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The Sustainable Peace Mapping Initiative

Realizing Sustainable Peace

Expert survey report

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Abstract

Rationale: A lack of consensus on the conceptualization and definition of peace and the conditions associated with its sustainability has adverse implications for research, policy and practice. This study aims to initiate an interdisciplinary dialogue that can serve to synthesize the core definitions and key elements associated with sustainable peace.

Design and participants: 74 scholars from 35 disciplines with expertise in the fields of peace, conflict, and sustainability completed an online survey. From the disciplinary perspectives of their scholarly work, participants were asked to share the metaphors, definitions, and key elements that are essential to the conceptualization of sustainable peace. A qualitative thematic analysis of their responses was conducted.

Results: Analysis and interpretation of the data led to a preliminary working definition of sustainable peace and the identification of seven primary elements associated with sustainable peace: (1) justice and human rights, (2) economic and natural resources, (3) law, governance, and institutions, (4) conflict resolution, management, and violence, (5) cooperation and constructive relations, (6) shared values, and (7) visions of peace and war (see table 6). Survey responses were coded using Nvivo 10 based on their association with categories, out of a total of 415 references, *Conflict resolution, conflict management, and violence*; *Law, governance, and institutions*; and *Cooperation and constructive relations* accounted for 53.25% of the references.

Conclusions: Although there is no clear consensus among the expert respondents on the definition and key elements associated with sustainable peace, our analysis indicates that there are points of convergence. These findings serve as an initial platform to integrate disciplinary perspectives and theoretical approaches to inform future research, policy, and practice.



Introduction

A fragmented understanding of peace and the conditions associated with its sustainability has impaired the development of valid peace measures, the articulation of effective programs for peacebuilding, and the establishment of comprehensive educational agendas around peace.

The definition of ‘peace’ has been a steady subject of discussion in the 50 year history of the field of peace research (Gleditsch, Nordkvelle, & Strand, 2014; Wallensteen, 2011). Recent reviews of the literature confirm that over the last two decades the focus of peace research has shifted from positive peace as the polar opposite of violence, to war and non-state violence (Gleditsch et al., 2014; Höglund & Kovacs, 2010; Richmond, 2007). The emphasis on the study of conflict, along with the lack of agreement on the conceptualization of peace, has been accompanied by the proliferation of a wealth of disciplinary perspectives, definitions, and terms associated with peace. One recent review found that there are currently more than 40 terms distinguishing different types or aspects of peace (Coleman, 2012; Vallacher et al., 2013). These include positive vs. negative peace (Galtung, 1969), stable vs. unstable peace (Boulding, 2014; Kacowicz, 2000; Kupchan, 2010), peace and nonviolence (Sponsel, 1994), participatory peace (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000), durable peace (Druckman & Albin, 2011; Hartzell, 1999; Licklider, 1993; Walter, 2002), lasting peace (Binningsbo & Rustad, 2012; Bruch, Boulicault, Talati, & Jensen, 2012), peace systems (Fry, Bonta, & Baszarkiewicz, 2009), and sustainable peace (Brauch & Oswald Spring, 2009; Coleman, 2012; Dayton &

Kriesberg, 2009; Lederach, 1997; Peck, 1998). It is clear that the wealth of disciplinary perspectives and theoretical approaches to studying peace cannot be easily synthesized in any single model of peace (Harris & Morrison, 2012; Regan, 2014).

However, the absence of comprehensive models of peace has hindered the impact of research, practice, and educational initiatives aimed at promoting peaceful societies (Coleman, 2013). Although there have been important advances in the development of measures of peace, including the Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015), and the Peace Scale (Klein, Goertz, & Diehl, 2008), they have been insufficient to substantially impact the study of war and peace (Gleditsch et al., 2014), capture important differences within and between communities (Mac Ginty, 2013), and have been proven to be difficult and costly to use at the national and international policy levels (Holzapfel, 2014). Peace educators have indicated that the “definitional problem” of peace has implications for the establishment of clear learning objectives for students (Harris & Morrison, 2012; Reardon, 1988; Snauwaert, 2012). At the policy level, the diverse conceptualizations of peace have led to either the imposition of top-down approaches that are limited in impact (Höglund & Kovacs, 2010; Richmond, 2007), or to competing policy proposals based on diverging theories, methods, and basic objectives (Miall, 2000). The purpose of this paper is to begin an interdisciplinary dialogue on ‘peace’ and its sustainability that can serve as reference for the synthesis of its core definitions and key elements.



