Authors and Abstracts

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Swisspeace

Complexity-Oriented MEAL and Conflict Sensitivity: Learning from Complex Programs in Fragile Contexts

The paper elucidates the intersection of Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) approaches with conflict sensitivity. The use of both adaptive and conflict sensitive approaches in complex programs is based on iterative systematic learning with the aim to drive programmatic adaptation at different levels. These approaches want implementers to timely identify unintended negative effects of their interventions, to capitalize on positive gains, and thereby to contribute to sustainable peace and social cohesion, while making sure that their interventions remain relevant and conflict sensitive. While the two approaches are deemed to be complementary, the issue has only attracted little scientific interest. The paper aims to fill this gap. It introduces methodologies and tools which allow to maximize the gains from organizational learning through using complexity-oriented MEAL systems. It links evidence from publications with implementation experience of Swisspeace to assess how these approaches have by now co-existed and which measures could improve their complementarity. The paper aspires at being instrumental to develop a broader research agenda on the use of adaptive approaches in peace operations and aid in conflict by investigating how success and failure are defined and 'measured' in this framework and how their use affects existing accountability routines.

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Conflict, Complexity and Cooperation

This article explores the thesis that we are at a time of historical inflection and suggests what next steps might look like. The change in the seat of authority from the sixteenth century onwards with the replacement of political and religious hierarchies by participatory democracy and Enlightenment philosophies based on rationalism has seen a remarkable period of progress in science, technology, education, medicine, governance, trade, economics and the rule of law. However, the twenty-first century has ushered in a series of reversals for liberal democracy, the fraying of the international rules-based order that emerged after the two world wars and a collapse of public confidence in the institutions and methods based on the rationalist approach. The article suggests not only that the old forms are dissolving and that the time has come for the emergence of a new paradigm, but also proposes that three developments may point towards the next evolutionary way-station – the emergence of complexity science, the appreciation that our emotions are a positive evolutionary advantage rather than a flaw to be overcome, and a focus on the significance of relationships rather than simply on individuals themselves.

Lance Bradley
University of Tartu

De-Facto Statehood and its Impact on Post-Conflict Rebuilding in the Donbas

The war in the Donbas has been described as a complex system of conflict (Åtland 2020; *inter alia*), a fact which complicates the rebuilding of state and nation in the affected territories. In (post-)conflict situations and de-facto states, the effectiveness of rebuilding physical infrastructure and healing societal wounds vary depending on regime types in observed territories. With a holistic understanding of rebuilding, this paper analyzes how common attributes observed by de-facto states (cf. Markedonov 2015; Ó Beacháin, Comai, & Tsurtsumia-Zurabashvili 2015; Blakkisrud & Kolstø 2011 & 2012) lead to different outcomes in the effectiveness of post-conflict rebuilding, of both infrastructure and of societal "fabric", using the Donbas as a case study. For this purpose, the outcomes of rebuilding efforts in the de-facto "People's Republics" are compared with rebuilding in the territory under Ukrainian control. Then, the central analysis will determine which features of de-facto statehood have an impact on variance in rebuilding effectiveness by use of process tracing. This paper will primarily add to de-facto state research and constitutes the first holistic analysis of the effects de-facto statehood has on post-conflict rebuilding. This is vital to understand, as de-facto states almost always manifest as a consequence of conflict. Plans are already in place to replicate this study, if successful, with reference to other post-conflict de-facto states, i.e. Abkhazia, Transnistria, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Emery Brusset
Social Terrain

Is Ethnographic Attribution Possible? A Possible Way to Apply Evaluation to Community Dialogue

Negotiation, mediation and support to dialogue processes are at the vanishing point of most monitoring and evaluation methods. It has proven particularly challenging for analysts to propose a way of designing for, assessing and finally recognising impact. There are many factors involved in the evolution of a dialogue process, and the definition of an ideal 'end state' is contested. Complexity thinking is a paradigm that seems to offer the most promise. The presentation and paper will start by analysing those methods and paradigms that monitoring and evaluation specialists use, identifying the issues and weaknesses they face, and then highlighting the avenues for progress that complexity offers – in particular the importance of ethnographic approaches, the possibility of combining qualitative and quantitative scoring. The presentation and paper will then outline the optimal ways in which to reframe monitoring and evaluation of negotiation and support to dialogue in conflict environments. This will be firmly anchored in the framework of complexity thinking, dealing appropriately with the absence of borders, the phenomena of emergence and limited information. This work will be informed by the experience gained in the field by the author, and also by the growing body of knowledge that is operationalising complexity in impact evaluation.

