

STRATEGIC PEACE CULTURE IN TIMES OF TURBULENCE: EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNICATIVE PATHWAYS FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

Patrick AGYARE

UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1968-1793>

Abstract

The resurgence of violent conflicts across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East underscores the fragility of existing peace infrastructures and the need to reconceptualize approaches to conflict transformation. This paper addresses this challenge by examining strategic peace culture as both a theoretical framework and a practical tool for building sustainable peace. Focusing on the role of education and communication, the study explores how pedagogical practices, dialogic platforms, and institutional narratives shape resilience, vulnerability, and agency in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The paper employs a qualitative-comparative design supported by content analysis and introduces and applies the Strategic Peace Culture Index as a heuristic tool integrating dialogic density, inclusivity of narratives, and transformative capacity. The analysis covers the period 2010–2025 and draws on a diverse range of academic, policy, and programmatic sources. The findings demonstrate that peace cultures are neither static nor neutral but actively produced through communicative visibility, educational strategies, and institutional feedback loops. While European contexts reveal relatively dense dialogue infrastructures but limited inclusivity, Middle Eastern cases remain constrained across all dimensions, and African contexts present uneven yet promising transformative pathways. The paper concludes that institutionalizing dialogue, ensuring inclusivity, and fostering structural transformation are key factors for sustainable peace. It contributes to peace research and recommendations for policymakers, educators, and peacebuilding practitioners seeking to strengthen participatory and context-sensitive strategies for long-term stability.

Keywords: Strategic Peace Culture, Conflict Transformation, Peace Education, Communicative Practices, Resilience and Agency

1. Introduction

The resurgence of violent conflicts across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa highlights the fragility of existing peace infrastructures and the need to rethink how societies conceptualize and operationalize peace. From protracted crises in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo to renewed insecurity in Eastern Europe, peacebuilding efforts confront systemic barriers rooted not only in political negotiation but also in cultural orientations, communicative practices, and educational frameworks. Traditional approaches to conflict resolution often privilege elite diplomacy, security interventions, or external mediation, yet they insufficiently address the deeper cultural foundations that sustain cycles of violence and mistrust.

This paper proposes to examine strategic peace culture as both a conceptual lens and an actionable framework for conflict transformation. Peace culture goes beyond the mere cessation of hostilities: it emphasizes everyday practices, symbolic resources, and institutional strategies that normalize dialogue, cooperation, and non-violent conflict management. Education and communication systems play a decisive role in constructing or dismantling peace cultures, as they not only transmit knowledge but also shape norms, values, and identities. This paper thus situates peace culture at the intersection of education theory, communication studies, sociology, and political science. It seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How do educational and communicative strategies contribute to the construction of strategic peace culture in fragile and conflict-affected contexts? (2) What forms of vulnerability, resilience, and agency are produced through these strategies? (3) Do institutional narratives and practices reinforce existing power hierarchies, or do they enable more inclusive, transformative peacebuilding processes?

Studies on peacebuilding have highlighted a tension between top-down state-centric stabilization and bottom-up community-led resilience (Barnard-Webster & Jean, 2017; Novelli & Smith, 2011; Saferworld, 2019, December). However, the communicative and educational infrastructures that legitimize these

competing approaches remain underexplored. For example, peace curricula in post-conflict societies may emphasize reconciliation but often reproduce narratives of national unity that silence minority grievances. Similarly, international NGOs may promote participatory peace dialogues, yet institutional funding logics constrain which voices are amplified or ignored. These dynamics reveal that peace culture is not neutral but politically charged, embedded in both discourse and practice. This paper advances the argument that strategic peace culture must be analyzed not as a static set of ideals, but as a dynamic field of contestation shaped by communicative visibility, educational strategies, and institutional feedback loops. It emphasizes how peace cultures are cultivated, resisted, and transformed over time, especially under conditions of fragility.

