

Giving Peace an Address?

Reflections on the Potential and
Challenges of Creating Peace Infrastructures

Ulrike Hopp-Nishanka

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1 Introduction¹

In early 2007, community groups in suburbs of Tamale, the capital of the Northern Region of Ghana, clashed over the construction of a water pipeline. Violence and destruction ensued, local businesses shut down, the police had to intervene and several community leaders and youths were arrested. The violence, however, did not escalate further and the conflict was settled outside court with the help of the Northern Region Peace Advisory Council, a group of more than 20 civil society representatives, religious leaders and local authority representatives (Draman et al. 2009). Building on the trust and acceptance forged with traditional chiefs, the group engaged in various forms of dispute resolution around land, religion, and social and political issues, as well as community peacebuilding work. Similar stories are reported from all over Ghana, and their successes are related to the country's national peace architecture that has evolved in recent years (for an overview see Ojielo 2007).

What is special about the example from Ghana is the contribution of government agencies. They play an important role in the peace efforts: the members of the advisory council did not come together on their own, but were appointed by the regional minister; they are supported by the government's peace promotion officers; and different regional and district councils are coordinated by a national government unit. Change agents have been institutionalised throughout the government system of Ghana (see *Box 2* below for more details).

The Ghanaian example seems at odds with many other peacebuilding experiences where government actors are far more marginal. The reluctance other actors feel about engaging them is partially explained by the complicated and compromised role governments tend to play in intra-state conflict, where often the state has been captured by exclusionary elites, state power is abused, and moderate actors excluded. In any event, it is rare to find governments embracing change in the way seen in Ghana.

What can be learned from the Ghanaian example? How can it (and others like it) be described and understood? What are the necessary elements of such national frameworks? Can they be implemented in any country? How can they be supported? These questions are now being explored in the context of the emerging concept of peace infrastructure.

The idea of peace infrastructure is to develop mechanisms for cooperation among all relevant stakeholders, including the government, by promoting cooperative problem-solving and institutionalising a response mechanism to violent conflict (van Tongeren 2011a). The understanding that a dialogue process and its underlying cooperative structure are mutually enhancing is not new (e.g. Ropers 1995); the novel focus here is on the structure – the organisation, connection and interaction – of cooperative mechanisms. While other concepts emphasise synergistic collaboration between peacebuilding interventions, the focus here is on building the structural capacities of the conflict parties and stakeholders. Changing the “hearts and minds” of conflict parties is not enough: organisational and structural capacities are required to achieve conflict transformation.

In principle, peace infrastructure composed of diverse, interconnected organisations at different levels can give peace an address in a social landscape torn by violence. It may either act as a change agent itself, or provide the necessary space for such change agents.

At the outset, I should note that I regard peace infrastructure as a concept that helps us understand the domestic, internal efforts in a conflict or fragile context to create or build on existing mechanisms and organisations that engage in reducing violence and problem solving. The focus is less on the role of

¹ The author is grateful to Norbert Ropers, Barbara Unger and Paul van Tongeren for lively discussions, without which the conceptual development of peace infrastructures presented here would not have been possible. The concept has been further developed with the help of the Berghof Handbook editing team's feedback.

external assistance to support these peace infrastructures, although insights on capacity building and other means of (external) support are offered “between the lines” (and explicitly in *Box 5*).

The aim of this article is to investigate the promise and potential as well as the challenges of peace infrastructures. It will conceptualise peace infrastructure and highlight some open questions.

The following section defines the term, explores its conceptual background, and offers a taxonomy of its possible elements and forms. In the third section, the concept is discussed with a view to establishing its potential for managing, settling and transforming conflicts. The fourth section will, based on practical experiences, point to some challenges and open questions. The fifth section will conclude and suggest steps for developing the concept further.

2 What is Peace Infrastructure? Furthering the Conceptual Debate

If peace infrastructure gives peace an address, what does this place look like? It could be anything from a rugged shed housing a local peace council in a remote South American village, to the elegantly designed high-rise office of a national truth and reconciliation commission in the capital of an African country. Its organisations could include a ministry dealing with peace and reconciliation in Nepal, the office of a presidential advisor coordinating the peace process in the Philippines, or one of the many district peace committees in Kenya.

All these different organisations represent elements of peace infrastructure. They are parts of a “dynamic network of interdependent structures, mechanisms, resources, values, and skills which, through dialogue and consultation, contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in a society” (Kumar 2011, 385). While acknowledging the relevance of the *process* of peacebuilding in which the actors and organisations in a network engage, the focus in this description as well as in the concept under development here is on the *organisational* aspect of the network (see *Box 1*).²

This section offers a working definition, describes peace infrastructures along five key characteristics and then presents several examples as illustrations.

Box 1: The Emerging Concept of Peace Infrastructure

In recent years, several practitioners and organisations have developed different terms and concepts that concern the organisation and architecture of peacebuilding. While the terminology is not yet fully defined, the following differentiation emerges:

“Peacebuilding infrastructure” refers to international actors as well as the domestic governmental (judicial, legislative and executive) and non-governmental structures and financial system (Dress 2005). The similar term “peacebuilding architecture” denotes a more focused approach to strategically assessing and designing solutions for violent conflict according to architectural principles (Reychler 2002).

In contrast, the focus of “infrastructures for peace (I4P)” is on the organisational elements and linkages that form domestic “mechanisms for co-operation among all relevant stakeholders in

² “Organisation” in this text refers to groups of individuals that are connected by common purpose and rules for a division of labour that define structure, membership and boundaries of the organisation. “Institution” refers to the rules that guide behaviour and ensure social order in a society.

peacebuilding by promoting cooperative problem solving to conflicts and institutionalizing the response mechanisms to conflicts in order to transform them. National, district, and local peace councils are cornerstones of such an infrastructure”. This emphasises institutionalisation within a government administration (van Tongeren 2011a, 400).³

The similar concept of “peace support structures” highlights the ownership by all conflict parties and includes elements established by conflict parties other than the government, including non-state armed groups. Building on experiences in accompanying Track 1 peace negotiations (Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies 2008; Hopp 2010; Wils et al. 2006), this concept concentrates on individual organisations and capacity building and support for the conflict parties involved in a peace or dialogue process (Berghof Peace Support 2010).