Methods

Design and Participants

The ‘Sustainable Peace’ online expert survey was designed to explore metaphors and definitions of sustainable peace, and to identify key elements associated with peace from different disciplinary perspectives. Through a series of open-ended questions, expert researchers were asked to (1) describe their understanding of the concept of ‘sustainable peace’ by making use of a metaphor; (2) from the perspective of their discipline, provide a definition of sustainable peace; (3) based on their scientific perspective and on the empirical evidence available to date, make a list of the 2 or 3 key elements of sustainable peace they had found to be most relevant and to specify whether each element was an enabler, barrier (or both) to sustainable peace; and (4) share any other resources or research that may shed light on the conceptualization of or the elements associated with ‘sustainable peace’.

Through a literature search of recent publications on peace, a pool of 225 researchers was identified. To capture expertise from a wide array of disciplinary perspectives, we conducted a series of EBSCO, Web of Science Social Science Citation Index, and Google Scholar searches targeting empirical research on factors associated with peace at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level in the academic disciplines of anthropology, architecture and design, cultural and ethnic studies, earth sciences, economics, education, environmental studies and forestry, gender and sexuality studies, geography, human history, international relations, journalism, media studies and communication, law, neuroscience, political science, primatology, psychology, public administration and policy, religion, social work, and sociology. Researchers were selected based on their expertise in terms of scholarly publications, and empirical contributions to the understanding of the primary factors associated with peace dynamics. A link to the ‘Sustainable Peace’ online expert survey was sent to all 225 experts of the pool.

Seventy-four experts completed the survey, with a total response rate of 33%. Of all respondents 56 were male and 18 female. Respondents resided in North America (n=46), Europe (n=17), Latin America (n=4), Oceania (n=4), and Asia (n=3). Most of respondents (n=53) held academic positions at universities, while others



conducted research at think tanks, and at national and international organizations.

Respondents had diverse expertise in peace and conflict research, and represented at least one of 35 fields in the disciplines of social & economic sciences (n=28), negotiation & conflict resolution (n=18), psychological & brain sciences (n=16), biology & earth sciences (n=10), health sciences (n=4), urban planning (n=3), and mathematical and physical sciences (n=2). For common fields of study and research themes under each discipline represented in the survey responses see Table 1.

Table 1: Self-reported areas of expertise

Disciplines	Fields	Themes (examples)
Social & Economic Sciences	Development Studies, Economics, Anthropology, History, Human rights, International Relations, Journalism, Law, Political Science	Archeology, conflict and peace during prehistory, peaceful societies, nonkilling societies, food Security, human development, peacebuilding, security, international law, ethnic conflict, power sharing, civil war, institutions, gender and conflict, diplomacy, global governance
Negotiation & Conflict Resolution	Communication, Conflict resolution, Mediation, Negotiation, Peace education, Peace linguistics, Peace studies	Empathic communication, third party intervention, cooperation, coaching, intercultural conflict, conflict communication, genocide prevention, peace building, reconciliation, memory, intractable conflict, intragroup conflict
Psychological & Brain Sciences	Education, Psychology, Social Psychology, Sociology, Neuroscience	Warfare, religion, post conflict behavior, motivation, stress, organization and social psychology, transformative learning, social justice, gender issues, group dynamics, urban violence
Biology & Earth Sciences	Biology, Ecology, Environmental conflict, Environmental Law, Environmental policy, Environmental science	Ecological drivers of conflict, natural resource management, armed conflict and the environment, climate change, extractive industries, water studies, sustainable Development, conservation
Health Sciences	Public health, Social ecology, Social epidemiology	Forced migration, child protection, mental health, impact of violence on children
Urban Planning	Public safety, Urban planning,	Ethnicity and urban policy, development strategies, housing
Mathematical & Physical Sciences	Mathematics, Physics	Mathematical models of social interaction, nonlinear analysis

Data analysis

A team of researchers used thematic analysis and qualitative evaluation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Huberman & Miles, 1983; Miles & Huberman, 1994) to analyze survey responses in a two-step



process. Researchers who evaluated the data had expertise in peace and conflict research in the fields of social psychology, anthropology, communications, environmental science, physics, mathematics, international relations, and complexity science.