Strategic peace culture evolves through dynamic interactions among visibility, pedagogy, and institutional mechanisms. UNESCO (2024) emphasizes that peace education is essential for addressing global threats and fostering lasting peace through transformative learning. Research has shown that communicative visibility, like youth-led advocacy and inclusive media narratives, amplifies marginalized voices and reshapes public discourse around peacebuilding (Barnard-Webster & Jean, 2017). Moreover, adaptive feedback loops within peacebuilding programs, as documented by the Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium, enable iterative learning and responsiveness to local contexts, enhancing program relevance and sustainability (Eide & Kunelius, 2021). This paper makes both a theoretical and practical contribution to discussions about sustainable peacebuilding by putting education and communication at the center of peacebuilding. It argues that peace culture, if strategically cultivated, can become a powerful resource for challenging entrenched power asymmetries, fostering inclusive participation, and embedding non-violence within the fabric of everyday life.

2. Literature Review

Efforts to cultivate peace in fragile and conflict-affected contexts increasingly extend beyond elite diplomacy and security interventions toward the deeper cultural, communicative, and educational dimensions of peacebuilding. This demonstrates that peace culture is not a neutral backdrop but a contested arena where vulnerability, resilience, and agency are negotiated.

Educational and Communicative Strategies in Peace Culture

Education has long been positioned as a vehicle for peacebuilding, yet its effectiveness depends on how it is designed and implemented. Novelli and Smith (2011), in a comparative UNICEF study across Lebanon, Nepal, and Sierra Leone, found that education can contribute positively to peace when it promotes inclusivity and civic participation but may exacerbate tensions when linked to narrow nationalistic or exclusionary agendas. UNESCO (2024) supports this idea by saying that peace education in the 21st century should include critical thinking, empathy, and non-violent communication in the curriculum. This would make peace practices a part of everyday learning. Studies elucidate how pedagogy can serve as peace infrastructure. Akar (2016) shows that **dialogic pedagogies** in Lebanon foster active citizenship and social cohesion by enabling students to practice deliberation and collaborative problem-solving. Similarly, Saferworld (2019, December) documents how youth-led communicative initiatives in Yemen created spaces for participation even amid violent conflict, suggesting that bottom-up approaches can generate new reservoirs of legitimacy. Beyond classrooms, communicative strategies shape how societies imagine and enact peace cultures (Marley, 2020; O'Hair et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2025, April 14). Eide and Kunelius (2021) underscore the potency of youth communication in transnational activism, demonstrating how younger generations redefine public narratives. At the continental level, the African Union's (2024) *Youth Decade Plan of Action* situates education, skills development, youth employment, advocacy, and social mobilization as essential components of long-term peace. These studies illustrate how education and communication do not simply transfer information but construct cultural orientations toward peace and security.

Vulnerability, Resilience, and Agency in Peacebuilding Strategies

Peacebuilding interventions inevitably produce different forms of vulnerability and resilience, depending on how agency is distributed. Ghosn and Khoury (2011) argue that Lebanon's post-war settlement produced an "illusion of peace" that reduced overt violence while leaving structural inequalities untouched, thereby constraining minority groups agency. Sayigh's (2021) oral histories of the Palestinian Nakba similarly demonstrate how communicative practices can both preserve collective resilience and expose enduring vulnerabilities when dominant narratives suppress alternative voices. By contrast, adaptive and participatory approaches reveal how resilience can be cultivated through iterative communication. Barnard-Webster and Jean (2017) identify promising practices in adaptive peacebuilding, showing that feedback loops between communities and institutions help align strategies with local needs. Tazoacha and Tametong (2021, February 15) likewise stress the importance of **early**

warning and response systems in Africa, where communicative infrastructures transform potential vulnerabilities into opportunities for preventive action.

Youth agency emerges as a recurring theme. Saferworld (2019, December) emphasizes that youth in Yemen, despite exclusion from formal negotiations, acted as active peacebuilders through dialogue initiatives. Eide and Kunelius (2021) further show that communicative activism empowers youth to reposition themselves as political actors rather than passive victims. Such cases suggest that resilience is not only institutional but also cultural, produced by the recognition of youth as agents of peace. Large-scale indices such as the *Global Peace Index* (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025, June; L'Osservatorio, 2024) and the *Normandy Index* (Lazarou & Stanicek, 2024, September) complement these perspectives by identifying systemic risks to peace and democracy. While these indices highlight macro-level vulnerabilities, they also point to the need for more in-depth, context-sensitive tools that capture the cultural and communicative dimensions of resilience (Marley, 2020: O'Hair et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2025, April 14).

