



Moesgaard Campus.

Introduction to Aarhus Centre for Conflict Management (Aarcon)

CHRISTIAN GADE – DIRECTOR OF AARCON

Aarcon (<https://aarcon.au.dk>) is a new conflict management centre, established at Aarhus University in 2023 and located at the picturesque Moesgaard Campus. Why was this new centre created? What sets it apart from existing centres? What is its current status, and what aspirations does it hold for the future? I will address these questions below.

Why was the centre created?

The centre was established to promote collaboration, knowledge exchange, and mutual learning among researchers, students, and practitioners working with conflict in the broadest sense of the word. At Aarcon, we do not limit our interest to a specific type of conflict, but rather engage with various conflict-related issues that are currently relevant to those affiliated with the centre. Presently, these issues encompass access to justice, border conflicts, climate justice, communication, gender conflicts, human-wildlife conflicts, human security, international criminal justice, land conflicts, and restorative justice. However, as the interests of the affiliated individuals are likely to evolve over time, so too will the issues we address at Aarcon.

“It is an ‘open’ centre where everybody is welcome to be affiliated, and it inspires to be a creative space where we try to challenge established assumptions and develop new ideas together...”

Christian Gade – Director of Aarcon.

What sets Aarcon apart?

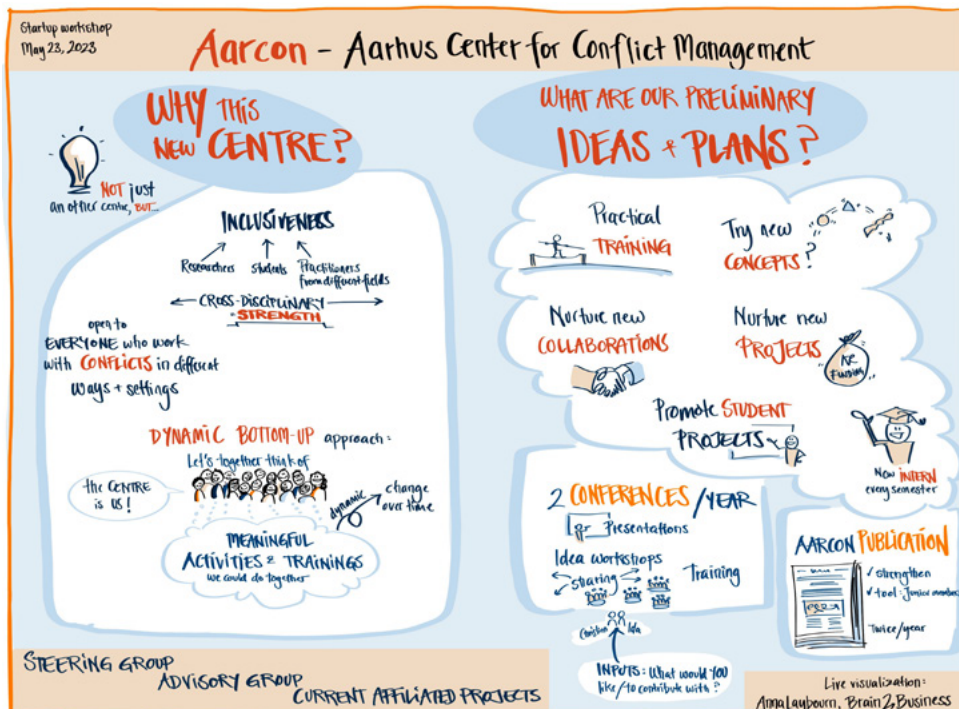
Aarcon is innovative in the sense that it embodies a unique centre design. This design combines a dynamic bottom-up approach to activities, an inclusive approach to participation, and a circular approach to organization. I will now present these three dimensions one by one.

A bottom-up approach to activities means that everyone affiliated with the centre should have the opportunity to influence the activities we undertake. For instance, if some of the affiliated individuals wish to do mediation training together, they are free to form a training group under the centre’s umbrella. The only stipulation is that no activities should be discriminatory towards any group. Essentially, Aarcon aims to make a positive contribution to a peaceful society, not the opposite.

An inclusive approach to participation means that anyone working with conflict, in any capacity, is welcome to affiliate with the centre and have a short profile featured on the centre’s website. The only requirement is that each affiliated person makes a positive contribution to the centre. This contribution can take various forms – participating in existing activities, taking the initiative to establish new activities, assisting in spreading the word about the centre, and more. We all lead different lives, so it’s natural that each of us will contribute in our own unique way. My hope is that the centre will evolve into a truly interdisciplinary hub, fostering connections and creating fresh collaborations among researchers, students, and practitioners.

A circular approach to organization means that the centre follows a cyclical organizational process that restarts every half-year. The biannual cycle commences with a conference, either the Aarcon Summer Conference in June or the Aarcon Winter Conference in December. During these events, participants share information about their recent work in relation to conflict. Concrete ideas for new centre activities are pitched, discussed, and potentially set into motion. Moreover, these conferences feature presentations, trainings, and more, all based on suggestions from previous conferences. For instance, at the upcoming Aarcon Winter Conference 2023, Kurt Mosgaard and Anton Baare from the Danish UN Association will give a presentation,

and Ann Fagerdal will lead a session on transformative mediation. Following the conference, the Aarcon intern team will assist in the practical implementation of centre activities, such as booking rooms at the university, and they will help to organize the next conference. We anticipate having 1-3 interns affiliated with Aarcon every half-year.



Visualization by Anna Laybourn, Brain2Business.

To facilitate knowledge sharing, we have launched a centre publication series named *Aarcon Report*. Within this series, researchers, students, and practitioners can contribute short texts related to their work. These texts will be readily accessible on the Aarcon website, and I envision the publication series evolving into a valuable resource for those engaged in conflict-related fields. For more details about *Aarcon Report*, please contact Mikel J.H. Venhovens, the Editor-in-Chief.

What is the current centre status, and what aspirations does the centre hold for the future?

I applied for the establishment of Aarcon in 2022, and the School of Culture and Society at Aarhus University formally created the centre in January 2023. In May of the same year, we held our start-up workshop at Moesgaard Museum where we discussed the centre and shared visions for its development. The dialogues were visualized by Anna Laybourn, who created the drawing above.



Aarcon start-up workshop on May 23, 2023.

In addition to the five members of the Aarcon Steering Group and the seven members of the Advisory Board, 51 researchers, students, and conflict management practitioners are currently affiliated with Aarcon. You can read the profiles of all these individuals [here](#). Furthermore, we currently have nine projects associated with the centre. You will find more information about these projects [here](#). The Aarcon Report is also up and running and has been assigned an ISSN number.

The next significant milestone is the Aarcon Winter Conference 2023, scheduled to take place at Moesgaard Campus on December 11, 2023. Attendance fees and the program can be accessed [here](#). I am optimistic that this event will serve as the foundation for new Aarcon activities. I also hope that more individuals will express interest in affiliating with us and contributing to the development of a robust and meaningful centre.



About the author

Christian Gade is an Associate Professor of Human Security and Anthropology at Aarhus University. In addition, he is the Director of Aarhus Centre for Conflict Management (Aarcon) and the Coordinator of the Master's degree programme in Human Security.

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