



ISCR 2024

Post Conference Report

September 20th 2024



INTERNATIONAL
SOCIETY FOR
CONTEMPLATIVE
RESEARCH

2nd Annual
Conference

June 19 - 23, 2024
Padova, Italy

Co-organizers: Mind and Life Europe, The University of Padova (Postgraduate Program in Contemplative Studies), and the Italian Buddhist Union Research Center

Overview

From June 19–23, 2024, the charming city of Padova, Italy, became a hub of intellectual and contemplative activity as it hosted the International Society for Contemplative Research (ISCR) 2nd Annual Conference. With the theme "**Embodied Cognition and Intersubjectivity in Uncertain Times: Interdisciplinary Frameworks for Contemplative Research and Education,**" the event convened leading scholars, researchers, and practitioners to explore the intersections of science, philosophy, and contemplative practices. The event kicked off at the historic San Gaetano Cultural Centre, providing a stunning backdrop for a series of engaging discussions and transformative practices.



Day 1: Setting the Stage for Contemplation

The conference commenced with an opening ceremony at the San Gaetano Cultural Centre. Professor Hal Roth, Director of the Brown University Contemplative Studies program, introduced the event, followed by addresses from leaders of the University of Padova and the city's officials. The evening was charged with anticipation, setting a vibrant tone for the days to come.

Keynote Insights: Bridging Worlds

The keynote addresses were a cornerstone of the conference, providing deep dives into cutting-edge research and philosophical inquiries:

- **Rhonda V. Magee** (University of San Francisco): Her talk, "Sitting in a House Afire? On Contemplative Pedagogy and Science in a Time of Social Unrest," underscored the critical role of contemplative practices in fostering resilience and empathy amidst social turbulence.
- **Bret W. Davis** (Loyola University): He presented "Groundless Zen: On Nishitani in and Beyond the Embodied Mind," delving into the insights of Zen Buddhism and its relevance to contemporary understandings of the mind.
- **Franz Vollenweider** (University of Zürich): In his keynote, "Neuroscientific Foundations of Psychedelic Experience: Potential Synergies with Mindfulness Meditation and Clinical Implications," Vollenweider explored the neural underpinnings of altered states of consciousness and the profound therapeutic potential of the integration between psychedelics and meditation.



Invited Keynote Panelists

Olga Klimecki from Technische Universität Dresden presented "Cultivating Compassion and Peace Through Contemplative Practices." She highlighted her extensive neuroscience research on meditation-based interventions, demonstrating their efficacy in promoting both mental and physical health. Klimecki showcased her work on the Medit-Ageing / Silver Santé study, emphasizing how contemplative practices can be powerful tools for resolving conflicts peacefully.

Anne Klein of Rice University delivered an enlightening talk titled "Embodied Interaction of Head and Heart in Tibetan Buddhism." Klein delved into the intricate connection between cognitive and somatic knowing within Buddhist traditions. Drawing from her experiences as a Lama in the Nyingma tradition, she illustrated how contemplative practices harmonize intellectual and emotional understanding.

From Oxford University, **Sarah Shaw's** lecture, "Narratives of Contemplation in Early Buddhist Texts," examined the meditative and literary aspects of early Buddhist stories like Jātakas and Dhammapada. Shaw provided compelling insights into how these ancient narratives have shaped contemporary Buddhist practices and their relevance in today's world. Dr. Shaw described 6 fundamental qualities of body & mind, including tranquility, softness, flexibility...

Claire Petitmengin of Institut Mines–Telecom Business School captivated the audience with her keynote, "Unveiling the Dynamics of Lived Experience: Micro-Phenomenology in Practice." Petitmengin focused on methods for becoming aware of and analyzing lived experiences. She discussed the educational,

therapeutic, and contemplative applications of these methods, highlighting their importance in addressing the ecological crisis by reconnecting us with our lived experiences.



Josipa Mihalj from the University of Zagreb presented "Mindfulness and Positive Youth Development," where she detailed her research on the impact of contemplative education on youth. Mihalj emphasized the critical role of self-compassion and mindfulness practices in preventing behavioral problems and promoting mental health among children and adolescents.