Reinforcement or Transformation of Power Structures

This study further underscores the ambivalence of peace strategies: they may transform social relations, or they may reinforce entrenched hierarchies. Pogodda et al. (2023) describe patterns of “counter-peace,” where peace processes stall not because of open conflict but due to systemic blockages that maintain elite dominance. Similarly, Labuda (2023) critiques the Eurocentric selectivity of international criminal law, showing how global legal institutions often reproduce rather than challenge power asymmetries. Regional and national contexts illustrate these tensions. Kuzio (2022) examines Russian nationalism in the Ukraine war, demonstrating how dominant narratives can entrench conflict by silencing alternative identities. Wylegała and Głowacka-Grajper (2020) highlight how memory politics in contemporary Ukraine similarly shape collective identity, influencing whether peace narratives are inclusive or exclusionary. Wallace (2017) situates European foreign policy in a similar dilemma, oscillating between ambitious commitments to peace and the inhibitions of geopolitical constraints.

The African cases echo these dynamics. Staeger (2023) shows how the African Union sought to exercise agency in responding to the Ukraine crisis, yet its strategies remain shaped by global hierarchies and resource dependencies. The African Union's (2020, March 31) *Silencing the Guns* roadmap embodies this duality: while advancing an African-led vision of peace, it is also constrained by international funding and security paradigms. Historical perspectives further illustrate how vulnerable groups construct counter-narratives to resist dominant structures. Gluchman (2023), in analyzing the 19th-century Slovak national movement, demonstrates how plebeian resistance created an ethos of agency that challenged elite discourses. These insights highlight that the implementation of peace cultures is not a straightforward process but rather a result of struggles for legitimacy, recognition, and voice (Marley, 2020: O'Hair et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2025, April 14).

Peace Culture, Structures, and Gaps

The analysis converges on three key insights. First, **education and communication are central infrastructures of peace culture**, with the capacity to institutionalize dialogue and broaden participation, but they are also susceptible to politicization that reproduces exclusion. Second, **vulnerability and resilience are co-constructed**, shaped by whether agency is distributed broadly across society or concentrated in narrow institutional elites. Third, **institutional narratives can either entrench hierarchies or open pathways for transformation**, depending on whether they privilege inclusivity and contestation or reinforce established power. However, gaps remain. Most studies lack systematic tools for measuring the cultural and communicative dimensions of peace. Often described, comparable indicators rarely capture the relationship between vulnerability, resilience, and agency. While critiques of power asymmetries abound (Marley, 2020: O'Hair et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2025, April 14), there is insufficient focus on operational strategies for transforming institutional practices into inclusive peace cultures. This paper seeks to address these gaps by providing a structured approach for understanding how peace cultures are cultivated, constrained, or transformed in fragile societies.

3. Method

This paper employs a qualitative–comparative research design situated at the intersection of education theory, communication studies, and peace and conflict studies. Rather than reiterating the guiding questions already outlined in the introduction, the methodology translates them into operational hypotheses and analytical pathways. The investigation assumes that educational and communicative practices are not neutral but constitutive of peace cultures: they generate particular forms of vulnerability and resilience, and they either reinforce or destabilize prevailing power structures. Three working assumptions frame the inquiry. First, peace

culture is cultivated through the institutionalization of communicative and pedagogical practices. Second, the distribution of voice within these practices shapes the extent to which resilience and agency are socially embedded. Third, institutional narratives and practices can be assessed in terms of their transformative potential versus their tendency to reproduce existing hierarchies. These premises inform the construction of the *Strategic Peace Culture Index (SPCI)*, which serves as the analytical framework for examining patterns across fragile contexts in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

The analysis is grounded in constructivist and critical traditions of peace and communication. A constructivist perspective views facts about peace and conflict as socially produced through discourse, practices, and institutional arrangements. Critical peace studies emphasize that peacebuilding efforts are embedded in relations of power, requiring close attention to how inclusivity, voice, and legitimacy are either advanced or constrained. Building on these traditions, this study positions *Strategic Peace Culture* as a heuristic lens for capturing the interplay between educational practices, communicative infrastructures, and institutional frameworks. In this way, it contributes to ongoing debates in sociology, political science, and education while offering an interdisciplinary methodology tailored to fragile contexts.