Discussing elements of the I4P concept and Berghof’s concept of peace support structures and developing them further, this article uses the term “peace infrastructures” to embrace both discussions without imposing its own interpretation on others.

Bringing different discussions together, I propose the following working definition:

Peace infrastructures consist of diverse domestic, inter-connected forms of engagement between conflict parties and other stakeholders. Their organisational elements can be established at all stages of peace and dialogue processes, at all levels of society, and with varying degrees of inclusion. The objective of peace infrastructure is to assist the parties (e.g. through capacity building or advice), the process (e.g. through mediation between the conflict parties or facilitation of public participation), or the implementation of process results (e.g. through monitoring and coordination of agreement implementation).

2.1 Key Characteristics of Peace Infrastructure

Peace infrastructure can take various organisational shapes and names depending on the cultural and conflict context. The working definition entails five characteristics that help to describe and categorise them in a less abstract way:

1. A key characteristic of peace infrastructures is their *domestic foundation*. The focus is on domestic capacities, not those of the international community and their peacebuilding architecture (as with, for example, the UN Peacebuilding Commission and Fund or the efforts of establishing an African regional peacebuilding architecture). Whereas internationally backed ceasefire monitoring or peacekeeping missions – or perhaps even international Groups of Friends – can be supportive elements of peace infrastructures, they cannot represent the only element.⁴
2. Peace infrastructures are established during *any stage of peace and dialogue processes*, from the height of a violent conflict to the implementation and monitoring of peace agreements. They could extend far into the post-conflict period if incorporating transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms: truth and reconciliation commissions are a prominent example, but places of memory like memorials and peace museums could also be components of peace infrastructures if they contribute towards creating a common future.

Figure 1 provides an overview of possible organisational forms of peace infrastructure along the stages of conflict escalation. Any of them may be found in combination and would not exclude others.

³ Van Tongeren (2011a, 2011b) offers an overview of decisive moments in the development of the concept. He highlights how the concept found its way into official documents in the years 2002 to 2006.

⁴ The concept is also not about networking among external peacebuilding actors, as for example outlined in Robert Ricigliano’s networks of effective action (2003). While working groups and other arrangements of these actors will entertain close connections with a peace infrastructure, they do not constitute one on their own.

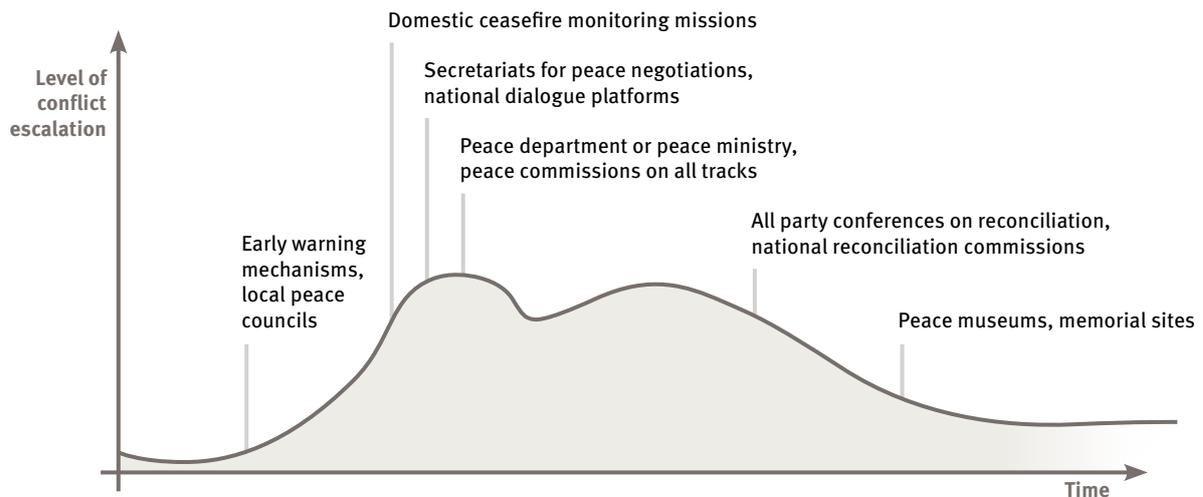


Figure 1: Organisational elements of peace infrastructure along conflict stages

3. Elements of peace infrastructure are found *at all levels and peacebuilding* tracks and show various forms of integration:

- ≡ Vertical integration between different tracks: engaging different societal levels (top, middle, grassroots) and administrative units at local, district, regional and national levels.
- ≡ Horizontal integration within the tracks: by bringing together all local peace council activities, or by establishing a regional platform for consultation, collaboration and coordination among stakeholders.
- ≡ Consolidation at national government level: providing a legal foundation and appropriate budget for peace infrastructure; establishing a government department or ministry dedicated to peacebuilding and providing guiding policy.

This characteristic highlights the structured, systematic character of peace infrastructures and distinguishes them from the “naturally evolved” peace constituencies found at different levels in a society (Lederach 1996). This difference is also expressed through a high level of government involvement and intra-governmental coherence that emphasises the commitment of the government to support peace efforts.

Individual elements alone – for example local peace councils – do not constitute peace infrastructure. Successful examples from Nepal, Ghana or Kenya bring various elements together, albeit in different ways.