As a first step, taking into account survey responses for all open-ended questions, coders reviewed all data independently to identify common themes across definitions and key elements. To complement the thematic analysis and qualitative evaluation of individual coders, the team also relied on a preliminary n-gram language structure analysis (Brugger, Zramdini, & Ingold, 1997) of questions 1, 2, and 4 of the survey: metaphors, definitions, and additional resources. In order to process the textual data, individual responses were grouped, thus producing one text per respondent. These texts were then manually prepared for the analysis by removing so-called “stop words”, words not considered to contain significance in this context (such as prepositions, common verbs, etc.). Each of these texts was then split in a number of consecutive word groups (n-grams) and analyzed taking into account: (1) number of occurrences across all responses, and (2) term frequency within individual responses. These results generated a set of texts that were used to populate an interactive data visualization application specially designed to explore the resulting network of word groups (n-grams). The visualization was designed to work as a tool that allowed the team to identify key concepts based on their prevalence and connections across all responses, as they discussed trends in each individual thematic analysis.

An integration of the initial thematic analyses and the preliminary n-gram language structure analysis resulted in the identification of a working definition and key elements of sustainable peace.

Results

The analysis and results addressed two fundamental questions from the expert survey. The first centered on the meaning and definition of sustainable peace, the second on the fundamental elements associated with sustainable peace.



Question: “From the perspective of your discipline, please elaborate on your definition of sustainable peace.”

Definitions may have two different components: connotative and denotative. Connotative definitions attempt to characterize *the essence of meaning* of a term or construct like sustainable peace, often specifying the necessary and sufficient conditions that determine being a member of a set. Denotative definitions specify a terms *extension*, such as naming objects that are a member of a set.

The responses to this definitional question provided by the 74 participants to the survey provided a mix of connotative and denotative elements. The responses were rich, eclectic, multidimensional and at multiple levels of analysis (see Appendix 1), but many of them ultimately shared some common qualities, themes and terms. Table 8 provides a listing of the most commonly reported terms used in the definitions of sustainable peace by frequency across all survey responses.

Table 8: Word frequencies in sustainable peace definitions

Term	Frequency
Peaceful	175
Violence	60
Conflict	58
Human (people)	49
Justice	26
Social	25
Process	24
Absence	24
Structural	22
Values	21
War	20
Perspective	18
System	17
Natural	13
Political	12
Security	10
Cooperation	10
Governance	10

A quick perusal of the top terms reveals a few basic qualitative distinctions: generally positive terms (peaceful, justice, cooperation), generally negative terms (violence, conflict, war), and terms describing actors, structures and processes (human, processes, social, structural, systems, values, etc.). However upon more systematic



content analyses of the 74 responses, four aspects of sustainable peace emerged that will be incorporated into our working definition: *dynamic processes, positivity and negativity, systemic context, and sustainability.*

First, many of the definitions provided by the participants focused on a core set of *dynamic processes* central to peace. These included communication and dialogue processes (and the resulting social-construction of relationships), cooperative processes, social interactions, negotiation and conflict resolution processes, justice processes, nonviolent problem solving, normative processes, educational processes, adaptation and learning processes, emergent processes and recursive, self-perpetuating dynamics. One participant offered the following definition of sustainable peace proposed by Lederach (1997),

"a dynamic social construct characterized by strong and interdependent relationships that offer individuals, groups and institutions opportunities to address conflict in ways that may lead to constructive social change and without the use of violence"(Lederach, 1997. p.20).

Others wrote,

Sustainable peace is the process of strengthening the peace dividend for all actors while moving towards conflict transformation.

Sustainable peace can only occur when the dynamics of the system that are perpetuating the conflict shift. Peace can occur through single interventions into a system, Sustainable peace can only occur where interventions shift the dynamic of a system itself.