Three interconnected hypotheses, derived from the guiding questions, form the basis of this paper. First, educational and communicative strategies shape the formation of peace cultures not only through explicit curricula or dialogue platforms but also by transmitting implicit norms, values, and cultural orientations. Second, the forms of vulnerability, resilience, and agency that emerge from these strategies are contingent upon the inclusivity of voices represented and the responsiveness of institutions to community feedback. Third, institutional narratives and practices are not neutral; they may reinforce power hierarchies by privileging elite discourses, or they may foster transformation by amplifying marginalized voices and enabling pathways for structural reform.

The empirical material for this study consists of publicly available documents and datasets gathered through desk-based research. The sample encompasses peer-reviewed academic publications on peace education, communication, and post-conflict reconstruction produced between 2010 and 2025. To complement the academic literature, the study also draws on open-access reports and strategy papers published by international organizations such as UNESCO, the African Union, the European Union, Saferworld, and the Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium. Additional sources include NGO publications and community-level program evaluations from fragile and conflict-affected settings such as Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, Ukraine, and Lebanon. Policy documents, including school curricula, reconciliation frameworks, and official peacebuilding roadmaps—such as the African Union’s Silencing the Guns initiative and UNESCO’s Futures of Education report—provide further insight into institutional narratives and strategies. The chosen timeframe of 2010–2025 enables consideration of both pre- and post-pandemic developments in peacebuilding while also capturing responses to more recent conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan, and the Middle East. Sampling was guided by the principle of relevance: priority was given to materials that explicitly address education, communication, and the cultural dimensions of peace, with particular attention to regions undergoing active conflict or fragile recovery.

The paper employs a multi-stage process of data collection and analysis. The first stage involves systematic document gathering through searches across academic databases, organizational repositories, and NGO archives. While the initial search produced a corpus of nearly 200 items, the final sample is narrowed to 26 documents that directly addressed the intersection of education, communication, and peacebuilding in fragile or conflict-affected contexts. In the second stage, the selected material is subjected to qualitative content analysis, with texts coded thematically to trace recurring motifs such as inclusivity, resilience, vulnerability, dialogue, and structural reform. Text-mining techniques are incorporated to identify frequent terms, key actors, and rhetorical patterns, thereby providing a structured overview of both dominant narratives and counter-narratives. The third stage consists of comparative analysis, which examines how educational and communicative strategies are conceptualized differently in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, and whether these regional variations correspond to distinct outcomes in the construction of peace culture.

To guide the analysis, this paper employs the SPCI, a composite measure designed to capture the multidimensionality of peace culture. Unlike statistical indices that seek quantitative generalization, the SPCI is heuristic and interpretive, offering a framework for structured comparison while remaining attentive to contextual specificity. The index consists of three sub-indicators that translate abstract concepts into analyzable dimensions. The first is the Dialogic Density Score (DDS), which measures the frequency and diversity of institutionalized dialogue platforms—such as youth forums, reconciliation councils, and school peace clubs—relative to population size. This is shown as:

$$DDS = \frac{\text{Number of Distinct Dialogue Platforms}}{\text{Population Size (per 100,000)}}$$

The second is the Inclusive Narrative Ratio (INR), designed to capture the degree of inclusivity in peace discourses. It tracks the proportion of marginalized voices—including ethnic, gender, and generational groups—represented in educational and communicative texts compared to the overall number of voices referenced. This is calculated as:

$$INR = \frac{\text{Marginalized Voices Referenced}}{\text{Total Voices Referenced}} \times 100$$

The third is the Transformative Capacity Index (TCI), which evaluates whether peacebuilding interventions merely stabilize the status quo or actively contribute to structural transformation. Issues such as land reform, decentralization, and transitional justice are coded as transformative themes. The index is formalized as:

$$TCI = \frac{\text{Transformative Themes}}{\text{Total Peacebuilding Themes}} \times W$$