In his talk, "Heart Openings: The Experience and Cultivation of Love Across Religions," **Christian Suhr** from Aarhus University explored how Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic traditions cultivate love and compassion. Using audiovisual and multimodal methods, Suhr vividly illustrated the sensory and emotional dimensions of these religious practices.

Independent philosopher **Andreas Weber** delivered a thought-provoking presentation titled "Enlivenment: A Poetic Approach to Understanding Life." Weber proposed a re-evaluation of our relationship with the biosphere, advocating for viewing all organisms as subjects within a meaning-creating reality. His work encourages a deeper appreciation of life's interconnectedness and its poetic nature.

Lastly, **Shirley Telles** from the Patanjali Research Foundation presented her keynote, "Physiological Benefits of Yoga and Meditation." Telles shared her extensive research on the health effects of yoga practices, discussing how specific yogic techniques can enhance both physiological and psychological well-being. Her numerous studies and publications provided robust support for the benefits of these ancient practices.

The diverse perspectives and profound insights shared by these keynote speakers significantly enriched the intellectual and contemplative landscape of the ISCR2024 Conference, leaving a lasting impact on all who attended.

Workshops and Panels

The heart of the conference lay in its diverse workshops and panel discussions. These sessions covered a wide array of topics, from the neurophenomenology of meditation to the application of mindfulness in education and healthcare.

Reimagining Contemplative Education was a standout pre-conference workshop, where educators and researchers discussed the future of contemplative education in the age of artificial intelligence. This session emphasized the need for a common scholarly language and collaborative research to navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Another highlight was the workshop on **Advancing Efficacious, Liberatory Methods and Approaches**. Here, experts from various fields shared strategies to make contemplative research more inclusive and equitable. The focus was on ensuring that the benefits of mindfulness and other contemplative practices are accessible to all, especially the most vulnerable in society.

Special Events: Music and Meditation

Daily meditation sessions provided practical experiences of Thai Samatha and Tibetan Buddhist meditation. The Musicafoscari Ensemble's concert at the San Gaetano Cultural Centre was a highlight, featuring compositions by Philip Glass and Terry Riley, and dancing by Marieke vanVugt, turning the event into a meditative sound journey and contemplative artistic experience.



Post-Conference Reflections

As the conference drew to a close, post-conference workshops provided an opportunity for deeper engagement with the themes discussed. Workshops like Anthropology of and from the Heart and Measurement Issues in Contemplative Science invited participants to reflect on how to incorporate emotional and sensory awareness into their research and practice. The discussions highlighted the need for robust methodologies to ensure the credibility and reproducibility of research findings. This was described as "building bridges of understanding across the chasms of uncertainty".

The session on **Integrating Contemplative Practices with Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy** was particularly cutting-edge, exploring the burgeoning field of psychedelics in mental health treatment. This workshop addressed methodological and ethical considerations, underscoring the importance of integrating contemplative practices into therapeutic settings.



A Glimpse into the Future

The ISCR 2024 Conference in Padova was a remarkable gathering that not only showcased pioneering research and philosophical insights but also fostered a vibrant community of scholars and practitioners dedicated to advancing the field of contemplative studies. The meeting was also a testament to the growing recognition of contemplative practices in interdisciplinary fields of inquiry and research, as well as their widespread application in clinical, and educational settings. By bridging ancient wisdom with modern research, the conference highlighted the potential for contemplative practices to enhance

mental health, uncover mysteries of the mind and brain, foster social justice, and promote personal and collective well-being.

As the attendees departed, they carried with them not only new knowledge and connections but also a renewed commitment to integrating contemplative practice and inspiring research into their lives and work. For the layperson, this conference signals a promising future where the insights of the mind and heart are brought together to create a more compassionate and understanding world. The rich exchanges and transformative practices experienced during the conference will undoubtedly shape the future directions of this interdisciplinary field.

Check out the [Photos link](#)



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With deep appreciation and warm regards

The ISCR Executive Committee

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