphasised the role of outside influence and a top-down process where international actors, such as the UN, grant funding to a country that is recovering from a conflict, and also monitors how the process of institution building is proceeding. It should also be pointed out that this framework has generally emphasised the role of institutionally bound capitalism in peacebuilding (Roberts 2011, 1–2). Therefore, such peacebuilding and “grand bargaining” have been criticised inside peace studies. As one of the alternatives, local peacebuilding has been proposed. Here peacebuilding is seen as a bottom-up process where local actors are at the centre stage of the process and classical Western tenets of liberal peacebuilding are questioned. (Randazzo 2016, 1351; Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013, 763)

Peace is seen as being above the influence of the individual

It was argued that generally peace is seen as something beyond the influence of individuals. Here people do not have sufficient means of influence or are too willing to hand over the responsibility for peace to the authorities. In relation to the previous theme, it was also noted that many people view peace too superficially, seeing it as a trendy issue rather than a necessity. Peace can be conceived as a difficult phenomenon to grasp, especially for an individual. Additionally, direct violence, can be an issue that is in the hands of top-political actors and governments, which means that, especially in autocratic countries, individuals may have a hard time to promote peace through civic society. However, we claim that in democratic countries, citizens' possibilities are more abundant and achieving at least negative peace may be easier. We base this argument on Immanuel Kant's idea, which he presents in his book *Perpetual peace* (2000). In short, he proposes that democratic⁸ countries are more unlikely to wage war because in these systems the leaders and rulers need the consent of the people for such action. People are probably very reserved considering war since the hardships of conflict would affect their lives and wellbeing⁹ (Kant 2000, p22). Based on this, it could be stated that even though singular individual may have hard time to affect issues of peace and war, at least in democratic systems, people can collectively affect the decision making of those in power and contribute to negative peace.

And yet, it could be claimed that achieving positive peace can be even more difficult than negative one since it demands all-encompassing social justice. However, there are very concrete examples of positive peace building by grass-root level action. For example, resistance movements and political protest group organised by citizens are credited to have played a vital role in ending apartheid in South Africa (Badran 2009). This shows that even though singular individual's abilities to affect the system can be limited, collectively individuals can even overturn a regime and contribute to the creation of a more just system. This is not to say that peace, both negative and positive, cannot seem hard to grasp at individual level. However, based on presented arguments and examples, they are not completely out of the individuals' influence if it is possible to act collectively. However, it should be noted that in many autocratic states, possibilities for such collective action are limited or non-existent.

Complexity of achieving peace

As a fourth and last theme, it was indicated that peace is seen as something too complex to achieve, and that we are even afraid to achieve it. This complexity is understandable if we consider, how difficult it is to stop even overt, direct violence that we have seen in the war in Ukraine or in Gaza. Furthermore, achieving social justice is no less complex issue. However, one way to alleviate this complexity in practice could be aforementioned civil action, which could at least make complexity more bearable through concrete action. However, this is not the only option and may not be enough for positive or even for negative peace. Some further actions are outlined in Milojevic's article (2024), which deals with anticipatory governance's role in conflicts and their prevention. Milojevic argues that anticipatory governance in of itself does not lead to more peaceful world and conflict prevention. Actually, she presents examples¹⁰ where anticipatory governance has been used to escalate conflicts and justify violence. (Milojevic 2024)

However, what is interesting in the context of complexity are Milojevic's notions about how anticipatory governance can be used to minimise violence and prevent conflicts. These views are presented in the framework of CLA and vary widely from practical issues to more philosophical and psychological framings. Furthermore, they encompass both negative and positive peace. In the level of litany, she points to the importance of peaceful futures and concrete actions, which entail these said futures. These actions are for example "peaceful coexistence of diverse groups" and "investments in positive peace initiatives". (Milojevic 2024, p16). Both of these actions are practical in a sense. Interestingly, coexistence of diverse groups also encompasses both negative and positive peace. From the point of view negative peace, it could be claimed that this practice is about the prevention of civil wars. On the other hand, from the point of view positive peace, it is about social justice between different groups. If there are grave social injustices in society, peaceful coexistence can be difficult. It should also be born in mind that even though these ideas are practical, they are also very complex in of themselves.

However, complexity becomes an even more clear issue when moving towards more abstract levels of CLA. In social level, the importance of values and laws are mentioned. On the other hand, in worldview level, Milojevic emphasises the importance of peace histories rather than warrior centric past. On the level of myths, general notion

that people on the other side of conflict are also political subjects and they have their own desired futures and visions of those futures is brought forth. (Milojevic 2024, p16.) Aforementioned points characterise the complexity of peace and peace building. Building peace is not only an issue of practical nature but also demands changes in laws, mental frameworks and varied understanding of established histories. This complexity may make peace seem like unattainable but in the spirit of paradox probing, we see the deconstruction of these complexities as one part of moving towards or even achieving peace.

Tensions – A mix of manageable and inherent issues

Based on the analysis, it can be argued that the tensions embedded in paradoxes can be categorised in two ways. There are tensions that can under right circumstances be managed and then those inherent to the nature of peace and achieving it.

Peace as a political game can be seen as a tension, manageable at least partially by third-party actors who can keep the spoilers in check in the peace process. To build a lasting peace also demands establishing of institutions to achieve positive peace, which links with the holistic nature of the peace and especially short-sightedness, involving actors with immediate goals instead of long-term planning and building of positive peace.

However, it should be noted that institution building based on third-party actors may create new tensions since local voices may not be heard, especially if the peace efforts are aligned with the traditional liberal peace building. In short, managing an old tension, may bring up a new tension. This exemplifies one of the main tenets of paradox probing, which is accepting the complexity and uncertainty. The actions taken today, may lead to surprising new tensions and even to new paradoxes - the future is not a linear trajectory.