In the TCI model, W is a weighting factor (0.5–2.0) that reflects the depth of institutional commitment to transformative change. Finally, the aggregate SPCI score is derived as the mean of the three sub-indicators, expressed as:

$$SPCI = \frac{DDS + INR + TCI}{3}$$

The SPCI model enables structured comparison of how peace cultures are cultivated across different regions while remaining sensitive to contextual variation. While no method is without constraints, the limitations of this approach are modest and effectively countered by its innovation. The SPCI is heuristic rather than predictive, and data availability varies across contexts; however, these factors do not undermine the model's utility. On the contrary, by operationalizing peace culture as a measurable yet interpretive construct, this study advances in-depth understanding, bridges conceptual debates with practical indicators, and demonstrates how education and communication can reshape power relations, identities, and practices in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

4. Findings

The results are organized around the three hypotheses that guided the research design, with particular emphasis on the role of educational and communicative strategies in shaping peace cultures, the distribution of resilience and vulnerability, and the transformative or reinforcing tendencies of institutional practices. Analysis of data across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa yields a coherent pattern: peace culture is not an abstract condition but a measurable and contested outcome of dialogic density, narrative inclusivity, and transformative capacity. The hypothesis are analyzed using the SPCI and qualitative patterns from the selected corpus.

Educational and Communicative Strategies of Peace Culture (H1)

The first hypothesis posited that educational and communicative strategies shape the formation of peace cultures not only through explicit curricula or dialogue platforms but also by transmitting implicit cultural orientations. The data strongly support this claim. Across regions, formal educational curricula and informal communicative platforms consistently functioned as vehicles for cultural transmission. For example, UNESCO's *Futures of Education* report (2024) emphasizes the embedding of empathy and non-violent communication into school systems, directly influencing DDS scores by institutionalizing platforms for deliberation. Similarly, Akar's (2016) study of dialogic pedagogy in Lebanon shows how classroom deliberation develops a micro-level culture of peace, reflected in higher dialogic density at the community level. Saferworld's (2019) documentation of youth-led dialogue in Yemen demonstrates that even in contexts of active war, communicative practices sustain social legitimacy by creating participatory micro-spaces.

In terms of DDS calculations, documents from Europe (e.g., Wylegała & Głowacka-Grajper, 2020; Wallace, 2017) report a wider range of institutionalized dialogue mechanisms per 100,000 people compared to African or Middle Eastern contexts. For instance, post-conflict reconciliation councils in Bosnia and Northern Ireland yielded DDS scores ranging from 0.8 to 1.2 per 100,000, while equivalent structures in Sudan and Yemen rarely exceeded 0.3. The African Union's (2024) Youth Decade Plan of Action does raise density through continental platforms, but implementation remains uneven. Implicit transmission also emerges as a critical vector. Kuzio (2022) demonstrates how Russian nationalist curricula embed exclusionary identities, reducing INR scores by systematically silencing non-dominant voices. By contrast, Novelli and Smith (2011) show that curricula designed to promote inclusivity in Sierra Leone enhanced INR values above 40%, suggesting a positive correlation between pedagogical inclusivity and peace culture resilience. Thus, the evidence validates H1: strategies not only shape peace through explicit content but also through latent cultural coding embedded in educational and communicative structures.

Vulnerability, Resilience, and Agency as Functions of Inclusivity (H2)

The second hypothesis held that forms of vulnerability, resilience, and agency generated by peacebuilding strategies depend on the inclusivity of voices and institutional responsiveness. The cross-regional comparison of INR scores and narrative content confirms this assertion. Textual coding revealed sharp contrasts between cases where marginalized voices were structurally integrated and those where they were excluded. In Yemen, Saferworld (2019) reports youth dialogue platforms that directly engaged women and tribal minorities, with INR values reaching 38–45% in analyzed documents. In contrast, Ghosn and Khoury's (2011) account of post-war Lebanon highlights structural exclusions that suppressed minority agency, producing INR values below 15%. Sayigh's (2021) oral histories similarly illustrate how suppressed Palestinian voices exacerbate vulnerabilities, as their exclusion from dominant narratives perpetuates intergenerational trauma. In African contexts, inclusivity varied. Tazoacha and Tametong (2021) demonstrate how community early warning systems in Cameroon integrated grassroots feedback, raising INR above 35%, while the African Union's *Silencing the Guns* roadmap (2020) remained more top-down, with INR values below 20% due to its reliance on elite-centered implementation. These findings confirm that inclusivity is not symbolic but materially linked to resilience. Adaptive peacebuilding models (Barnard-Webster & Jean, 2017) show that feedback loops increase agency by aligning institutional responses with local needs. Where feedback was absent, as in the case of Eurocentric legal frameworks critiqued by Labuda (2023), exclusion reinforced vulnerabilities. Thus, H2 is supported: resilience and agency are contingent on inclusivity and higher INR values correspond to more sustainable peace cultures.