4. Peace infrastructures vary in terms of *inclusion*. Two forms of inclusion can be distinguished: those stakeholders who establish peace infrastructure and decide its mandate and functions will *govern* and “own” its elements; others might be invited to *participate* in activities but without a governing role.

Most peace infrastructures include at least one of the conflict parties.⁵ Ideally, more than one would be involved in establishing the peace infrastructure; the peace process in South Africa and many other places suggest that inclusivity is a precondition for effectiveness (Kelman 1999; OECD 2007). This will often mean including non-state armed groups. Strengthening their capacities is often a requirement for their participation in peace processes and contributes to reducing asymmetry in negotiations.

Various combinations of inclusion and participation can be conceived. These can range from “conflict parties only” (often found in the context of peace negotiations – peace secretariats or working committees), to “government-civil society” (as in the case of consultative platforms), to “government-all stakeholders” (as found in peace departments or ministries), to “all-party forums” (like local peace councils or truth and

⁵ This aspect distinguishes peace infrastructure from anything established by civil society alone. The latter could be part of a peace infrastructure but do not suffice for infrastructure establishment.

reconciliation conferences).⁶ While the latter hardly achieve all-inclusiveness, they are at least platforms for multiple stakeholders, not just those engaged in violent conflict.

5. The different elements of peace infrastructure can serve various *objectives and functions*, which include:

- ≡ Capacity building, advisory services and (internal) consultation for the conflict parties;
- ≡ Communication, facilitation and mediation between conflict parties and with other stakeholders;
- ≡ Implementation, monitoring and coordination of activities agreed by the conflict parties and other stakeholders.

The three groups of functions represent increasing levels of collaboration between the conflict parties. Whereas the first function does not involve collaboration between the parties, the second one does: here, organisations often serve as a go-between or a bridge-builder. The third group of functions shows the highest level of collaboration, when conflict parties work together to implement the results of peace agreements or monitor them jointly.

2.2 Organisational Elements and Examples of Peace Infrastructures

Any peace infrastructure involves various organisational elements depending on these five characteristics. The range of possible organisational elements can be conceived according to the level of collaboration between the conflict parties and stakeholders on the one hand, and the level of inclusive participation at the other. Figure 2 presents an overview.

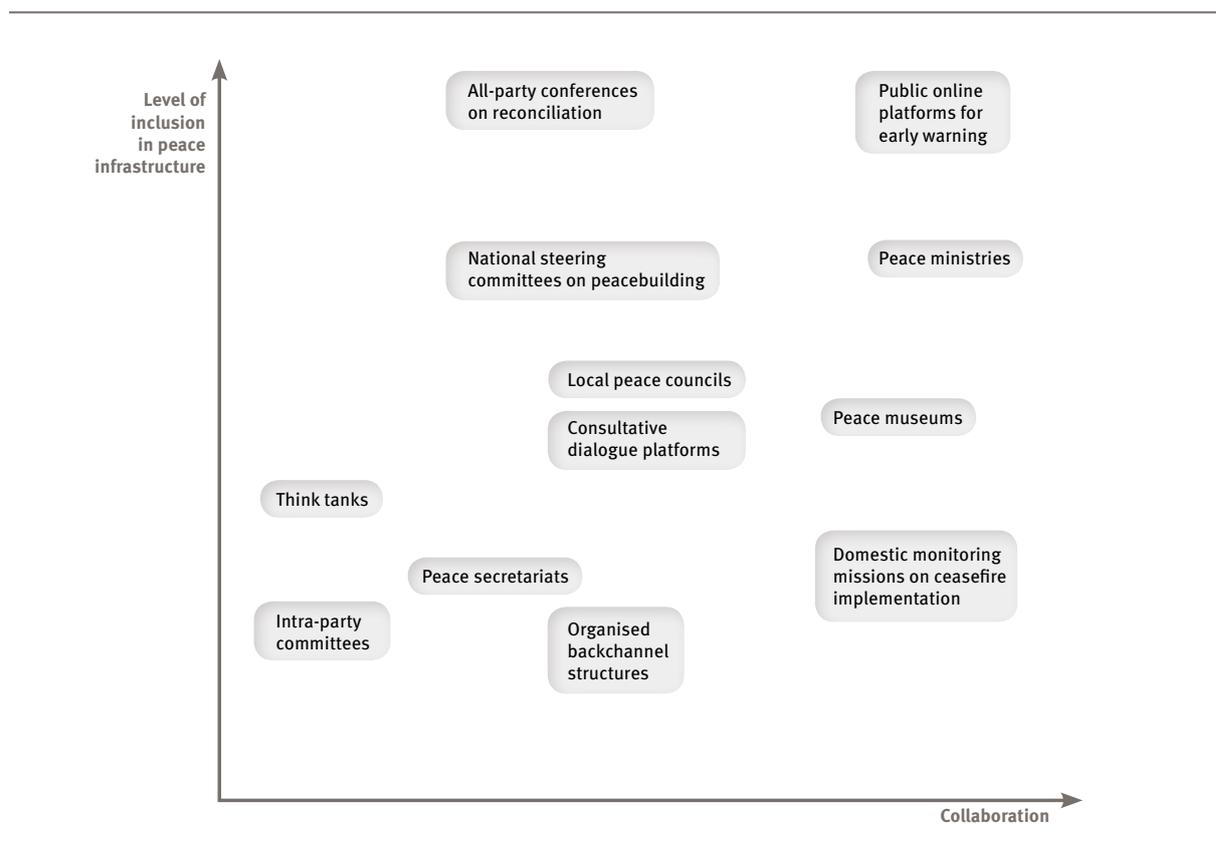


Figure 2: Organisational elements of peace infrastructure along axes of inclusion and collaboration

⁶ Not all parts of a peace infrastructure will necessarily be accessible to the public; some will involve a certain level of confidentiality.