Another tension emerging from the data was the influence of an individual or lack thereof. In democratic societies, there is a possibility of collective civic action to alleviate social injustices and promote positive peace. The South Africa example shows even that this kind of activity can affect a society based on grave social injustices. In short, peace may be out of the reach of singular individual but through collective actions, it is attainable. However, in these kinds of cases, it should be remembered that even if the aim of collective action is to solve social injustice and to achieve positive peace, the end result is not assured. There is a myriad of historical examples where grass-root level revolt led to a new societal system, but the injustices still endured. This underlines the aforementioned notion of uncertainty.

The last tension was the idea that peace is too complex to be achievable. This point was supported the examples presented by Milojevic, which clearly show that achieving peace is truly a complex objective, requiring changes in mental framings and economic investments. This complexity can be studied as we have shown in our analysis dealing with paradoxes. The complexities exist nonetheless and achieving peace, both negative and positive, is by nature a complex issue full of contradictory tensions.

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper presents the process and outcome of a methodologically innovative foresight exercise. The aim was to identify paradoxes and use them as tools for sense-making future developments concerning a complex issue – peace. Probing paradoxes helps in revealing hidden assumptions and thus opens up wider perspectives for futures developments. This ensures that undesirable outcomes of certain trajectories shown by paradoxes can be subjected to closer scrutiny and enables a search for preventive measures that can be proactively taken.

This workshop was both challenging and rewarding. First, within the paradoxes and tensions, we recognised a strong global perspective that underpins peace – both the UN and the Millennium Project emphasise themes related to peace in their agendas. The UN conceptualises peace as a Sustainable Development Goal (United Nations, n.d.). The Millennium project has embedded peace in the framework of 15 global challenges (Millennium Project, 2024.)

Second, the above analysis of themes shows that the exercise was successful in terms of the number and scope of the ideas produced. However, some of the paradoxes identified were not actually paradoxes in the defined meaning, but rather statements or ideas concerning the topics discussed. Some participants raised fundamental questions about the topics¹¹. It is important to note that potential biases also exist as regards interpretation of paradoxes since it is directly connected to the participants' interests.

Third, what can be further discerned from engaging in Paradox Probing, is an emphasis on ethical and justice considerations and implications. Unpacking and questioning ethical issues in futures is an essential task to direct attention to value judgements on futures and shift them toward more pluriversal understanding as Feukeu (2024) suggests. From the probing, we can distinguish ethical issues associated with peace and technology: “We have amazing tech, but use it for weapons”. This relates to system-oriented ethical issues.

Fourth, the workshop offered a forum to discuss the paradoxical issues, that Chimal & Ramos (2024) have identified functions as a mechanism for empowerment. Through the help of metaphors, challenging deeply held assumptions promotes “forming pathways to reconceptualization” (Chimal & Ramos. 2024). Similarly, we claim that this ethical role is achieved through paradox probing. Considering long-term futures perspectives, current paradoxes may also represent ethical issues that clearly affect future generations, where decisions must be made to avoid negatively impacting them (Knudsen et al. 2024).

As a limitation of our approach, it could be argued that the paradox probing as we applied it in this exercise, does not yet as such produce explicit future-orientated knowledge. Rather the paradoxes, which were identified and proposed by the participants, were heavily linked to the present. This outcome is only natural, because the paradoxes represent the present reality. Paradoxes, however, bring forth tensions which are currently affecting peace and which have an effect on the futures of peace as drivers or countervailing forces. Thus, we will develop the method of paradox probing further in order to relate the present paradoxes closer to emerging developments. Future-orientated insights could become available via paradox probing, if the identified underlying tensions would be revealed during the process of deconstructing paradoxes. When scrutinised, this could support the development of alleviating measures so that pathways for preferred futures could be defined. Paradoxes as deconstructed and interpreted could indeed be used for making narratives and their pathways. They could act as catalysts for strategic thinking in organisations similarly as Cornelisse & van Klinken (2024) claim for scenarios.

All in all, paradoxes represent a powerful tool for evoking futures images, albeit negative or positive ones. Preferably they can be used for exploring and constructing desirable futures by embracing and deconstructing present paradoxes. In the same vein as Claude Lévi-Strauss says, “metaphors think in us” we can propose that “Paradoxes do think in us”.

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Notes

- 1- For more, please see <https://www.utu.fi/en/university/turku-school-of-economics/finland-futures-research-centre/research/t-winning-spaces-2035>
- 2- RESCUE is the acronym for the project on ‘Real Estate and Sustainable Crisis Management in Urban Environments’ <https://www.rescue-finland.com/>
- 3- Galtung also later introduced cultural violence to specify the role of culture in legitimising violence in its direct or structural form (Galtung, 1990).
- 4- A previous foresight exercise with CLA was conducted in order to immerse in crises and create resilience (Heinonen, Sivonen, Karjalainen et al. 2024). Another experimental futures clinique on a later occasion combined CLA more concretely with Paradoxes. For that, see Heinonen, Ebrahimabadi, Viitamäki et al.

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- 5- These considered both peace and work.
- 6- The Group 1 formulation of the combined paradox has been made as a desktop addition.
- 7- Stedman talks about international actors as custodians of peace (Stedman 1997, 6).
- 8- The exact term is constitutional republic but here republic and democratic country can be used as synonyms.
- 9- This is not to say that democratic countries have not waged wars. However, the argument goes that it is more unlikely and takes more convincing than in autocratic countries.
- 10- Examples: 1) Civil war in Yugoslavia was thought to be inevitable, which led to a self-fulfilling prophecy.
2) President Bush argued that pre-emptive actions are the only way to guarantee national security and justified Iraq war this way.
- 11- It was for example asked whether it is even possible to remove war and violence from the society.

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