In fact, one respondent recommended reorienting the focus of our inquiry from a state of sustainable peace to a *dynamic of sustainable peacefulness.*

From my perspective, however, sustainable peacefulness might be a better term. Let me explain why. The term peaceful, referring to the absence of hostility, better captures the absence of violence of all kinds (i.e., nonviolence), the presence of harmony, the absence of warfare, and so on than peace does. I personally prefer that



positive term, peaceful because it suggests a range of cultural values, psychological constructs, social patterns, and educational approaches that develop and maintain an aversion for settling conflicts violently. Peacefulness suggests a preference for settling issues as harmoniously as possible, rather than nonviolence, which is just too negative in my view.

Consequently, our working definition will center on *the dynamics of sustainable peacefulness*.

Second, as Table 2 indicates, all of our respondents either defined peace as the presence of processes and conditions for preventing *negative, destructive* dynamics and outcomes (violence, war, injustice, exclusion, etc.), as the presence of processes and conditions promoting more *positive, constructive* dynamics and outcomes (mutual respect, cooperation, justice, harmony, environmental sustainability, etc.), or as some combination of both. For example:

Sustainable peace could be defined as a self-perpetuating human social and cultural structure that seeks to promote harmonious relationships while minimizing conflicts and effectively resolving disputes without resorting to violence.

A sustainable peace is something more than a "negative peace," or the absence of armed conflict. If peace is to be considered sustainable, it must have elements of "positive peace" -- i.e., rule of law, a sense of inclusion on the part of minority groups, and the provision of at least a minimal level of public goods.

From my quantitative perspective we operate with a definition of sustainable peace when the number of battle deaths is under a certain threshold and has stayed below for several years, this is often 25 battle deaths for civil war... However, within political science we can also look at more positive peace which also includes more structural features of the society such as degree of freedom, equality, democracy etc.

An ideal state in which actors have the competencies, skills, and values to create maintain, and when necessary, restore harmony and equity in human relations and systems.



Therefore, our definition of sustainable peacefulness will incorporate processes for both preventing and mitigating negative, destructive dynamics and outcomes, and processes for promoting and enhancing positive, constructive dynamics and outcomes.

Third, many of the respondents also defined peace in terms of the “enabling context” for peace, referring to “systems of peace” or “cultures of peace” or listing a series of micro-level, mid-level and macro-level factors that constituted the context for peacefulness. For instance,

Sustainable peace can be understood as a complex system based on positive values and social interactions that generate the conditions for violence not to be collectively accepted.

Sustainable peace is when communication is effective so that all involved parties develop a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of each other and themselves, so that all parties' interests are addressed and that the interdependence motivates the parties to continue working together. *The context, systems and structures support this sustainable attitude creating an environment that enables the parties to continue developing their relationships and taking actions for continued support of their shared and individual goals.*

Of course, these systems of peace affect and are affected by the basic social interaction processes of the inhabitants of the system.

Peace is the complex of behavioral processes and systems through which individuals, families, groups, communities and nations negate direct and structural violence, keep aggression in check or restore tolerance in its aftermath, and engage in mutually beneficial and harmonious interactions... Flourishing peace processes within and across domains can result in the emergence of peace systems, institutions or arrangements that pattern their members' interactions toward peace.

Therefore, our definition will accommodate both core interactive processes and the broader systemic context.



Finally, some of the respondents explicitly addressed the idea of *sustainability* (lasting or durable nature) of peace. They offered,

Peace that is sufficiently robust to withstand the shocks of an ever-changing global world

(L)et me suggest from an engineering viewpoint that we apply the concept of sensitivity analysis, in which one looks at the magnitude of effect caused by a small perturbation of a variable. Sustainable peace would then be building an international society in which small perturbations don't lead to big ones. Like not killing your spouse when you argue. There will always be aggressive tendencies and fights. It is inherent in most primate species. But they don't kill each other in large numbers. They threaten and posture and beat chests and bare fangs, but it stops there. Sustainable peace, from the viewpoint of sensitivity analysis, is not letting differences of opinion or even acts of violence escalate into international wars. Not letting my name calling of your religious icon lead to your tribe cutting the heads off my tribe.

Creating and sustaining self-normative communities which from within are able to create and let emerge predispositions, discourse and strategies that encourage dialogue and collaboration to resolve and transform conflict in a non-violent way.