Institutional Narratives: Reinforcing or Transforming Power (H3)

The third hypothesis suggested that institutional narratives are not neutral but either reinforce existing hierarchies or enable transformative change. Evidence confirms this ambivalence. The Transformative Capacity Index (TCI) provides a structured lens. In Ukraine, Kuzio (2022) shows how nationalist discourses privilege dominant identities, limiting transformative themes. TCI scores from documents coded in the Ukrainian context averaged 0.25–0.35, with weighting factors reflecting shallow institutional commitment to structural reform. Wylegała and Glowacka-Grajper (2020) similarly identify memory politics as reinforcing national divisions rather than enabling reconciliation. In contrast, African Union documents (AU, 2020, 2024) demonstrate partial transformative intent, particularly in their calls for land reform, youth employment, and decentralization. When the scores for these initiatives were weighted, the TCI values reached between 0.55 and 0.70; however, implementation gaps reduced the overall SPCI results. Gluchman's (2023) analysis of Slovak plebeian resistance shows how counter-narratives challenged elite domination, a finding that resonates with contemporary grassroots agency in Yemen and Sudan. European Union foreign policy presents a mixed case. Geopolitical interests constrain Wallace (2017)'s ambition for transformative peace, resulting in TCI values near 0.4. Resource dependency similarly undermined African agency in responding to the Ukraine crisis, resulting in partial rather than full transformative outcomes, as Staeger (2023) highlights. These patterns confirm H3 that institutional narratives act as sites of power reproduction or transformation. Where marginalized voices are amplified, TCI scores increase, signaling transformative potential; where elite discourses dominate, scores stagnate, reinforcing hierarchies.

Aggregate SPCI Outcomes

Calculating composite SPCI scores across cases reveals both regional variation and methodological utility. Average values for Europe ranged from 0.52 to 0.65, reflecting relatively high DDS due to dense institutional platforms but moderate INR and TCI values. Middle Eastern cases averaged lower, between 0.28 and 0.42, constrained by low dialogic density and selective inclusivity, despite isolated successes in youth-led initiatives. African contexts ranged widely, from 0.30 in Sudan to 0.58 in contexts where AU initiatives or community-driven feedback loops raised inclusivity and transformative capacity.

Table 1: Regional Averages

Region	DDS (avg)	INR (avg)	TCI (avg)	SPCI (avg)
Europe	0.80	0.42	0.45	0.56
Middle East	0.30	0.28	0.35	0.31
Africa	0.45	0.35	0.50	0.43

Source: Table compiled by author.

The table illustrates the comparative utility of the SPCI in identifying patterns across contexts. Europe demonstrates density but continues to struggle with inclusivity, while the Middle East reveals gaps across all three dimensions of dialogic density, narrative inclusivity, and transformative capacity. Africa, by contrast, presents an

uneven but nonetheless promising picture, with transformative efforts emerging in particular settings despite ongoing structural challenges. Collectively, the findings confirm the three hypotheses outlined at the outset of this study. The first hypothesis is validated by evidence that educational and communicative strategies explicitly and implicitly shape the formation of peace cultures, a process reflected in variations of the DDS and INR across regions. The second hypothesis is similarly supported, showing that the inclusivity of voice has a direct influence on resilience and agency, as verified through both INR analysis and case study evidence. The third hypothesis is also confirmed: institutional narratives are far from neutral, as they either reinforce entrenched hierarchies or, alternatively, enable pathways for structural transformation, a dynamic captured through the TCI and complementary discourse analysis.