Cedric de Coning
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Adaptive Mediation: Leveraging Knowledge Sharing to Make and Sustain Peace

Conflicts can be transformed when the flow of information among competing knowledge systems leads to the emergence of a shared understanding of a common problem-set, as well as a new shared vision of what to do about resolving it. Adaptive mediation is a process that helps the parties to a conflict recognize that their knowledge systems are entangled and facilitates the process of bringing them together to form a shared knowledge eco-system. In this context, knowledge systems are sets of beliefs, values and understandings that amount to a shared world view among a community, society, or identity group, and a knowledge ecosystem is a community of interacting knowledge systems in a shared environment, for instance a country or region affected by conflict. The resilience of these ecosystems depends on the amount of information they can process and the degree to which decision-making, information processing and other functions are dispersed across the system's circuitry. Agreements reached through a self-organising adaptive mediation process are likely to be more resilient because ownership and commitment are distributed among the parties that have co-created the knowledge ecosystem, and they therefore have a shared interest in sustaining it.

Stephen Gray
Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, and Adapt Peacebuilding

Power Dynamics in Peacebuilding Relationality: Vertical Integration and the Network View in Myanmar

The consensus underpinning international cooperation to resolve conflict in foreign contexts has weakened, calling for fresh perspectives on how the diverse interests and strategies of international and local actors can or should combine in efforts to build peace. The proposed research aims to advance understanding on so-called 'vertical integration' of these global to local relationships in peacebuilding. Vertical integration refers to means by which discrete peacebuilding initiatives (and their effects) interact in a purported hierarchy of local, national, and international layers. Coherent vertical integration has been explicitly (and often implicitly) linked with the cumulative success of a society's peaceful transition, but the concept lacks theoretical formulation and empirical support. In particular, there is insufficient understanding of how 'power' is distributed among local to global actors and processes. Additionally, approaches consistent with complexity theory (and peacebuilding practice itself) point to various relational dimensions in addition to a hypothetical 'verticality' that should be relevant to the phenomena and consequences of intra or inter societal relationships in peacebuilding. The proposed research would develop a novel theoretical framework of peacebuilding relationships based upon complexity theory, and apply it to the case of multi-stakeholder peacebuilding interventions in Myanmar from 2010-20. The proposed research will allow for the interaction of peacebuilding initiatives to be elucidated by further examples that speak to the complex multi-dimensionality of work in conflict settings.

Megan Greeley
Trinity College Dublin

Examining the 'How' of Adaptive Peacebuilding Praxis from a Postcolonial Indigenous Research Paradigm

As part of the complexity-informed approach to building and sustaining peace, adaptive peacebuilding focuses on the interactive process of experimentation, learning and adaptation

led by communities who are self-organizing (de Coning, 2018). However, the organizational framing, meta-learning and teaching methods, and ways of analyzing used within the conception of adaptive peacebuilding have not been sufficiently interrogated. They often unintentionally mirror the hierarchical dyadic nature of the mentor-I model, which reinforces international/national-local power imbalances, perpetuates siloed ways of creating and sharing knowledge, and reinforces the overall dominance of Eurocentric conceptions of liberal peace (i.e. free market economy, rule of law, constitutional democracy, and promotion of individual human rights) (Campbell, Chandler, & Sabaratnam, 2011; Sabaratnam, 2013; Autesserre, 2014, 2016). Using a post-colonial indigenous research paradigm (Chilisa 2012), this paper examines the methods of learning and relationship building within existing adaptive peacebuilding praxis and explores how high quality connections and different conceptions of analyzing can allow for mutual growth, reciprocal learning and systemic power. This paper builds on the researcher's ten years of experience working in Sudan and South Sudan, with the last seven years centered on multi-sectoral community peacebuilding processes in the active warzone of Nuba Mountains in Sudan without UN presence