The horizontal axis of the graph represents levels of collaboration between the conflict parties. Elements with low levels of collaboration are to the left: examples include intra-party committees set up to prepare and discuss negotiations or think tanks closely affiliated with one side of the conflict. Elements with high levels of collaboration are further to the right, such as peace ministries tasked with implementing a peace agreement (where staff recruitment and governance of the ministry contributes to collaboration).

The level of inclusiveness is represented on the vertical axis and is independent of the level of collaboration. Thus, a very collaborative organisation such as a joint monitoring mission between formerly warring parties might be relatively exclusive, whereas a public online platform for early warning can invite the widest public participation.

The levels of collaboration do not correspond with the stages of conflict in a linear sense. Collaborative peace infrastructures between different non-state stakeholders and the government can be active even in the early phase of latent conflict, for example in early warning mechanisms. Several of the African peace infrastructures established in the context of elections include functions of monitoring violence and early warning systems (for example in Ghana, Ojielo 2007).

While the figure serves to show the scope of different organisational forms, it is of course a simplification. Organisations will evolve over time and under the influence of different agendas. This can happen when, for example, the government becomes involved in a local civil society peace platform and contributes to its formalisation, its diffusion to other districts, and eventually to the development of a national policy: this was the case with the district development and peace committees in Kenya inspired by a women's initiative in the Wajir district that had been built through long-standing civil society networking efforts (Jenner/Abdi 2000; Kut 2007; GPPAC 2010).

This example of bottom-up peace infrastructure is similar to the earlier example of the national peace architecture for peace in Ghana (see *Box 2*).

Box 2: The Bottom-Up National Infrastructure for Peace in Ghana

Despite appearing comparatively peaceful in regional terms, Ghana has seen many kinds of violent inter-ethnic conflict at the community level (Bombande 2007). The first avenues for peacebuilding and inter-ethnic reconciliation were opened by civil society initiatives in the 1990s, but fresh violence in 2003 led to a more concerted peacebuilding effort by the government. Building on the experiences of an all-party advisory council in the crisis-prone Northern Region – a council that intervened in local conflicts to prevent violence and find dispute resolution mechanisms suitable to the cultural context – a national infrastructure was established under the lead of the Ministry of Interior with assistance of UNDP (Ojielo 2007).

The infrastructure comprises: peace advisory councils on the district, regional and national level; government-affiliated peace promotion officers on the regional and district level; and a Peacebuilding Support Unit within the Ministry of Interior (Ministry of the Interior 2006). There are varying levels of implementation across Ghana's 10 regions and 138 districts, but observers note that it contributed significantly to the containment of tension and prevention of violence during the 2008 national elections. The National Peace Council helped mediate the political transition (Kumar 2011). The example of Ghana has inspired other countries like Togo to consider similar arrangements.

In other cases, peace infrastructure builds on commitment at the central government level and thus can be considered top-down. Examples are the peace infrastructures in Central American countries which are based on the regional Esquipulas Process in the 1980s (*Box 3*), and the peace infrastructure that serves to implement Nepal's Comprehensive Peace Agreement (*Box 4*).

Box 3: Diverse Peace Infrastructures Based on the Esquipulas Process in Central America

To encourage national reconciliation processes in Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador and to help stabilise the region without US armed intervention, a group of Central American heads of state started a regional mediation process in the 1980s. While the original effort eventually failed, it helped to lay the foundation for later peace agreements and each country subsequently developed a national peace infrastructure adapted to their own situation. In all cases, this included a national consultation process involving the government, armed groups and the civil society.

The process, although built “from the top down to the people” and embedded in strong regional and UN involvement, went beyond negotiations between the conflict parties only and integrated consensus building on the grassroots level. As illustrated in the case of Nicaragua (Wehr/Lederach 1991), so-called “insider partials” as well as external mediators contributed to this process and helped build trust.

Each of the countries followed their own protracted process towards a peace agreement, or several agreements. In Nicaragua, separate agreements for the different conflicts were negotiated and supported by separate structures including local and regional peace commissions (for an overview see Odendaal 2010). In Guatemala, a number of structures were installed at the national level to support the negotiations, monitor implementation and coordinate civil society participation. Some complemented each other and some did not. The government appointed its own structures for the negotiations; a parallel Civil Society Assembly was established to allow the public to participate in the peace process, although it was criticised in terms of the undue influence of the business sector (Armon et al. 1997; Sarti/Schünemann 2011).

Box 4: Central Government Ministry as Cornerstone of the Peace Infrastructure in Nepal

The peace infrastructure in Nepal was established with the purpose of supporting the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2006 after years of armed conflict between the government and an armed insurgency led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). The government’s peace efforts centre on the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction that emerged out of the government peace secretariat after the peace agreement was reached. The ministry carries broad functions in monitoring and implementing the peace accord and is expected to support a wide range of elements, including local peace committees with representatives from all societal stakeholders, a peace fund, a truth and reconciliation commission, and a commission to investigate disappearances (Ministry for Peace and Reconstruction of the Government of Nepal, n.d.).

The infrastructure reflects the government’s commitment to a comprehensive peace process that would not end with a peace agreement. The local peace councils were established to link the Track 1 peace process systematically to the grassroots level (Odendaal/Olivier 2008). However, centralisation and domination by political elites limit inclusion and responsiveness to local concerns (Dahal/Chandra 2008). Civil society plays a key role in engaging the government as a partner and in monitoring the conflict parties’ commitment to the peace accord (Thapa 2007).

Moreover, the infrastructure shows the weaknesses of an artificial design that did not grow out of the local political cultural context. Some of the elements of the infrastructure have not been established yet and, as Ram Bhandari notes, the concept for the local peace infrastructure was “never discussed with local actors, but was designed from the top down, based on political negotiation and donors’ recommendations” (Bhandari 2011, 15).

