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Introduction: Building Bridges

Peace Infrastructure

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Zusammenfassung

Der Band versteht die Brücke als zentrale Metapher für Friedensarbeit in einer zunehmend fragmentierten und multipolaren Welt. Im Mittelpunkt stehen verschiedene Formen des Verbindens, nämlich interdisziplinär als Brücke zwischen wissenschaftlichen Disziplinen, intergenerationell als Brücke zwischen Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft, interkulturell als Brücke zwischen Kulturen, intergouvernemental als Grundlage für Diplomatie und internationale Kooperation sowie interreligiös als Raum für Verständigung und gemeinsame ethische Prinzipien. Die Beiträge thematisieren positiven Frieden, Kulturdiplomatie, koloniale Kontinuitäten, religiösen Pluralismus, lokale Friedensansätze, Holocaust-Erinnerung, praktische Friedensarbeit und Europas Rolle als Friedensprojekt. Gemeinsam zeigen sie: Nachhaltiger Frieden entsteht dort, wo Dialog, gegenseitige Anerkennung und Kooperation über Grenzen hinweg ermöglicht werden.

Schlagwörter: Friedensforschung, Interkultureller Dialog, Zeitbrücke, Peacebuilding

Abstract

This volume explores the idea of the bridge as a central metaphor for peacebuilding in a fragmented and increasingly multipolar world. It brings together different forms of connection: interdisciplinary, bridging academic disciplines; intergenerational, connecting memory, historical responsibility, and the future; intercultural, fostering dialogue across cultural divides; intergovernmental, strengthening diplomacy and cooperation between states; and interreligious, creating space for mutual understanding and shared ethical principles. The contributions examine positive peace, cultural diplomacy, colonial legacies, religious pluralism, local and Indigenous approaches to peace, Holocaust remembrance, practical peacebuilding, and Europe's role as a peace project. Together, they argue that sustainable peace requires dialogue, mutual recognition, historical awareness, cooperation, and the courage to build bridges across differences.

Keywords: Peace Research, Intercultural Dialogue, Time Bridge, Peacebuilding

Building Bridges

A bridge is more than a structure connecting two points. It is an invitation to cross a distance—to encounter what lies on the other side, to overcome separation, and to create the conditions for dialogue. Bridges can connect places, but they can also connect people, experiences, generations, cultures, religions, political communities, and ways of thinking. In a world increasingly characterized by fragmentation, geopolitical rivalry, social polarization, and competing narratives, the idea of the bridge acquires a particular significance. Peace requires not only the absence of walls and divisions, but the deliberate construction of connections across them.

This volume is therefore guided by one central idea: peace is built through bridges.

Interdisciplinarity: a bridge between disciplines

Contemporary conflicts and peace processes cannot be adequately understood through a single academic perspective (Mühlbauer/Lakitsch, 2024; Mühlbauer/Moegling, 2026). Questions of peace and security intersect with political science, international relations, sociology, history, law, religious studies, cultural studies, and peace research (Moegling/Mühlbauer, 2025). The contributions gathered here reflect this diversity and demonstrate how different intellectual approaches can complement one another. Interdisciplinarity becomes not simply an academic principle, but a methodological bridge through which complex realities can be understood in their interconnectedness.

Intergenerational or Zeitbrücke: a bridge across time

Peace is always connected to memory, historical responsibility, and the experiences passed from one generation to another. The past does not disappear; it continues to shape identities, political narratives, and contemporary conflicts (Stoev, 2005). At the same time, each generation inherits the responsibility to transform these experiences into a more peaceful future. Remembering, learning, and transmitting knowledge are therefore essential elements of peacebuilding. A bridge across time connects historical experience with contemporary responsibility and future possibilities.

Stefan Stoev contributes a deeply intergenerational perspective through his return to Washington twenty years after completing his commemorative service at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accompanied by his sons, the journey becomes an encounter between past and present and an opportunity to reflect on

Holocaust remembrance, historical responsibility, human rights, and contemporary challenges. Zeitbrücke—the bridge of time—thus becomes a metaphor for connecting generations and transforming remembrance into responsibility for the future.

Intergovernmental – a bridge between political communities

In an increasingly multipolar international system, cooperation between states remains indispensable. Diplomacy, international law, multilateral institutions, arms control, common security arrangements, and regional integration all depend on the ability of governments to communicate and cooperate despite divergent interests. Intergovernmental bridges are particularly important at a time when geopolitical competition risks replacing dialogue with confrontation.