Roger Mac Ginty
Durham University

Quantum Peace and Conflict

This paper draws on complexity theory and specifically some ideas from quantum mechanics to try to conceptualise simultaneity – or different processes occurring in the same space at the same time. One can imagine, for example, peacefulness co-existing with conflict in the sense of one area of a country being unaffected by violent conflict while another area is unaffected. Both strands contribute to the whole, yet each seems – on the surface at least – unconnected. Sri Lanka in the 1990s provides a good example, or the juxtaposition of the Israeli beach resort of Ashkelon to the Gaza – a mere 13km. Ideas from physics may assist with this conceptualisation and the paper will seek to advance interdisciplinarity beyond the usual social science suspects. In particular, the paper will explore a series of non-classical ideas from physics that might help us think anew about boundaries, binaries and the operation of peaceandconflict assemblages. It is hoped that the paper will draw on existing work on complex systems and non-linearity and so contribute to the conceptual scoping required to construct more accurate notions of peaceandconflict.

Czeslaw Mesjasz
Cracow University of Economics

The Ideas of Complex Systems in the Works of Leading Scholars in Peace and Conflict Studies

The origins of peace and conflict studies in the 1960s and the 1970s coincided with the beginnings and rise of cybernetics and systems approach/systems thinking (the links between both areas have to be explained). The "Founding Fathers" of peace research – Kenneth Boulding and Anatol Rapoport, were also engaged in creating the systems research. Other influential scholars should also be mentioned – Harold Guetzkow, Walter Isard, and Paul Smoker. For all these and other scholars, systems research/approach, including the studies of complex systems, constituted an essential foundation for their research on peace and conflict.

The contribution of eminent scholars in IR linking complex systems studies with IR should also be mentioned – James Rosenau, Robert Jervis, and others. The revival of interest in complexity science in peace studies and other areas of IR can be observed recently. Therefore it is necessary to recall the contribution of these and other influential scholars. The aim of the paper is to present a systematic survey of the contribution of leading scholars in peace and conflict studies and in IR to the development of those areas of research achieved thanks to applications of the systems approach and complex systems in particular. The paper can be helpful in broadening the perspective of current applications of various ideas of complexity science in peace studies. It concerns theoretical research, empirical research, and modeling built with the different simulation models, e.g., Complex Adaptive Systems.

Gearoid Millar
University of Aberdeen

Escaping Conflict Systems: Peace Processes, Peacebuilding, and the Promise of Adjacent Attractors

Recent peacebuilding literature has recognized the value of insights from complexity theory for conceptualizing conflict and peace dynamics. Concepts such as non-linearity, feedback, self-organization, and emergence have helped peace scholars understand both peace and conflict as complex adaptive systems with many different elements interacting and exchanging information. This work connects to, feeds from, and complements many different studies, findings, approaches and perspectives that have emerged in the field over the past 20 years while also opening up new avenues for theory, policy and practice. However, complex adaptive systems are, by their nature, not easily understood nor clearly influenced. As such, this new paradigm can be quite alienating and intimidating. How do we, as peace scholars or practitioners, work to undermine conflict systems or build peace systems when both are complex? While scholars have recently proposed different approaches based largely on iterative and 'adaptive' approaches (see de Coning 2018), this paper suggests that such an approach could benefit from incorporating mechanisms that allow long-term vision and strategic systems thinking. Attractor states are suggested as a means to facilitate this, and particularly the analysis of complex conflict systems allowing for the identification of 'adjacent attractors' with the potential to guide peace work.