The SPCI thus proves effective in bridging conceptual debates with operational indicators. By translating education and communication into measurable constructs, the index captures the dynamic interplay between pedagogy, discourse, and institutional power. Importantly, the results suggest that sustainable peace cultures are most likely to emerge where dialogic density, inclusivity, and transformative capacity converge—where dialogue platforms are not only widespread but also inclusive in scope and directed toward genuine structural change. From an economic and policy perspective, the findings underscore that investments in participatory education and communicative infrastructures generate dividends that extend beyond social cohesion to the reduction of conflict risks. This conclusion is reinforced by macro-level indices such as the Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2025) and the Normandy Index (Lazarou & Stanicek, 2024), both of which highlight the systemic benefits of inclusive and transformative peacebuilding. As such, the SPCI demonstrates its practical value as a tool that can be integrated into evaluation frameworks employed by international organizations and NGOs, complementing existing approaches with a more thorough account of the cultural and communicative dimensions of peace.

5. Discussion

The findings point to both convergences and tensions within the broader scholarship on education, communication, and peacebuilding. By developing and operationalizing the SPCI, the research offers an interpretive yet structured tool that differs significantly from prior studies, which have often remained conceptual or case-specific. In doing so, it enables a “virtual dialogue” with the existing literature, highlighting both its contributions and limitations. Earlier research on the role of education in fragile contexts has underlined the importance of curricula and institutionalized learning spaces in fostering resilience. Novelli and Smith (2011), in their synthesis of Lebanon, Nepal, and Sierra Leone, identified education as a double-edged sword—capable of reinforcing division if exclusionary, yet also enabling social cohesion if inclusive. Their work resonates with this study’s findings on the INR, but the present paper advances the conversation by quantifying inclusivity across cases and linking it directly to agency and resilience outcomes. Akar (2016) similarly emphasized dialogic pedagogies in Lebanon as mechanisms for active citizenship and peacebuilding. While his study provides rich qualitative insight, it remains confined to a single regional context. By contrast, the present study extends the comparative horizon by examining Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, thus demonstrating the broader utility of dialogic density as a measurable phenomenon. Saferworld’s (2019) account of youth contributions to peacebuilding in Yemen and Eide and Kunelius’s (2021) study on the communicative power of youth activism both point out the importance of younger generations in shaping discourse. These findings align with the SPCI’s DDS dimension, yet the present research moves beyond descriptive accounts by formalizing youth forums and dialogue platforms into a comparative metric. This step transforms anecdotal recognition into an operationalized index capable of cross-regional application. Institutional responsiveness has also been a recurring theme in the literature. Barnard-Webster and Jean (2017) highlighted the value of adaptive feedback loops in peacebuilding programs, while Pogodda, Richmond, and Visoka (2023) identified systemic “counter-peace” blockages within peace processes. The emphasis on the TCI builds on these insights but shifts the focus from processual blockages to structural reforms, thereby paving the way toward evaluating the long-term sustainability of peace initiatives.

The importance of narrative and memory is likewise visible in Sayigh’s (2021) *Voices of the Nakba* and Wylegała and Głowacka-Grajper’s (2020) exploration of history and identity in Ukraine. Both demonstrate how collective memory shapes perceptions of justice and belonging. These works primarily utilize oral histories; however, this study integrates these perspectives into a quantifiable framework via INR, enabling the comparison of the significance of marginalized voices across various contexts instead of considering them as discrete case narratives. At the macro level, indices such as the Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025) and the Normandy Index (Lazarou & Stanicek, 2024) have long attempted to quantify peace and threats to democracy. However, the primary focus of these tools is statistical, and they often face criticism for prioritizing quantitative generalization over cultural specificity. In contrast, the SPCI enhances these measures by incorporating the

discursive and communicative aspects that would otherwise go unnoticed. In this sense, it does not replace existing indices but provides a more context-sensitive companion tool. Finally, Staeger (2023) and Kuzio (2022) highlight the geopolitical dimensions of peace and conflict, examining African agency and Russian nationalism respectively. Although their analyses highlight the structural power dynamics, they often neglect the everyday communicative and educational strategies that shape peace cultures (Marley, 2020; O'Hair et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2025, April 14). By foregrounding these dimensions, this study adds depth to geopolitical accounts, suggesting that macro-level structures and micro-level practices are best understood as interdependent rather than isolated. Collectively, these comparisons reveal that while the existing literature has richly documented peace education, dialogue, and communicative agency, it has rarely translated these concepts into operational frameworks that enable systematic cross-regional comparison.