Heinz Gärtner examines in this book the concept of positive peace, moving beyond the mere absence of war towards questions of justice, equality, freedom, cooperation, and the overcoming of structural violence. His discussion of the security dilemma demonstrates how attempts to increase security through military means can paradoxically produce insecurity and escalation. Drawing on examples such as the CSCE and the Helsinki Final Act, he highlights the potential of diplomacy, neutrality, disarmament, and cooperative security as foundations for common security.

Hannes Swoboda examines in his book chapter Europe as a peace project in an increasingly fragmented and multipolar world. His contribution reflects on the challenges posed by geopolitical rivalry, Russian aggression, transatlantic uncertainty, economic dependencies, and renewed militarisation. He argues for a European peace strategy that combines credible defence with diplomacy, arms control, international law, conflict prevention, and greater economic and technological sovereignty. His concept of "value-based realism" calls for a Europe capable of defending itself without reproducing the power politics of great powers, instead acting through multilateral cooperation, flexible coalitions, and dialogue with the Global South.

Interreligious and Cross-Cultural Dialogue – a bridge between different cultural communities

Religion has historically been both a source of division and a powerful resource for reconciliation. Understanding religious traditions in their historical and political contexts can help challenge narratives that portray conflict as the inevitable consequence of religious difference. Dialogue between religious traditions can

instead reveal shared ethical principles, including restraint, human dignity, justice, and the rejection of violence. The contributions to this volume approach these different bridges from diverse perspectives.

Josef Mühlbauer focuses on cross-cultural dialogue and cultural diplomacy as infrastructures of peace. His contribution demonstrates how conflicts are shaped not only by material interests but also by identities, historical narratives, perceptions, and enemy images. Cultural diplomacy, understood as reciprocal engagement rather than strategic influence alone, can create spaces for mutual recognition, trust, and sustained communication across political and cultural divides.

Vera Al Mawla and Mahdi Yahya provide a practical perspective from a decade of peacebuilding work by Peace of Art Lebanon in North Bekaa. Their contribution demonstrates how cross-cultural dialogue can be embedded in sustained organizational practices through youth civic education, civil-society coordination, and heritage documentation. Their four-stage framework—context mapping, participatory co-design, equal-status contact, and adaptive monitoring—shows how bridges between confessional, generational, and geographic communities can be built through repeated and intentional encounters.

Mudasser Awan, Gazi Md Nurul Islam, and Shafia Jamil turn to the historical relationship between religious pluralism, colonialism, and conflict. Their chapter challenges the assumption that contemporary religious conflicts are simply expressions of ancient hostilities. Through cases including Nigeria, Sudan, British India, and Sri Lanka, they show how colonial administrative and political practices constructed and reinforced religious divisions, offering important lessons for historically informed and inclusive peacebuilding.

In a related contribution, Mudasser Awan, Saba Munawar, Iffat Khalid, and Shafia Jamil ask the fundamental questions: “Whose peace?” and “Whose culture?” Their analysis challenges the universalization of Western-liberal approaches to peace, justice, and reconciliation and emphasizes local ownership and Indigenous justice mechanisms. The chapter demonstrates that sustainable peace requires bridges between different conceptions of justice and legitimacy rather than the imposition of a single model.

Shafia Jamil, Gazi Md Nurul Islam, Hanna E. Kalbi, and Mudasser Awan explore an explicitly interreligious bridge, examining land covenants and the ethics of armed conflict in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Their comparative analysis argues that sacred texts are frequently instrumentalized to legitimize political violence, while also revealing shared ethical resources for restraint and peacebuilding. The chapter

reminds us that interpretation is not merely a theological exercise but can have profound political and human consequences.

Peace Begins Where Bridges Are Built

Taken together, these contributions demonstrate that bridges are neither abstract metaphors nor simple solutions. They are political, social, cultural, intellectual, and ethical practices. They require openness, reciprocity, patience, and the willingness to encounter difference without immediately seeking to overcome it.

At a time when the language of division often appears stronger than the language of cooperation, building bridges becomes an act of political and intellectual responsibility. The bridges explored in this volume—between disciplines, generations, cultures, governments, and religions—are ultimately connected by a common aspiration: to create spaces in which difference does not inevitably become conflict.

Peace begins where bridges are built!

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