

‘Be Prepared’ for Peace

The Global Scouting Movement’s Discourse
on Youth Agency in Peacebuilding

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FKVK02

Spring 2022

Abstract

Perspectives on the role of children and young people in peacebuilding often overlook youth agency. However, the growth of critical theories in peace and conflict studies in the later decades has shone a new light on the need to acknowledge youth as parties to peacebuilding. Through a lens of peace education, this paper analyzes the discourse on youth agency in the context of the largest youth movement in the world, the global scouting movement. The theoretical framework posits that in order for peace education to enable youth agency, it needs to facilitate redistribution, representation, recognition, and reconciliation. The result shows, based on documentation from the 42nd World Scout Conference, that the global scouting movement has constructed a strong discursive link between youth and agency in peacebuilding. It has done so through educational ventures which are aligned with all of the approaches which peace education typically takes; socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural approaches. However, the scouting movement's discourse also places certain constraints on youth agency by linking youth to dependency, inherent peacefulness, and generalized interests and experiences.

Keywords: youth agency, peace education, peacebuilding, discourse analysis, scouting

Word count: 9 909

Contents

1 Introduction	3
1.1 Purpose	3
1.2 Research question	4
2 Literature review	5
2.1 Bottom-up peace	5
2.2 Youth agency	6
2.3 Scouting as a case study	7
3 Theory	8
3.1 Peace education and youth agency	8
3.2 Discourse analysis	10
3.2.1 Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory	10
4 Method	12
4.1 Discourse theory	12
4.2 Conceptualization, operationalization, and delimitation	13
4.2.1 The global scouting movement	13
4.2.2 Peacebuilding	14
4.2.3 Youth agency	15
4.3 Material	16
5 Empirical Analysis	18
5.1 Socio-economic approaches	18
5.2 Socio-political approaches	20
5.3 Socio-cultural approaches	21
6 Discussion	24
7 Conclusions	28
8 Bibliography	29
8.1 Books and articles	29
8.2 WOSM material	31

1 Introduction

Youth are often seen as people-to-be, rather than as people in their own right, with their own interests, experiences, and agency (Jonstoj 2011, 20). This is often as true in the field of peace and conflict as it is in other aspects of society (Del Felice & Wisler 2007; McEvoy-Levy 2001). However, if the roles of youth in society are overlooked and reduced, then that arguably inhibits our possibilities of understanding what kind of future is being created for these people-to-be, and which part they play in creating it. My area of interest for this paper is therefore to understand how children and young people are regarded in relation to peacebuilding. To do so, I have turned to the largest youth movement in the world.

The global movement today known as scouting started with one man and a small group of boys in the United Kingdom in 1907. The founder of the movement, Robert Baden-Powell, was a lieutenant in the British army. While stationed in British India in the late 19th century, he noticed what he considered to be a lack of training among the men under his command. To address this issue, Baden-Powell instituted what became known as “Scout Training” for his men. From there, the idea evolved to train young boys using the methods of Scout Training during times of peace. Thus, a movement was born (Scheidlinger 1948, 740).

Since then, scouting has expanded across the world during the past 115 years. The present day scouting movement has peacebuilding as one of its core tenets, with the goal of enabling young people to engage in promoting peace through education, community service, and cross-cultural connections. The modern scouting movement emphasizes the “Scout Movement’s promise to peace through its responsibility as the world’s leading educational youth movement”, and “that peace is an ongoing process of building inclusive societies, which requires constant effort and attention, and that the Scout Movement plays an important role in strengthening young people as peacebuilders in their communities” (WSC 2021: 2, 7).

1.1 Purpose

Based on this background, the global scouting movement constitutes a rather unique context for my research objectives. Scouting is the biggest youth movement in the world (Guy-Allen 2015), and few other organizations that primarily involve children have a comparable level of shared values across such significant geographical and cultural scope. The contemporary global scouting movement is therefore ideal for the purpose of exploring the modern day discursive relationship between youth and peacebuilding in a way that can have wider implications for the field of peace research. With this paper, I strive to

provide an understanding of to which extent and in which ways children and young people are considered agents in peacebuilding.

1.2 Research question

To which extent are youth considered agents in peacebuilding in the contemporary discourse of the global scouting movement?