The common feature of these very different peace infrastructures, bottom-up or top-down, is that they were established, developed and maintained with the intention of furthering the peace and dialogue process. Although some originate from specific community experiments, peace infrastructures are more than the organisations that evolve from political processes in a given conflict situation. They consist of a demarcated set of organisations: a designated subsystem for peace within the overall conflict system. This delineation

appears necessary. If everything is part of peace infrastructure, the concept becomes too holistic and loses traction.

The discussion so far has put forth a working definition; it has shown that peace infrastructures can take many different shapes and can change over the course of time. In their ideal form, they represent inclusive and sustained efforts of the conflict parties and other relevant stakeholders at preventing and transforming conflict, building peace, and forging strong linkages between peacebuilding tracks; and finally they imply an empowering, but not overpowering, commitment from the government. According to this vision, they have the potential to strengthen a given peace process by giving it an organisational structure. The following section will discuss this potential in relation to three distinct areas.

3 The Potential of Peace Infrastructures

Peace infrastructures could be conceived as contributing to peacebuilding in three ways:

1. *Dealing with violence* through conflict management, violence containment or de-escalation;
2. *Dealing with the process of conflict settlement*, for example through negotiations and dialogue; and
3. *Dealing with the structural causes and the need for systemic transformation*.

The three areas often overlap, but for conceptual purposes the distinction is maintained here.

3.1 Managing Conflict and De-Escalating Violence

Early warning mechanisms and mechanisms to monitor and implement ceasefires and peace agreements are examples of peace infrastructure that can potentially help to manage conflict and de-escalate violence. Other kinds of peace infrastructure can potentially increase cooperative behaviour at the community level, for example in the context of elections. Organisations working at Track 3, for instance, can help resolve community conflict at an early stage with the help of locally trusted mediators; they can also alert actors at other societal levels in order to increase security in a local environment, coordinate intervention with others, or liaise with neighbouring district level bodies (IRIN 2010b).

With a view to fragile situations, peace infrastructure could potentially help increase government legitimacy, enhancing their accountability and building public trust and confidence in state institutions. By being part of the peace infrastructure, government bodies and their staff can engage in joint problem-solving efforts and less hierarchical, asymmetric relations than in their usual bureaucratic environment. Recognising these efforts and their potential contribution to security as well as development, the latest World Development Report features examples of infrastructures for conflict prevention and risk reduction (World Bank 2011, 188-189).

3.2 Conflict Settlement and Dialogue

Peace infrastructures reflect a growing domestic ownership of peacebuilding and a commitment to building internal capacities for conflict settlement (Kumar 2011). While external support in form of mediation is often indispensable, domestic peace infrastructure can be complementary. Peace infrastructures are of particular relevance in situations without a sufficient internal political consensus for external mediation, or where violence is too dispersed to be dealt with through centralised external mediation.

In this capacity, peace infrastructure provides a space or a forum for dialogue along different tracks. In situations of political transition and regime change, domestic institutions might convene national dialogue or negotiations about governing arrangements. An example is found in Lebanon where a

presidential initiative to create national unity and work towards reconciliation is combined with providing expertise to stakeholders, combining facilitation and capacity building (Common Space Initiative 2011). When accompanying external Track 1 mediation, peace infrastructure can help to broaden the foundation for negotiations by involving the other tracks, like the One-Text-Initiative in Sri Lanka that works on Track 1.5 and reaches out to the grassroots level by connecting to local people's forums (Siebert 2007; Timberman 2007).

In certain situations, structures within peace infrastructures can also perform the function of facilitation if serving as, or assisting, "insider mediators" (Mason 2009). Being close to the conflict parties, these mostly individual actors engage in mediation efforts, often adding credibility and trust to the process as they are more invested in it and more knowledgeable about it than outsiders. Supported by the peace infrastructure, they can establish a "platform for change", which in Paul van Tongeren's words is "a functional network that would span across the divisions and levels of society and that would ensure optimum collaboration between the main stakeholders" (van Tongeren 2011a, 401 referring to Lederach 2005).

With a view to the content of negotiations and dialogue, community-based peace infrastructures can provide Track 1 actors with insights into the situation on the ground and help shape proposals. This could add a collaborative, integrative perspective – rooted characteristically in joint problem-solving approaches – to the negotiations and counterbalance the usual orientation towards bargaining strategies. Think tanks and other organisations that offer policy advice at Track 1 or 2 provide other ways to strengthen negotiation and dialogue capacities. Examples include the Palestine Negotiation Support Unit, the peace secretariats of the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, the Nepal Transition to Peace Initiative, and the Common Space Initiative in Lebanon (Walton 2011).

3.3 Engaging in Conflict Transformation

By building the capacities of conflict parties and encouraging their active involvement in peace processes and other forms of dialogue, peace infrastructures can be said to play a role in conflict transformation. Ideally, they bring together stakeholders and their constituencies, change agents and other parts of society and provide the space for joint problem-solving, and they can help create, consolidate and maintain a network of transformative actors. As Chetan Kumar (2011) points out, domestic infrastructures might be more important than external mediation in many kinds of conflict situation, including in continuous, transformative or even revolutionary processes such as those witnessed in the "Arab Spring".

Local peace commissions present one of the few examples of domestic conflict transformation organisations rigorously discussed in existing literature.⁷ These comprise any "inclusive forum operating at sub-national level" that works with methods of "dialogue, promotion of mutual understanding and trustbuilding, as well as inclusive, constructive problem-solving and joint action to prevent violence" (Odendaal 2010, 3).

