

Irene: Conflict Resolution through Classical Literature in Amazonia

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PROJECT SUMMARY

The *Irene* project, led by Dr. Martin Dinter and a team of collaborators from Latin America, used classical literature, examples and rhetorical techniques, such as the Socratic method, to help indigenous communities in the Amazon find peaceful ways to resolve conflicts. The project adapted and translated a comic-style workbook from the *Irene Peace Building* project, which had already been successfully used in Colombian schools. These materials will be used to train indigenous women activists as mediators, helping them to handle disputes in their communities.

Working closely with State University of Amazonas in Brazil and University of La Sabana in Colombia, the project tailored the materials to reflect the realities of indigenous communities in the Amazon, incorporating local narratives and cultural references. High school teachers and education specialists helped ensure the materials were accessible and relevant, while students supported documentation and dissemination efforts.

The adapted resources were designed for use in a future impact project, where indigenous female activists will receive training in mediation and conflict resolution. These activists will, in turn, replicate the training in their communities, helping to address disputes related to land, water, and gender-based violence. By linking classical texts with contemporary issues, *Irene* provided the foundation for long-term peacebuilding efforts in an underserved and vulnerable region.

HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

The project grew out of an earlier research initiative led by Martin, funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This original project explored how classical literature could serve as a tool for peacebuilding and conflict resolution. As part of this work, Martin collaborated with colleagues in Colombia and Brazil to develop educational materials that used classical myths to teach mediation skills. These resources were successfully trialed in Colombian schools as part of the country's *Cátedra de la Paz* (Peace Education) curriculum.

Recognising the potential of these materials beyond the school setting, Martin and his collaborators saw an opportunity to adapt them for use in indigenous communities in the Amazon. Through existing partnerships with the State University of Amazonas (UEA) and University of La Sabana, the team identified an urgent need for conflict resolution training among indigenous women activists. These communities often face land and water disputes, as well as high levels of violence against women, with little legal protection or government intervention. The *Irene* project received support from King's College London's Rapid Response Fund, allowing the team to act quickly and translate the materials into Portuguese and Nheengatu.



The Conflict Tree, adapted from the Irene project's original materials, helps participants visualise how conflicts develop and evolve. By identifying the roots (causes), trunk (people involved), branches (outcomes), and fruits (consequences), indigenous women activists can explore ways to transform disputes into opportunities for dialogue, justice, and community healing.



Participants also planted seeds as a symbol of the community's commitment to dialogue and peace: "The seeds we plant today will grow for future generations. If we cultivate dialogue and respect, our forest will be strong and prosperous. If not, the future will be ruinous."

WHAT HAPPENED?

The *Irene* project focused on adapting and translating conflict resolution materials originally developed for Colombian schools to make them accessible to indigenous communities in the Amazon. With support from King's College London's Rapid Response Fund, the team translated the materials into Portuguese and Nheengatu (a Tupi-Guarani language) and adjusted them to reflect the realities of life in the Amazon. This included incorporating local traditions, classical literature, and examples relevant to the conflicts experienced in indigenous communities, such as land and water disputes and gender-based violence.

The project was carried out in collaboration with the State University of Amazonas (UEA) in Brazil and University of La Sabana in Colombia. High school teachers and education specialists played a key role in adapting the materials, ensuring that they would be suitable for use in community-based workshops. Students from both universities helped document the process, capturing interviews, photos, and reports to support future evaluation and dissemination.

An important part of the project involved building relationships with indigenous communities. The team worked closely with established networks of indigenous leaders and educators to gain approval for the project. Given the remote nature of many of these communities and the bureaucratic challenges of working in the Amazon, establishing trust and ensuring the project aligned with local needs was a critical step. The *Irene* team collaborated with an expert in Indigenous Education, who facilitated conversations with community leaders to secure their support and ensure the materials were appropriate and effective.

By the end of the project, the revised materials were ready for implementation in a follow-up impact initiative. Indigenous women activists will use them in workshops designed to train mediators who can help resolve conflicts in their communities. While logistical challenges, such as setting up financial agreements with partners, caused some delays, the project successfully delivered materials that will support long-term peacebuilding efforts in the Amazon.



Irene project day in Tunja (Cundinamarca) near Bogota (Colombia). The ancient Greek writing on the board reads Irene (peace).

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT?

The *Irene* project made a significant contribution to conflict resolution efforts in the Amazon by providing indigenous communities with culturally relevant educational materials that will be used to train mediators. By translating and modifying conflict resolution resources to the needs of the community, the project ensured that indigenous women activists in the Amazon have access to practical tools to address disputes over land, water, deforestation and gender-based violence in their communities.

One of the key outcomes was the development of training materials in Portuguese and Nheengatu, making them accessible to a wider audience in the region. These resources will now be used in a follow-up impact project, where indigenous women will be trained as mediators, allowing the knowledge to spread organically within their communities. This is particularly crucial in areas where governance is weak, and legal protection is limited.

Beyond the immediate benefits of the materials, the project also strengthened institutional partnerships. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between King's College London and the State University of Amazonas, formalizing future collaboration opportunities. Additionally, the involvement of journalism students in documenting the project helped raise awareness of indigenous rights and the urgent need for conflict resolution strategies in the region.

By bridging classical literature with real-world issues, the *Irene* project laid the foundation for long-term peacebuilding and educational initiatives. It provided indigenous activists with concrete tools for mediation while also contributing to academic discussions on the role of literature in conflict resolution. The project has already led to further funding applications, ensuring that its impact will continue to grow in the years to come.

MARTIN'S TOP TIPS FOR IMPACT

1. Find Enthusiastic Partners: Work with people who are passionate about the project's goals. Committed partners bring energy, expertise, and local knowledge, helping to overcome challenges and ensure lasting impact.
2. Be Flexible and Adapt to Challenges: Expect setbacks and be ready to adjust. Whether it's bureaucratic delays or logistical issues, staying adaptable keeps the project moving forward.
3. Plan for Long-Term Sustainability: Impact shouldn't stop when funding does. Train local leaders, create open-access resources, and build partnerships that keep the work going.

FURTHER READING

1. Zapata Matiz, V., Vásquez Guerrero, D. A., Santamaría Pérez, J. G., Forero Álvarez, R., Dinter, M. T., Girado Sierra, J. D., Uribe Neira, R., & Forero Álvarez, L. M. (2024). *Construir paz desde las aulas: Un viaje a través de los clásicos griegos y romanos*. Campus 1742, 26-30. [Available online](#).
2. Dinter, M. (ed.) (2023). *Dossie Tematico: Conflict Resolution and Classical Literature*. Classica – Revista Brasileira de Estudos Clássicos, 36.
3. Forero Álvarez, R., Uribe Neira, R., & Dinter, M. (2025). *The Irene Project: Classical Literature for the Promotion of Peace and Reconciliation in the Classroom*. In S. Nitu & A. Holmes-Henderson (eds.), *Humanities Forward: Opportunity, Innovation, Policy in the 21st Century*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press (in print).



This project was funded by an AHRC Impact Acceleration Account hosted by the Faculty of Arts & Humanities at King's College London, and supported by the Faculty's Impact & Knowledge Exchange team

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