2 Literature review

Previous research has brought grassroots actors into the scope of peacebuilding agents. Such perspectives now form a distinct part of the field of critical, bottom-up approaches to peace, a field within which this paper has its theoretical starting point. Such research has also laid the groundwork for considering the global scouting movement a legitimate peace actor, and a subject worthy of scholarly attention within the field of peace and conflict studies. Furthermore, other disciplines have highlighted the relevance of the scouting movement as a case study. The following is an outline of these schools of previous research.

2.1 Bottom-up peace

There is already a vast body of research on the topic of peacebuilding discourse, as well as how it has changed over time. Particularly with the growth of critical approaches to the field of peace and conflict in the latest decades, the attention of the field has increasingly shifted toward acknowledging how grassroots actors contribute to shaping peace processes. Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond are prominent amongst the scholars that have identified a so-called local turn in peacebuilding around the turn of the 21st century. The local turn describes a critical response to the hegemony of liberal peace ideals, one that gives new attention and primacy to locally based agents in peace processes rather than to Western liberal states, elites, and institutions. This local agency can take the shape of “small-scale mobilization for peace in practical terms, in the context of everyday life and of the state” (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 770). Much of such local mobilization initiatives are closely tied to theories of conflict transformation, often seeking to address the antagonistic relationships that are at the root of conflict. In short, the local turn does not consider elite-level peacemaking sufficient, but instead “drills down to address the identities, attitudes and education systems that underpin conflict” (ibid., 771).

This emphasis on conflict transformation is shared by many critical scholars, amongst whom John Paul Lederach has been a pioneer in the development of tools that aim to address conflict transformation at the local level. His work focuses on facilitating intergroup contact and making space for civil society in order to foster peace. Lederach takes the same social constructionist view of peace and conflict that many bottom-up peace scholars do and considers meaning and knowledge to be socially constructed through the perceptions and interpretations that people share when interacting with each other (Lederach 1995).

Based on previous studies it can thus be established that grassroots movements and locally based civil society actors are legitimate forces that should be

acknowledged in peace research. Additionally, understanding the ways identities, knowledge, values, and meaning are constructed among such actors is likewise an important aspect of furthering peace research. These indicators have paved the way for the study at hand, which focuses on the discursive construction of meaning in a peace oriented grassroots movement.

2.2 Youth agency

The above are the central tenets supporting my research, yet there is what I consider to be a significant gap in the previous approaches to bottom-up peace: they have almost exclusively focused on adults. Adulthood seems to be a default prerequisite to being considered an actor, and one might gather from the existing body of social constructionist peace research that it is only how adults conceive of and socially construct matters of peace and conflict that is of any importance. It is not my intention to disprove or delegitimize any of this research, but rather to contribute to the growing body of research that focuses on the roles of children and young people.

Many previous approaches to researching the roles of youth in peace and conflict have highlighted how children and young people in war are at risk of being “subjected to forced labour, recruitment into armies or militias, and child prostitution”, and that many are “displaced, separated from their families, or orphaned, and must undertake a long, painstaking processes to rebuild their lives after war” (Del Felice and Wisler 2007, 8). Other approaches have emphasized that children raised in a culture of violence are likely to engage in violent conflict, and there has been extensive research on young people’s participation in war (ibid., 10-12). These areas of research have produced a common conception of children and young people that categorizes them into a binary of victim or perpetrator in relation to violence, with little regard for how they can and do actively contribute to peace at all levels of society (Cardozo et al. 2015, 6).

In later decades, an increasing amount of attention has been paid to the importance of integrating youth in peacebuilding efforts (Del Felice and Wisler 2007; McEvoy-Levy 2001, 32). In fact, young people have been argued to be “epitomizing grassroots change” as they “have less of an interest vested in the status quo than adults and thus have the greatest incentive to push for change” (Helsing et al. 2006 as cited in Cardozo et al. 2015, 36). The following study builds on the normative assumption established in these previous research approaches: that children and young people can and should have agency in peacebuilding processes. If youth are key to the long-term success of peacebuilding efforts (Del Felice and Wisler 2007, 24), and if they have the greatest incentive to push for change (Helsing et al. 2006 as cited in Cardozo et al. 2015, 36), then the way that children and young people’s agency is conceived of

in peacebuilding contexts should be considered an important precondition for the possibility of building sustainable peace.