The literature on conflict transformation identifies a range of possible contributions to the transformation of conflict actors, issues, and structures (Miall 2004). Building trust and improving relationships between the conflict parties lead to potential actor transformation as well as personal transformation. Knowledge transfer and capacity building potentially lead to issue transformation if they help find compromise, or to actor transformation if it contributes to a change of goals of a conflict party. Institution building can lead to structure transformation when affecting the asymmetric power balance

⁷ The analysis of conflict transformation actors mostly centres on civil society actors and non-governmental organisations. The role of the conflict parties is seen as either that of spoilers or that of insider-partials and change agents within the parties. These, however, are mostly described as individuals or groups of persons (e.g. Mason 2009). The role of organisations is hardly discussed; one exception at the grassroots and middle level of society are peace commissions (Lederach 1997, 2001), or, as other authors prefer, local peace forums (Odendaal 2010).

between the conflict parties. The example of Ghana, where institution building, reconciliation efforts and working towards a culture of dialogue come together, indicates several avenues of conflict transformation (Ojielo 2007).

This brief discussion has established the possible contributions of peace infrastructure in the areas of conflict management, conflict settlement and conflict transformation. While this potential – derived from the literature and individual cases – appears promising and is attracting interest among donors and third-party actors, more comparative evidence needs to be collected to consolidate the conceptual promise. To this end, the following section presents challenges and open questions.

4 Challenges and Open Questions

Literature on peace infrastructures and their role and impact in peace and dialogue processes is still scarce. Existing reviews are mostly limited to evaluations of external support to the peace infrastructure; those concerning Track 1 (and 1.5) often remain confidential. References in academic literature usually serve illustrative purposes and are anecdotal in character. Very few documents offer detailed accounts of the activities or the organisational design of peace infrastructures.

One noteworthy exception is the case of the peace infrastructure in South Africa. A cornerstone of the National Peace Accord, it is relatively well documented within the vast literature on the South African process (for example Gastrow 1995; Marks 2000; Spies 2002). Building on these experiences, Andries Odendaal is developing a growing body of comparative work on local peace forums and committees, elements of peace infrastructure at the local level (2011, 2010, 2006; Odendaal/Olivier 2008). Finally, the Berghof Foundation has collected material on 20 cases of Track 1 peace infrastructure organisations.

The remainder of this section, based on a review of this literature, raises five general themes. It offers “food for thought” and discussion rather than a comprehensive overview; further examination is needed.

4.1 Political Will and the Ambivalent Role of Government Bodies

The foremost theme in literature concerning peace infrastructures concerns the ambivalent role of government bodies and the problem of dependence on the political will of the top-level leaders. Without an official mandate from the government, a community-based consultation process will remain a civil society effort that does not filter up to the national level. Without the political commitment of the conflict parties, Track 1 (or 1.5) dialogue processes may remain a mere facade or serve to contain domestic or international criticism (Hopp-Nishanka forthcoming).

In his review of local peace forums in 12 different contexts, Odendaal (2010) shows that their effectiveness strongly depends on national-level commitment. Organisations at the local level cannot override national political imperatives and so remain vulnerable to “spoilers”. To deal with these challenges, they require a national-level mandate that makes them, paradoxically, even more vulnerable to political manipulation.

Similar impressions can be garnered from the Sri Lankan people’s forums, which are active at the community level but seem not to have any wider impact owing to the lack of government involvement or effective linkages to other tracks (Timberman 2007). Government involvement, however, often leads to its domination of participatory processes and politicisation (Brett et al. 2007; Rainford/Satkunanathan 2009).

Political manipulation and instrumentalisation may occur whenever one stakeholder has the power to dominate the design and establishment of infrastructure. Moreover, transformative actors within existing infrastructure elements might not have sufficient space to contribute to the necessary change process. As Chetan Kumar notes, “where public or civic space is largely contested or polarized, widely trusted “change

agents” or internal mediators may either be not available, or may not have the political space in which to facilitate the right conversations or behavioral change” (Kumar 2011, 387).

Whether peace infrastructures remain effective appears to depend significantly on their “dependence” or level of politicisation. At worst, the peace infrastructure does not perform its original functions and becomes an empty shell, or is hijacked by those seeking to manipulate public opinion or international views or gain individual power. The key question is how such infrastructures can move from being “mirrors” reflecting the destructive dynamics of the conflict towards being “incubators” that provide a safe space for sowing the seeds of transformative change.

Involving a wider set of societal actors in establishing and steering infrastructures might be one option; another might be found in principles that guide, for example, the establishment of political think tanks which are often granted a certain level of intellectual independence from their leadership in order to do their job. Peace infrastructure may also need to have its own checks and balances through diverse actors and organisational forms that complement and correct each other.

4.2 Inclusiveness and Legitimacy

Observations from various contexts show that, to be effective, peace infrastructure needs to be seen as legitimate by all relevant stakeholders. To this end, inclusiveness is crucial – but unfortunately it is often unattainable, in particular in the early stages of peace processes. While infrastructure at the local level, for example, might be able to mobilise communities to work together or increase the constructive commitment of influential stakeholders – businesspersons for example – they rarely manage to integrate opposition hardliners.

Some claim that peace infrastructure may sometimes need to be built without difficult stakeholders, for example where so-called “spoilers” have the power to impede or paralyse their functioning and where the organisations have high visibility and symbolic power. One case might be a complicated decision-making process on participation in initiatives to memorialise human rights violations and the victims of violent conflict (Brett et al. 2007). Excluding relevant stakeholders in such a process or emerging organisation, however, usually hampers reconciliation and might contribute to future conflict escalation.

The challenge of inclusiveness and legitimacy is not merely a matter of politics. On a technical level, it is also reflected in the question of who is represented in the governance bodies of peace infrastructure. Studies of national-level organisations as well as of local peace commissions from such diverse conflict contexts as South Africa, Kenya, Nepal, Sri Lanka or Macedonia show that inclusive staff composition is important (Hopp-Nishanka forthcoming; Odendaal/Olivier 2008). Multi-partisan staff within organisations provides an additional challenge for those dealing with conflict.

