

BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP WORLD: IMAGINING A FUTURE OF COOPERATION AND EQUITY

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Abstract

In a world dominated by narratives of control, conflict, and dystopia, envisioning a future based on partnership principles is both a revolutionary and a necessary endeavor. This paper explores the transformative potential of a partnership-based society, where cooperative relationships replace hierarchical structures, and mutual respect and collaboration become the cornerstones of social, economic, and environmental interactions. By drawing on cultural transformation work and Indigenous wisdom, this paper outlines a comprehensive vision for education, agriculture, urban development, governance, and social inclusion in a partnership world.

Key words: Cooperation, cultural transformation, equity, partnership, respect

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The current global landscape is often characterized by domination and conflict, fostering a pervasive sense of dystopia. A dystopian world can be defined as an imagined universe where oppressive societal control is maintained through various means (Dillon & Connell, 2017). This control often involves corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian systems. In such a world, the illusion of a perfect society is upheld, masking the harsh realities and injustices that lie beneath the surface (Dillon & Connell, 2017). In contrast, partnership theories emphasize the importance of envisioning and co-designing a future rooted in partnership.

In this paper, we imagine a future where partnership, rather than domination, guides our interactions with each other in a cooperative nature. Such a future is essential for creating a sustainable, equitable, and thriving world. We hope this paper will contribute to the discourse on building a partnership world, offering a vision of a future where cooperation and equity are the guiding principles.

The partnership model, as proposed by Riane Eisler (2007) and other scholars (Courtney et al., 1996), serves as the foundation of this paper. Surrounding the main idea of active involvement and self-care actions of individuals (Courtney et al., 1996), the partnership model is an important approach in working with underserved, vulnerable, and/or minority populations (Courtney et al., 1996). Guided by the partnership model, the hierarchies of domination and isolated professions could be broken down, and highly-functioning, collaborative teams could be built up (Eisler & Potter, 2014). The partnership model contrasts with dominator cultures, highlighting the benefits of societies organized around equitable, respectful, and cooperative relationships.

Contemporary partnership models originate with Riane Eisler's cultural transformation theory, as presented in her book *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1988). This theory provided a framework to guide the shift from fragmented thinking to systematic thinking, and from human domination to partnership interconnectedness (Gilbertson et al., 2019). It impacted the hierarchical structures of the world tremendously, especially in the health-care and education arenas (Kennedy Oehlert, 2015).

Domination and partnership paradigms have distinct features. In domination-oriented systems, social structures are rigidly hierarchical, with one-way communication and leaders who use "power over" tactics to maintain control, often employing shame, blame, and fear to sustain stability (Gilbertson et al., 2019). Domination can be reflected in autocratic classrooms, mindsets defining men over women, and/or organizational cultures emphasizing supervisor over employer.

Conversely, partnership systems are characterized by mutual respect and high value placed on each member's unique contributions. Communication is bi-directional, and both challenge-taking and innovation are encouraged (Gilbertson et al., 2019). Partnership can be reflected in a collaboration relationship among members of an organization, encouraging different opinions from people with various backgrounds, and/or mutual respect not limited by social hierarchy and economic status.

Indigenous philosophies, which emphasize the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of communal well-being (Watene, 2022), also inform this vision. Indigenous philosophy broadly refers to the ideas of Indigenous peoples pertaining to the nature of the world, human existence, ethics, ideal social and political structures (Watene, 2022). Indigenous philosophies emphasize the importance of nourishing and regenerative relationships. It focuses on inclusive, justice, well-being, and development (Watene, 2022).

Partnership theory and Indigenous philosophies often intersect in their emphasis on relationality and interconnectedness. They both value relationships based on respect, mutual benefit, and sustainability. With the 10th anniversary of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*, I would like to imagine a future world built on partnership theory and Indigenous philosophies, to portray a more inclusive and sustainable world picture.

Building a Partnership World

A partnership world posits that all human social structures, including families, organizations, and nations, will shift from relationships of domination to relationships of partnership (Gilbertson et al., 2019). With the mutual respect and cooperative relationships that a partnership world calls for, people can live and work collaboratively, inclusively, and sustainably. This is evident in partnership cultures such as nomadic forager societies from 10,000 years ago, which were the oldest known form of human social organization (Eisler, 2019). With the efforts of the society and individuals, we

saw a trending equitable world on the track of achieving partnership, an opposite to the trends of the later colonial period. Seeing through the partnership lens, we are calling everyone to work together to build a partnership world in the future.

