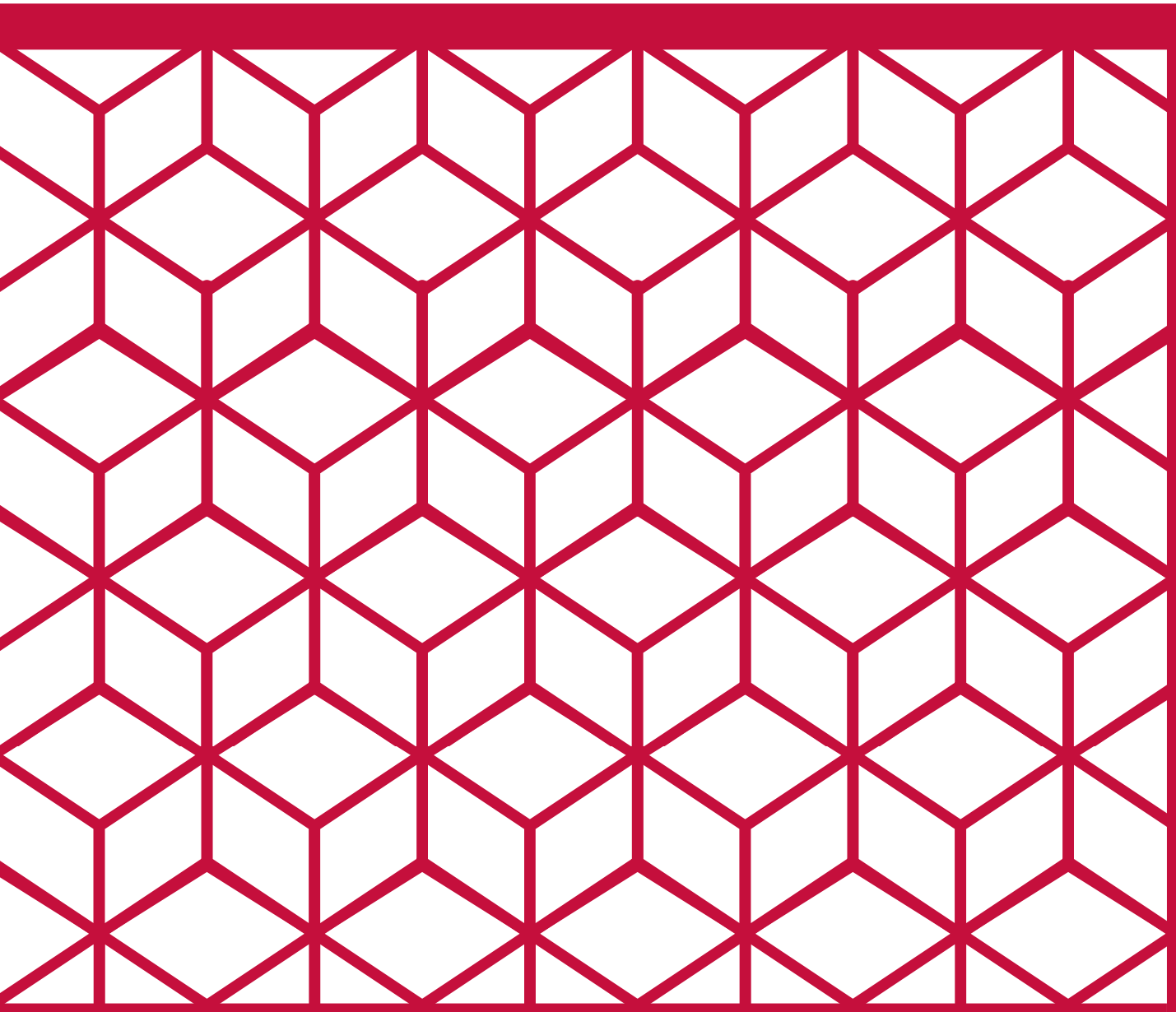


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Warm Peace Network: Building from the Ground Up



WARM PEACE INSTITUTE

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INTRODUCTION

In October 2020, in the wake of the Abraham Accords, I visited the United Arab Emirates for the first time. I was awed by the architectural grandeur and modernity juxtaposed with the religious discipline and tradition. Over the course of my visit, I had the privilege of forging new friendships with Emiratis, and I returned home inspired and deeply impressed by the sense of hospitality and curiosity that I encountered among my new friends.