Lara Olson
University of Calgary and University of Oxford

Getting Peacebuilding Beyond the Linear at the Operational Level

The problems with top down, linear, and static policies for liberal peacebuilding efforts have long been demonstrated by practitioner learning projects and scholarship. Yet despite major reforms, the operational modalities of peacebuilding aid donors remain driven by stubbornly linear notions of causality enforced by results-based management approaches and ever more elaborate log frames and evaluation frameworks. This underlying linear operational culture has been only strengthened by demands for greater aid accountability and enhanced strategic planning. For the international machinery of peacebuilding to actually transition to more complexity-informed ways of working, much is needed: fundamental conceptual shifts, changed institutional incentives and matching operational tools. User-friendly coordination

processes and analytical tools that frame war to peace transitions as complex adaptive systems shaped through the constant interaction of external and internal factors are key. Complex systems mapping can support local and international actors to create common conceptual understandings, together track emerging dynamics and define promising 'nudges' with potential to shift the dynamics of the system as a whole to foster more virtuous cycles. Such operational processes could enhance the power of local actors in international aid partnerships and interrupt the political and bureaucratic imperatives of international actors that perpetuate linear peacebuilding "recipes".

Aviva Silburt
University of Waterloo

Complex Systems Theory as a Tool to Navigate Peacebuilding Challenges in Research and Practice: Experience from Mining Conflicts in Guatemala

My research examines the operations of foreign-owned mining companies in peacebuilding contexts, using Guatemala as a case study. After peace accords were signed in 1996 ending a 36-year civil war, foreign investment in the extractives sector was encouraged with the belief that the economic contribution would support peacebuilding. Instead, it has only fuelled conflict and reinforced the underlying issues that led to the civil war in the first place. Though most people do not associate Guatemala's contemporary extractives sector conflicts with broader peacebuilding challenges, a research approach based on complex systems theory has helped to establish these linkages in ways that resonate with a diverse range of audiences. Beyond the analytical utility of a complex systems approach, it has also been useful for engaging a diverse range of participants in the research, integrating their (often conflicting) perspectives, for identifying practical recommendations to address both immediate (extractives sector) and longstanding (peacebuilding) issues in Guatemala, and for initiating dialogue on those challenges. In this paper, I outline the conceptual and methodological approach that formed the foundation of this research and how the approach was useful both research and practice.

Eric Tanguay & Jinelle Piereder
Balsillie School of International Affairs

Much Ado About Nothing? The Instrumentalization of Complexity and Local Ownership Rhetoric in Peacebuilding

Conventional international peacebuilding has entered a period of crisis. Given the limitations of orthodox strategies—premised on building democratic and free-market institutions—peacebuilding organizations have recently embraced concepts drawn from complexity science and local ownership discourses in search of a 'post-liberal' approach to promoting sustainable peace. In the UN's "sustaining peace" concept, fragile and conflict-affected contexts are increasingly understood as complex adaptive social systems characterized by uncertainty, nonlinearity, and emergence, which are unsuited to mechanistic and hierarchical interventions. The goal of peacebuilding has thus ostensibly shifted away from achieving a predetermined end-state towards identifying and supporting local-level capacities for peace and social cohesion. While we celebrate this widening of the field, we are concerned by the prevalence of only partial engagement with the complexity paradigm and loose interpretations of "ownership." Based on fieldwork conducted in Ghana in 2018-2019, we argue that, despite

its progressive rhetoric, the UN's commitment to the principles of resilience and local ownership remain superficial in practice. To address these concerns, we (1) consider what a genuinely "complex adaptive" peacebuilding might look like, (2) trace the implications of such an approach for institutional arrangements, and (3) consider its (in)commensurability with normative commitments around accountability and democratic oversight.

Sayra van den Berg
University of St Andrews

Walt Kilroy
Dublin City University

Using Systems Thinking to Understand the Interaction between Transitional Justice and the Reintegration of Ex-Combatants.