Finally, the quest for inclusiveness also concerns the integration of marginalised perspectives, such as those of regional or ethnic minorities, poor and low caste communities, women and children, and victims of human rights violations. In the case of recently established memorial sites in Peru, some of the decision-making processes do not sufficiently involve the relevant local stakeholders and concentrate too much on elites (Weissert 2012). Nepal’s local peace committees, although inclusive in theory and designed to “address the concerns and complaints of local stakeholders for democratic values, beliefs and a sustainable peace”, have been criticised by locals as being dominated by political party ambitions and as not considering the local population’s needs (Bhandari 2011).

4.3 Linkages Between Tracks and Levels

Most peace infrastructure requires connections between and within societal levels (vertical and horizontal links) in order to become effective. Multi-track engagement in peace infrastructures is often translated into the spanning of all administrative units from the national level to local communities. The peace process in South Africa, for example, saw a coordinated effort to involve all levels, with distinct roles for each track.

Here, as well as in Nicaragua, regional commissions helped inform national peace efforts and make them more effective. They did this by bringing in stakeholders with regional importance and by communicating diverse local and regional needs and translating them into national priorities (Marks 2000; Odendaal 2010). As with Track 2 engagement, regional capacities have an important role to play in terms of information, coordination and capacity building (Ojielo 2007).

In reality, though, the sub-national, regional level is often the weak link between local and national organisations. The focus is usually either on local, grassroots efforts or on the national level, with regional activities regarded as mere transmission gears, neglected and under-funded. In order to play a transformative role, the regional level needs strengthening. To this end, some peace infrastructures rely on a national “help desk” of sorts: a dedicated support unit, often installed within a government body, is established as the entry point for external capacity building and coordinates the involvement of peace infrastructure with other government agencies. In Ghana, this support has been organised by the Ministry of Interior which appointed regional Peace Promotion Officers based on nominations from the regional governments. The ministry provides further support through a Peacebuilding Support Unit that coordinates with other government agencies (Ojielo 2007; Odendaal 2011).

Such support, however, only fosters integration if there is willingness to engage all parts of society. Peace infrastructures often integrate different levels and tracks on paper only. In practice, there may be severe capacity and coordination constraints that limit the linkage to a one-way flow of information. Sometimes even this one-way communication is not a priority in political cultures dominated by elites. In such a situation, a national help desk alone will not address the underlying problems.⁸

4.4 Capacity Building, Leadership and Integrity

Setting aside the problem of how to enhance capacities if the will to use them is lacking, the question of how best to support emerging peace infrastructures remains. While adequate skills (technical skills, management and topical expertise) are necessary, organisations within the peace infrastructure require more than simply capacity building (see *Box 5*).

Box 5: Options for Assisting Peace Infrastructure

Peace infrastructure is attractive for donor and other third-party assistance since it offers the opportunity to strengthen domestic capacities for peacebuilding. Assistance can be provided in many ways: funding, capacity building, and support for institution building can make meaningful contributions. Three recommendations emerge from the literature and practical experiences:

1. Assistance requires commitment from relevant stakeholders and ownership by beneficiaries

The call to respect stakeholders’ ownership of change processes is often made, but experience shows it is difficult to achieve. Who needs to be involved at which stage when establishing peace infrastructure? How can hardliners and potential spoilers be dealt with? How to address marginalisation and exclusion rooted in the political culture that might lead to the neglect of beneficiaries at the local level? These questions should be addressed not only among donors, but also with the main stakeholders and the government.

2. Capacity building should include strategic planning and organisational development needs

An obvious area of support for peace infrastructure organisations is capacity building on content-related issues. Negotiation and mediation training or problem-solving workshops will be useful, but the organisations also often need management, planning and communication skills. Further, the transformative process that the organisations are meant to encourage often needs to start within the

⁸ Parlevliet (2011) with a view to the state’s role in human rights and conflict transformation, argues for a differentiation of state capacity in ability (concerning technical skills) and willingness (concerning values and culture).

infrastructure itself: accompanied organisational development processes may be necessary in many peace infrastructures in order to come to terms with the effects of the violent conflict on their own organisation and its staff, as experiences in Sri Lanka show (Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies 2008; Hopp-Nishanka forthcoming).

3. Support needs to recognise its unintended consequences and safeguard the legitimacy of peace infrastructures

Problems with legitimacy may arise if external supporters take the lead in ushering their internal counterparts towards desired solutions. Not only might the peace infrastructure lack ownership, but the assistance might also cause harm if appearing biased towards one of the conflict parties. International (often western) approaches to establishing peace infrastructure might result in importing particular cultures of peace, memory and reconciliation into a context in which they are foreign. And very practical issues might arise as well: the Palestine Negotiation Support Unit faced resentment when local stakeholders found the facilities and salaries of the organisation's senior staff inappropriate (Milne/Black 2011).

Beyond capacity building, two other organisational ingredients appear necessary for establishing effective peace infrastructures: leadership and institutional integrity.

The personalities of political leaders and senior staff matter crucially. Illustrative examples include the Central American heads of state (Oscar Arias in particular) who shaped the Esquipulas process, and the heads of the peace secretariats in the 2002 Sri Lankan peace process. Individual leaders form and inform the infrastructures that they head (Hopp-Nishanka forthcoming). The question is how can the "right people" be brought into the job, and who can identify them?

Very often, the nominations for leading administrative staff in political processes are politicised and follow agendas other than that of driving peaceful change processes. Internationally-assisted leadership development programmes like the ones in Burundi and Timor Leste may be an effective way to engage and indeed transform those leaders (Odendaal 2011).