The SPCI addresses a critical methodological and conceptual gap in peacebuilding research by offering a systematic framework for evaluating peace culture beyond descriptive or normative accounts. Earlier literature has acknowledged the role of education and communication in fostering peace, yet such contributions often remain confined to isolated case studies or theoretical propositions lacking comparative rigor. The SPCI advances this discourse by introducing quantifiable indicators that assess the density, inclusivity, and transformative capacity of peace culture within diverse sociopolitical contexts. Unlike macro-level indices that prioritize structural stability or conflict incidence, the SPCI captures cultural and communicative dimensions that influence long-term peace sustainability. It evaluates how participatory education systems, inclusive dialogue mechanisms, and narrative practices contribute to social cohesion and mitigate conflict drivers. The index is adaptable across contexts, allowing for both cross-national comparison and localized analysis without compromising methodological integrity. Empirical application of the SPCI demonstrates its utility in identifying institutional practices that either reinforce hierarchical power structures or enable inclusive peacebuilding. Its design supports evidence-based policy formulation and programmatic evaluation. This shift opens new horizons for peace research by bridging normative debates with empirical indicators while remaining sensitive to context.

6. Conclusions

The central objective of this study was to explore how educational and communicative strategies shape peace cultures across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East and develop a methodological tool capable of capturing their complexity. The design and implementation of the SPCI, a composite measure that integrates dialogic density, narrative inclusivity, and transformative capacity, achieved this objective. The index offers a new way to operationalize peace culture as a measurable yet interpretive construct, bridging the gap between conceptual theorization and empirical application. The findings confirm that peace cultures are not simply the outcome of explicit curricula or institutional policies but are also shaped by implicit norms, the inclusivity of marginalized voices, and the responsiveness of institutions to community needs. New patterns have been identified: Europe demonstrates dense dialogue platforms but limited inclusivity; the Middle East struggles across all dimensions, while Africa reveals uneven but promising transformative efforts. Importantly, the alignment of density, inclusivity, and transformation emerges as a key condition for sustainable peace cultures. By situating these results within existing scholarship, the study underscores both continuity and innovation.

This study advances the conceptual and evaluative terrain of peace culture by integrating insights from education theory, communication studies, sociology, and political science. Through the development and application of the SPCI, it offers a scalable, context-sensitive framework for assessing how educational and communicative strategies shape peacebuilding outcomes in fragile and conflict-affected settings. The SPCI addresses a critical gap in existing peace metrics by foregrounding cultural and communicative dimensions that are often excluded from macro-level indices such as the Global Peace Index and the Normandy Index. Unlike these broader tools, the SPCI enables granular analysis of how participatory pedagogies, inclusive dialogue mechanisms, and narrative practices contribute to the formation of strategic peace cultures. This includes identifying patterns of vulnerability, resilience, and agency that emerge through institutional and grassroots interventions. Empirical application of the SPCI demonstrates its utility in evaluating both formal and informal peacebuilding initiatives. It reveals that when educational and communicative infrastructures are designed to be participatory, reflexive, and locally embedded, they can foster social cohesion, mitigate conflict drivers, and challenge entrenched power hierarchies. Conversely, when such infrastructures are top-down or exclusionary, they risk reproducing structural inequalities and undermining transformative potential. For policymakers, the findings indicate the value of investing in inclusive education systems and communicative platforms that facilitate deliberation, pluralism, and civic engagement. For practitioners, the SPCI offers a diagnostic tool that balances methodological rigor with interpretive flexibility, enabling contextually grounded assessments without sacrificing comparability. For academics, the framework offers novel avenues for interdisciplinary research on peace culture, especially

concerning institutional design, narrative construction, and agency development. Subsequent research ought to enhance the weighting mechanisms of the SPCI, evaluate its relevance in various regions, and investigate longitudinal applications to elucidate the evolution of peace cultures. In this way, the study not only advances current debates but also lays the groundwork for a new generation of peace research—one that is empirically rigorous, methodologically innovative, and deeply attentive to the cultural and communicative foundations of peace.

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