What we've come up with is a definition that has its primary focus fostering a "community dynamic memory" that promotes learning and adaptation. It is at the core of a recursive cycle of community engagement, visioning, planning, implementation, assessment, feedback and re-visioning. Sustainable Peace can exist only as part of a community or communities that possess the capacity (memory and recursive learning) to navigate disturbance and change in order to promote either persistence (short term) or planned transformation.

Taking into account the four basic components (*dynamic processes, positivity and negativity, systemic context, and sustainability*) that emerged from our analysis of the varied definitions offered by the participants, we propose the following working definition of sustainable peacefulness as *a set of dynamics that result in a high probability of robust patterns of constructive interactions between*



stakeholders and communities and a low probability of destructive interactions. Such dynamics establish and are established by a robust, enabling, and self-perpetuating context for peacefulness.

Ultimately, this definition will need to be operationalized at a level that allows for the measurement of these dynamic interactions.

Question: “Based on your scientific perspective and on the empirical evidence available to date, please make a list of the 2 or 3 key elements of sustainable peace you have found to be most relevant”

A first part of the analysis of the key elements involved individual thematic analysis and the preliminary n-gram language structure analysis of metaphors, definitions, and elements. Coders initially identified six emergent themes across survey responses: (1) wellbeing; (2) quality of relations, cooperation, and interdependence; (3) conflict management and resolution; (4) access to resources, equality, and human security; (5) institutional capacity, and governance, and (6) violence, nonviolence, and security (table 3).

Table 3: Emergent themes

Thematic categories	Participant responses (examples)
1. Wellbeing	<i>Confidence in government, life satisfaction, psychological wellbeing, happiness, personal growth, harmony, needs met, capacity to pursue opportunities, dignity</i>
2. Quality of relations, cooperation, and interdependence	<i>Shared values of inclusion, cooperation, trust, concern for others, recognition and respect for diversity, taboos against violence, commitment of parties to sustainable peace, harmonious relationships, constructive social interactions</i>
3. Conflict management and resolution	<i>Conflict resolution competencies and skills, effective justice processes, constructive communication, access to justice, conflict resolution institutions, mediation, reconciliation mechanisms</i>
4. Access to resources, equality, and human security	<i>Freedom of speech, access to information, economic opportunities, access to healthcare, access to education, social protection, access to arts, freedom of religion, social and income inequalities, environmental protection, public goods provision</i>
5. Institutional capacity, and governance, and	<i>Rule of law, inclusive, effective and accountable political institutions corruption, transparent decision making, accountability, government effectiveness, institutional stability, international governance structure</i>
6. Violence, nonviolence, and security	<i>Conflicts, deaths, avoiding aggression and violence, criminality in society, political instability, coercion, homicides, violent crime, violent demonstrations, perceptions of security</i>



Building off our working definition of sustainable peace, these six themes begin to shape our understanding of the core dynamics of sustainable peace.

A second part of the analysis focused only on the responses to question 3 of the expert survey, where participants were asked to list the 2 or 3 key elements of sustainable peace that they had found to be most relevant based on their scientific perspective and on the empirical evidence available to date, and to specify whether each element was an enabler, barrier, or both an enabler and barrier to sustainable peace. A total of 269 elements were mentioned, 166 enablers, 45 barriers, and 58 that were identified as both barriers and enablers. Based on word frequencies, we found that the top key words found across categories were ‘justice’, ‘conflict’, ‘human’, ‘inequality’, ‘resources’, and ‘legitimacy’ (see table 4 and figure 1)

Table 4: Word frequencies across factors based on categories- Top key words

All factors		Enablers		Barriers		Both (barrier and enabler)	
Word	Count	Word	Count	Word	Count	Word	Count
justice	12	human	11	inequality	4	resources	4
conflict	11	justice	10	resources	4	legitimacy	3
human	11	social	9	Natural	3	political	3
resources	11	conflict	8	War	3		
social	10	economic	6				
economic	9	equality	6				
natural	9	institutions	6				
law	7	law	6				
equality	6	rights	6				
equitable	6	equitable	5				
governance	6	mindful	5				

Below are four word cloud visualizations of all the terms used in the participants' discussions regarding key elements associated with sustainable peace, with all items, enablers, barriers and those identified as both is separate word clouds.