Education in a Partnership World

Driven by Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations (2015), institutional initiatives and campus operations have been implemented worldwide to promote education sustainability (Biancardi et al., 2023). In a partnership-based future, education systems will be designed to foster critical thinking, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving (Davis, 2024). Curricula integrate Indigenous knowledge and contemporary scientific understanding, emphasizing holistic and experiential learning (Davis, 2024). Classrooms become spaces of mutual respect, where students and teachers engage in dialogue. Education is accessible and equitable for all, regardless of socioeconomic status (Davis, 2024).

Agriculture and Food Systems

Over the past 60 years, the productivity of agriculture and food systems has increased significantly (National Academies of Sciences et al., 2022). We celebrate achievements of the agriculture and food systems, but meanwhile we also need to see the expenses which were incurred by these gains. Loss of biodiversity, degradation of soil, scarcity of water, runoff of chemicals, and greenhouse gas emissions are impacting our natural and human systems tremendously (National Academies of Sciences et al., 2022). Furthermore, given the achievements, it is estimated that 800 million people are still affected by hunger worldwide (National Academies of Sciences et al., 2022).

The Government-University-Industry Research Roundtable of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2022) proposed the aim of producing more food with more nutrients and less environmental impact. With that effort made, agricultural practices in a partnership world will prioritize sustainability, biodiversity, and food sovereignty. Regenerative agriculture and permaculture principles will guide farming, restoring ecosystems and promoting resilience against climate change (Frietsch et al.,

2023). Community-supported agriculture models flourish, strengthening local economies and ensuring that all people have access to nutritious food (Frietsch et al., 2023). Traditional agricultural knowledge, particularly from Indigenous cultures, will be integrated into modern practices, creating a harmonious balance between innovation and tradition (Frietsch et al., 2023).

Urban Development and Infrastructure

With the development of materials and technology, massive urbanization has expanded rapidly. However, challenges such as transportation inefficiency, energy insufficiency, air pollution, water pollution, lack of housing space, and uneven health resources still exist (Anwar et al., 2017). With the necessity for sustainable infrastructures in mind (e.g., safe roads, better housing, purified water, access to energy and modern health care) (Anwar et al., 2017), cities in a partnership future will be designed for the well-being of all inhabitants. Through public-private partnerships, urban planning will prioritize green spaces, sustainable transportation, and affordable housing (Anwar et al., 2017). Mixed-use developments will encourage community interaction and reduce environmental impact. Smart city technologies will enhance connectivity and efficiency (Anwar et al., 2017), but implemented with ethical considerations and community input. Public spaces will become centers for cultural exchange and civic engagement, fostering a sense of belonging and shared responsibility.

Governance and Political Systems

The Open Government Partnership was launched during the 2011 United Nations General Assembly meeting (Open Government Partnership, 2024). Since then, aims for the governance and political systems were gradually transformed to promoting transparency, empowering citizens, fighting corruption, and harnessing new technologies (Piotrowski et al., 2022). Working with civil societies, governments created action plans for concrete reforms. Issues such as justice, gender, governance, civic space, natural resources, and corruptions were addressed step by step (Open Government Partnership, 2024).

Imaging the future, governance structures in a partnership-based society will be inclusive, transparent, and participatory. Decision-making processes will involve diverse stakeholders, ensuring that policies reflect the needs and aspirations of all community members. Decentralized governance models will empower local communities, promoting self-determination and accountability (Selfgovs, 2023). Legal systems will prioritize restorative justice, focusing on rehabilitation and reconciliation rather than punishment (Meng, 2020). International relations will be characterized by cooperation and mutual respect, with global institutions dedicated to peace building and sustainable development (Meng, 2020).

Social Inclusion and Equity

As iterated in Eisler's (1988) cultural transformation theory, cultural transformation actions play a crucial role in challenging discriminatory norms (domination) and fostering inclusive attitudes (partnership). A partnership world actively works to dismantle systemic inequalities and promote social justice (United Nations, 2006). Policies and initiatives will be designed to uplift marginalized groups, ensuring that everyone has equal opportunities to thrive. This includes comprehensive healthcare, affordable housing, and access to education and employment. Efforts to preserve and revitalize Indigenous languages and cultures will be prioritized, recognizing their invaluable contributions to our collective heritage (United Nations, 2006).