Another option concerns the recruitment of "insider mediators" as leaders. If they bring with them a personal commitment to peacebuilding, international experience, good connections with civil society and a reputation for neutrality or multi-partiality, they could be the right choice for the job. On the other hand, it could be argued that they should stay on the outside in order to maintain their independence and serve the infrastructure as facilitators.

Personal leadership alone is not sufficient. Research on the role of leadership in change and development processes points to the need for "institutional integrity". Such institutional integrity occurs when "the institutional arrangements sustain the integrity of its personnel and its processes and – crucially – when the personnel and processes sustain the institutions because they perceive it to be both legitimate and effective" (Leftwich 2009). In other words, in order to be effective, leaders with transformative skills require a demand for their contribution in an organisational landscape often informed by violence, abuse of power, and patronage.

4.5 Social Media

The final aspect to be discussed here concerns the use of social media for peace infrastructures and its potential to overcome some of the limitations and challenges discussed above. Social media technologies appear to be widely used in many of the recently developed peace infrastructures around the world, although their use has barely begun to be discussed.

Information technology is often applied in preventing and responding to crises. Government agencies and civil society, for example, collaborate and collect early warning data and provide crisis mapping through crowd sourcing (McConnell/Tsuma 2011). NGOs and local peace councils send violence alerts via

Twitter. This mobilises local information and helps prepare crisis interventions, as the relatively peaceful conduct of the national referendum in Kenya in 2010 illustrates (IRIN 2010a). These activities improve conflict analysis and monitoring systems but in addition add a new dimension of public participation and ownership to the society's response to violence.

Some organisations use the Internet in order to share information, viewpoints and invite dialogue. For example, peace secretariats increase outreach and public participation via Facebook; Track 1.5 initiatives facilitate web-based dialogue among stakeholders; and some organisations communicate within interest-based communities through Internet platforms and discussion groups.

While examples around the world are many, their effectiveness is not always clear (Stauffacher et al. 2011; Timberman 2007). Does the use of social media really help increase public participation and overcome marginalisation? Does it create new lines of exclusion? In what ways are contributions from innumerable individual commentators processed, what gets lost, and who decides?

Sometimes the adoption of these technologies might simply follow a common trend regardless of their appropriateness or the requirements for their maintenance. Understanding the effectiveness of different social media tools is crucial.

It is also important to understand the wider picture. How will the global trends towards web-based, virtual interaction affect traditional, physical organisations and face-to-face interaction in dialogue and problem solving? Will Lederach's original "house of peace", which he described in his thoughts on peace infrastructure (1997), also find a virtual address, and what will the "house of peace 2.0" look like?

A core theme of the five areas outlined above is power and the willingness to engage in transformative processes. While peace infrastructures seem to offer great potential, they are also at risk of being manipulated and face substantial limitations when transformative processes are blocked by those who monopolise power. If these blocking actors hold government offices, infrastructures with strong administrative elements appear particularly vulnerable and weak. The same holds true if non-state actors who oppose peaceful change dominate infrastructures. In the worst case, this can turn peace infrastructures into their opposite and contribute to further marginalisation and violence.

This assessment, however, should not discourage an open debate. There is a potential for peace infrastructures to serve as an address for peace, but they have to be built and maintained carefully. If they are, their contribution can be twofold: their organisational elements can serve as agents of change; and as infrastructure they can provide enabling conditions for other change agents.

5 Instead of a Conclusion: An Invitation for Further Discussion

In this article, I have attempted to delineate a nascent concept. While some might argue that different kinds of peace infrastructure and their very diverse organisational manifestations are not homologous, I have outlined a set of common features and challenges that are worth exploring further.

At the same time, I would reiterate that peace infrastructures do not include all organisations involved in conflict management, settlement and transformation that can be found in a given organisational landscape or conflict setting. There will be diverse sets of international and domestic actors, faith-based organisations, academic institutions, social movements, NGOs and other civil society organisations – all with an important role to play – but they do not necessarily need to be part of the peace infrastructure. On the contrary, some of them will have to stay outside of it in order to play a more critical role, serving as a

corrective and warning voice when necessary. As discussed above, some peace infrastructures might find it difficult to engage opposing groups in peace processes, especially if some of the opposition may come from those very actors that serve as their principals and control them. In such instances, the wider landscape of peace actors will be indispensable for helping it to work.

Establishing a peace infrastructure is of course a long-term political process; Odendaal (2011, 26) notes that “the process to establish an infrastructure in Ghana took 8 years (2003-2011) and is not yet complete. The establishment of such infrastructures should not take place on the basis of hasty, superficial considerations. Its specific design should follow the contours of the country and not that of a template developed elsewhere. Joint political ownership is critical. It is, in other words, a process that must be home-grown, but that will benefit from learning from experiences elsewhere”.

The dilemmas, questions and challenges raised here point to a vast agenda for such “learning from experiences elsewhere”. This learning should consider the situational context as well as the functional and organisational characteristics of the peace infrastructure.

A starting point is the analysis of peace infrastructures along the five characteristics set out here (domestic foundation, timing, organisational integration, inclusion, and functions). Of particular interest would be a differentiation along functional purposes (capacity building and consultation, communication and facilitation, implementation and monitoring) and along organisational aspects (e.g. governance, levels of inclusiveness and stakeholder participation, composition of staff). This would lead to a deeper understanding of specific infrastructure elements such as truth commissions, memorial sites or domestic monitoring missions and in turn be helpful in further exploring differences and commonalities among different infrastructure elements.

Also required is a differentiation of the situational contexts of peace infrastructure: what are its contributions in contexts as varied as tensions and violence in election processes, peace negotiations, revolutionary moments, or times of reconciliation and healing? How does it operate in the context of fragile states and other less conducive environments?

Our understanding of peace infrastructures and their value for peacebuilding and conflict transformation is still at a very early stage. Considering the experiences and their potential, it is worthwhile taking a closer look.

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