Over coffee and shisha, one of my new Emirati friends recalled to me her first encounter with a Jewish person. It happened online, on a gaming platform, where she and an Israeli gamer began talking. What started as a random encounter between two gamers evolved into a cross-cultural relationship that broke down barriers and shifted the perspectives of two individuals. As I sat and listened to how this chance encounter had such an impact on changing two people's world views, I could not help but imagine the potential impact such encounters could have, on a larger scale with laser-focused intentionality.

Over the past six months, I have become aware of dozens of pilot dedicated to people to people diplomacy and advancing "Warm Peace" among Israelis and Emiratis, and Jews and Muslims.

These historic opportunities are a result of the Abraham Accords and the normalization of relations between Israel and some of her Arab neighbors. Normalization can lead to a warm peace between peoples, but it will not evolve organically. We must encourage, advance and invest in warm peace. The Abraham Accords have already begun to unleash a wave of partnerships in the diplomatic, defense and business arenas. A warm peace, however, will emerge only when civil societies begin to curate opportunities and experiences for communities to engage with one another and learn about each other's similarities and differences.



Picture the following scenario: in five years, over 100,000 young Jews and Arabs from across the world will have taken part in immersive, life-changing educational encounters. This generation of young adults will have interacted with the “other” in ways previously unimaginable. Imagine the potential for regional alliances and initiatives; for advancing common values such as tolerance and global citizenship; and for catalyzing collaborations aimed at repairing the world together. These encounters offer a promise of warm peace that will pave the way toward a new reality in the Middle East.

While dozens of pilot encounter programs have already begun to sprout despite the limitations brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, we can expect this trend to significantly accelerate as travel restrictions begin to ease through 2021 and 2022. Herein lies the opportunity to capitalize on the failures and lessons learned from alumni networks. All too often, alumni activity is an after-thought. Volunteers and organizational professionals spend a disproportionate amount of time planning every detail of the immersive educational experience with little focus on the aftermath (i.e. figuring out how to process and integrate the experiences into daily life and identifying ways to measure the success of the promise of warm peace in these immersive experiences.

Network theories have become part and parcel of nearly every social change movement in recent years, and many existing regional and global models can provide guidance on designing and developing the most appropriate “Network of Networks” that will connect, and propel, the thousands of alumni who will take part in these life-changing encounters. Thriving networks require “Rules and Tools” that enable them to achieve their longer-term purposes in a member-driven way. The following principles reflect an initial set of these “Rules and Tools” that ought to be considered when designing a “Warm Peace Network of Networks.”



FROM COHORTS TO COMMUNITY

The umbrella network will aim to integrate alumni of different immersive group encounters into a wider community of alumni who have all participated in common experiences. For example, two Harvard graduates, one who completed a law degree in 2015, and one who finished a B.A. in 2010, share a common experience, even though they did not take part in the same encounter.

Deepening the sense of social cohesion formed during immersive encounters will have significant value for the first two years post-experience. Social cohesion can be encouraged through online platforms for communicating, gaming, socializing, sharing and learning, as well as in-person follow-up experiences like sport tournaments and theme-based gatherings.




FROM COMMUNITY TO NETWORK

Over time, this alumni community will transform into a strategic network for its members. A strategic network is a wide network in which members have a general sense of the assets and skills they can access through the network. More importantly, however, each member has the knowledge and confidence to access and navigate the network. The strength of a strategic network is in the loose ties that exist between network members and the potential to activate and strengthen these loose ties for a purpose. Loose ties to people who are different from us are the keys to innovation and change. They are the ones that can provide us with a different perspective and more novel information than the people with whom we are closest. This transformation into a strategic network will involve the formation of interest-based sub-networks; a communications platform; resources to support personal and professional development of network members; and seed financial support for collaborative pilot initiatives.



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

As the network evolves and outputs are monitored, those individuals with leadership potential will gradually set themselves apart by taking advantage of offerings and opportunities to step up and take initiative. These emerging leaders can be invited onto a focused leadership development track that can take a “Network of Networks” approach— seeing each individual leader as a node of potential connectivity to hundreds and thousands of other individuals.



LESS TALKING, MORE DOING

In the past, we have seen limited success in bringing together Jews and Muslims to bridge the divisions caused by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by encouraging participants to explore their similarities and differences through dialogue. This “Network of Networks” has the potential to be something else: a network of doers who create, build and collaborate together in a diverse range of fields. These can include cultural and artistic collaborations, climate change initiatives, business and entrepreneurial prospects, academic consortiums, spiritual experiences and many more.

As the world slowly emerges from the grip of COVID-19, let us hope that we begin to sow the seeds of the promise of warm peace.

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