Impact on our Future

Having gone through the traumatic COVID-19 pandemic period, the world is much more connected by virtual technologies than before (Haven, 2023). However, even with the digital interactions and virtual connections available, people are feeling much more isolated and lonelier than before the pandemic, especially among those individuals who spend significant amounts of time on social media platforms (Haven, 2023). One of the main reasons for this paradox is attributable to the lack of in-depth in-person conversations, where emotional connections could be reached at a higher level (Haven,

2023) and cooperation and collaborations could be better established through close face-to-face interactions (Palopoli, 2022).

With the global partnerships that have been built, either online or in person, cultural knowledge, opportunities, and challenges are expanding. As humans we share common social responsibility aiming to achieve mutual support, increase trust and communication, enhance collaboration between different parties, and reach sustainable outcomes and greater inclusivity (United Nations, 2015). The partnership world will eventually change various domains of our life, including social, economic, and environmental aspects, especially for vulnerable populations and for Nature (United Nations, 2015).

Vulnerable Populations

The partnership world will provide a platform for members of historically oppressed and marginalized groups to voice their needs and perspectives (European Commission, 2023). Specifically, it will include more equitably developed policies and practices to improve equal access to resources, social inclusion, resilience, and adaptability, which will lead to improved outcomes (European Commission, 2023).

Children and elders are frequently categorized as the most vulnerable populations due to their unique physical, social, and economic characteristics (Feine, 2023). The partnership world will provide an environment that supports children's physical, emotional, and intellectual development. Education systems will need to be consistently child-centered, by fostering opportunities for creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). Elders' well-being will need to be prioritized by community partners, valuing the wisdom and experience of members of this population (Pillemer et al., 2022).

With a technology-immersed world, partnerships can significantly impact vulnerable populations by leveraging advancements like Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to address disparities in areas such as education (Salas-Pilco et al., 2022) and identity

protection (Jeyaraman et al., 2023). For instance, collaborations between tech companies and educational institutions can develop AI-driven tools that offer

personalized learning experiences, improving educational outcomes for underprivileged students (Salas-Pilco et al., 2022). Additionally, partnership innovations focused on digital security can safeguard individuals from threats such as identity theft or breaches, which disproportionately affect vulnerable communities (Jeyaraman et al., 2023). By combining resources and expertise, these alliances will have the opportunity to enhance access, protect personal data, and ultimately foster greater equity and resilience among those at high risk (Jeyaraman et al., 2023).

Relationship with Environment

Partnerships play a crucial role in addressing environmental challenges, particularly as climate change accelerates and global populations grow (King et al., 2023). A partnership future recognizes the intrinsic nature of harmonious coexistence. Environmental stewardship is a core principle, guiding policies and practices that protect and restore natural ecosystems (McLeod et al., 2024). Indigenous environmental knowledge informs sustainable land and resource management, ensuring that development does not come at the expense of ecological health (McLeod et al., 2024). Communities actively engage in conservation efforts, understanding that their well-being is intimately connected to the health of the planet (McLeod et al., 2024).

By fostering collaboration between governments, businesses, and communities, these partnerships enable the pooling of resources, expertise, and innovative solutions to tackle issues such as carbon emissions and habitat loss effectively (Everard et al., 2017). As a result, partnerships can drive the adoption of sustainable practices, promote the development of green technologies, and support the restoration of ecosystems. Through coordinated efforts, partnerships not only help mitigate the impacts of climate change but also pave the way for a more resilient and sustainable future for our planet (Everard et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Imagining a partnership-based future requires a radical shift in our values and behaviors, and a return to ways we once lived. This paper has outlined a vision where education, agriculture, urban development, governance, and social inclusion are all guided by ancient principles of cooperation, respect, and sustainability. By drawing on cultural transformation work and Indigenous wisdom, we can co-create a future that is equitable, resilient, and thriving. It is a future where all people, including vulnerable populations and the rest of nature, can flourish in harmony.

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