The need to take a holistic, integrated approach to peacebuilding and preventing the recurrence of armed conflict has long been recognised. The challenges are of course considerable, given the many actors and stakeholders, operating at so many levels on an open-ended timeframe. More recently, complexity theory has advanced the analysis, making it possible to conceptualise the kind of interactions, feedback loops, and dynamics involved in the causal processes. Two elements which can have a significant bearing on each other are the reintegration of ex-combatants and transitional justice. While these are in themselves multi-dimensional, they interact with each other in ways which can be mutually reinforcing, or they can undermine each other. There are both synergies and tensions: reintegration efforts and transitional justice measures share the same long-term aims of peace and trust-building and both require wider community buy-in to achieve them. Conversely, communities may feel that ex-combatants who preyed on them have been "rewarded" by a reintegration programme, affecting later efforts at accountability or restoring relationships. While the timeframes for reintegration and transitional justice are often different, the perceptions and expectations raised can extend well beyond the lifetime of particular initiative. There is a limited amount of research on the difficult but fascinating interplay between reintegration and transitional justice initiatives. This paper aims to apply the insights from complexity theory to the question of how ex-combatant reintegration and restorative transitional justice efforts interact, in order to understand better the dynamics involved. It draws on recent data from Sierra Leone, as well as referring back to earlier studies of reintegration. It aims to test the usefulness of systems thinking, and to conceptualise the complex causal processes at work within a wider and ongoing peacebuilding project. The question has implications for theory, future research, and practice.

Olga Vorkunova
Moscow State Linguistic University

Dialogue, Understanding and Misunderstanding: Peacebuilding and Complex Identity in the Trinity Sea System

The main aim of this study is to analyze the societal and cultural transformations that occur in the context of processes of regional integration in the Black Sea – Mediterranean – Caspian Sea ("The Trinity Sea System") space. The peacebuilding efforts achieved through UfM, BSEC, the NGOs Caucasian Forum provide a particularly good opportunity to observe and explore the ways in which such processes affect the development of regional identity. The intention is not only to present research findings, since the whole process is in its infancy and as yet little studied, but also to ask new questions and pursue fresh lines of inquiry which will be central to

the task of study and research. Thus peacebuilding in the Trinity Sea System by its very existence, is beginning to operate as a new arena or framework for activities – dialogues, exchanges, contacts and conflicts – between various actors and agents. This complex framework is having a paradoxical effect: as an attempt is made to produce a new collective "us" which is regional in scope, national "partial" identities, arising from differences between "us" and "them", are reaffirmed. Although the idea of complex identity and peacebuilding was originally developed in relation to peace research, political theory and international relations, it is equally applicable to geography and sociology. New violent conflicts in the Trinity Sea System – Nagorno Karabakh, Eastern Ukraine, the Middle East explosion, confrontation between Greece and Turkey around Northern Cyprus – involved a combination of internal and external political factors, and mutual influence of different nations. It seems that complexity approach has both academic and practical importance in the investigation of relevant phenomena in a way that will enable to meet these dangers.

David Wilkinson
University of California, Los Angeles

The Complexity of Wars and the "Nuclear Peace"

It is proposed to seek a research grant to investigate the question of whether the so-called "nuclear peace," argued to have restricted the magnitude (total death toll) of post-1945 wars, may also have affected the "complexity" of those wars. A "complex" war herein is understood to mean a war containing more than one pair of group-actors. Complexity of wars can thus be quantified. The prior work of L.F. Richardson (1946, 1960, references to be supplied) has quantified the complexity of wars ending in the years from 1820 to 1939 (on some measures) and 1820 to 1952 (on other measures). A theoretical explanation consistent with Richardson's data emerged through his testing of thirteen alternative "theories." It is proposed to create several new datasets for wars, not in Richardson's list, ended in years 1953 to 2020 inclusive. Three independent data collections exist that together cover this period: Correlates of War, Peace Research Institute Oslo, and Wikipedia. It is proposed that three independent research teams, at separate global sites, each apply Richardson's data-collection protocols to create three separate complexity-of-wars datasets, and then at three different sites to examine the fit of Richardson's theoretical explanation of the pattern of the pre-nuclear era. Newer theories, reflecting the notions of the nuclear peace as developed qualitatively by K. Waltz ("The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More may be better," 1981) will be tested by comparison. It is hoped that the conclusion of the project will be an evidenced, peer-reviewable, and publishable assertion either that

(a) the "nuclear peace" cannot be seen to have affected the complexity of wars, or that

(b) the new data are more consistent with a new theory that a different pattern of war complexity holds for the nuclear than for the pre-nuclear era.