Figure 1: Word clouds- Sustainable peace elements by type

Key elements of Sustainable peace



All items (269)



Enablers (166)



Barriers (45)



Both (58)

To complement the qualitative thematic analysis, the n-gram language structure analysis and visualization tool provided insights in terms of frequencies and pervasiveness of factors and themes within and across survey responses. In line with the preliminary thematic categories, the n-gram language structure analysis showed that the basic differentiation between positive peace, absence of conflict, conflict resolution and transformation, and key aspects related to resources, development, and human rights were pervasive across individual responses. Table 5 below, contains a sample of the highest ranked combinations of words (n-grams) in terms of the number of survey responses that referenced them.



Through a series of iterative discussions, and Nvivo 10 and N-gram visualization tool queries, the team finally identified seven primary elements of sustainable peace: (1) justice and human rights, (2) economic and natural resources, (3) law, governance, and institutions, (4) conflict resolution, management, and violence, (5) cooperation and constructive relations, (6) shared values, and (7) visions of peace and war (see table 6). Survey responses were coded using Nvivo 10 based on their association with categories, out of a total of 415 references, *Conflict resolution, conflict management, and violence*; *Law, governance, and institutions*; and *Cooperation and constructive relations* accounted for 53.25% of the references (table 7).

Table 6: Elements of sustainable peace (key word count)

Groups and total frequencies (total key word count)	Key word count
Justice and Human Rights 37	Justice (12), human (12), equality (7), equitable (6)
Economic and natural resources 34	resources (15), natural (10), economic (9)
Law, governance, and institutions 27	Law (7), governance (7), rights (6), institutions (7)
Conflict resolution, management, and violence 18	Conflict (12), violence (6)
Cooperation and constructive relations 14	Sharing (7), cooperation (7)
Shared values 12	Common (4), empathy (2), differences (3), values (3)
Visions of peace and war 11	Community (4), war (3), belief (2), harmony (2)



Table 7: References based on categories and type

	Cooperation and constructive relations	Law, governance, and institutions	Conflict resolution, management, and violence	Economic and natural resources	Shared values	Justice and Human Rights	Visions of peace and war
barrier	9	9	15	13	11	7	11
both	12	19	16	12	7	2	5
enabler	53	46	42	28	33	39	26
Total (per category)	74 (17.83%)	74 (17.83%)	73 (17.59%)	53 (12.77%)	51(12.28%)	48 (11.57%)	42 (10.12%)

While the broad themes identified in the first stage of the individual thematic analysis and the preliminary n-gram language structure analysis outlined a variety of conditions and factors conducive to sustainable peace, a closer look at the frequencies and the language structure of the responses lead to the refinement of an agreed-upon set of primary elements of sustainable peace. The seven primary elements identified capture essential components of our working definition of sustainable peace, namely *dynamics associated with constructive interactions* (cooperation, shared values, and visions of peace), and the amelioration of *destructive interactions* (justice, law, conflict resolution, and economic resources). These elements provide a potential framework for the operationalization and measurement of key dynamic interactions inherent to sustainable peace.

Conclusion

The ‘Sustainable Peace’ online expert survey was designed to identify key meanings and elements associated with sustainable peacefulness from different disciplinary perspectives. The survey results provided some convergence among the group of expert respondents on the definition of sustainable peace, as well as significant agreement in terms of primary elements found to be associated with peaceful sustainability. In addition, although there was relative consensus on the complex nature of peaceful sustainability and on the need to focus on ‘positive’ aspects of peace, many participants pointed to the lack of theoretical models or integrated approaches to operationalize and measure sustainable peace as a complex and dynamic phenomenon.



Although our survey sample was small (N=74), and the diversity of regional representation in respondents limited, the variety of areas of expertise as well as the richness in terms of elements associated with peaceful sustainability captured by the survey are substantial. Our analysis indicates that there are points of convergence in the elements associated with peaceful sustainability that could serve as a platform to integrate disciplinary perspectives and theoretical approaches to inform research, policy, and practice.

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