2.3 Scouting as a case study

The choice of the global scouting movement as a case study rests on the notions gleaned from previous research on bottom-up peace; that agency in and influence over processes of peace and conflict resides not only with states, political power holders, international institutions, and the like, but also with normal people. The choice of case is also based on the argument that there is a need for more research on how children and young people can and do contribute to peacebuilding. The global scouting movement spans both of these areas of interest, being a grassroots movement that works largely in local contexts and primarily engages youth.

Considering the global scouting movement as a subject worthy of analysis has not previously occurred in the field of peace and conflict in a significant way. However, it would be amiss to think that the movement has not been present in the international arena. Since its earliest days, there has been a substantial amount of collaboration between the United Nations (UN) and the scouting movement, which has today become a network of partnerships (WOSM 2022: 4). Moreover, using scouting as a case study for academic research is not completely novel. Some previous studies have analyzed scouting in relation to, for example: forming national identity (Auerbach 2019), as a source of wartime labor during World War II (Lundberg 2016), as a site of internationalism and cross-cultural connection (Lundberg 2022), and as a citizen training venture (Lundberg 2018; Springhall 1987). These studies indicate ways in which the scouting movement can be considered relevant to the field of peace and conflict. Hence, this paper draws from and further expands upon this kind of research. Firstly, by considering the global scouting movement a legitimate grassroots movement with the power to facilitate youth agency in peacebuilding. Secondly, by analyzing how aspects of the global scouting movement such as citizen training and cross-cultural connection align with the methods of peace education and form a part of the discourse on youth agency in peacebuilding.

3 Theory

The question of if and how youth are considered peacebuilding agents follows the social constructionist logic that stipulates that the constitution of social reality is formed by our conceptions of it. According to Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), all of the many and diverse approaches to social constructionism share four basic premises: that no knowledge is objective, that there are no pre-given conditions that form social reality, that knowledge is created and maintained through social processes and interactions, and that the social construction of knowledge has practical consequences for how we act (5-6). This logic provides the theoretic context within which we can understand the purpose of discourse analysis. If social reality is constructed through how we perceive it and how we share our perceptions through social interaction, then language and the patterns in language use are necessary units of analysis in the quest to understand and explain social reality. This means that the result of the research question, to what extent youth are discursively represented as agents in peacebuilding, has implications for the extent to which children and young people are included in, and considered contributors to, peacebuilding efforts in practice.

Based on a social constructionist standpoint, this paper uses discourse analysis as a theoretical framework, and also as a methodological approach. I analyze the discourse on youth agency through a theoretical lens of peace education, which is the primary field of research that concerns itself with youth agency. In the following sections, I provide an outline of both the field of peace education and the field of discourse analysis, as well as their uses in relation to the topic of this paper.

3.1 Peace education and youth agency

Although children and young people have been generally overlooked as actors in peace and conflict studies, their relevance to peace processes is highlighted in the field of peace education. Peace education emerged as a field after World War II and seeks to dismantle all forms of violence by understanding and addressing their root causes. Bajaj (2016) defines peace education as:

All forms of educative endeavors (formal, non-formal, informal) aimed at:

- 1) the transforming of content, structure and pedagogy of education to address direct, structural, and cultural forms of violence
- 2) the creation of new ways of learning rooted in a comprehensive and holistic notion of peace.

The field employs both scholarly research and educational practice, grounded in critical theory and a bottom-up, localized approach. Peace education research is

most often concerned with schools and formal education, but is ultimately about humanizing education both in and out of schools. It posits that education can happen anywhere, and that roles like educator and learner are fluid and dependent on context and situation (Bajaj and Hantzopoulos 2016, 1-10). Scouting, which the founder, Robert Baden-Powell, in the movement's early days described as a "practical aid to education" that is "complementary to school training" (Baden-Powell 1908, 4), and which has then evolved to produce the explicit goal of strengthening youth as peacebuilders (WSC 2021: 2, 7), can therefore be seen as an arena for peace education.

Furthermore, peace education has been explored as a tool for facilitating youth agency in peacebuilding processes. This paper follows the theoretical framework used by the Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding, which contends that:

1. A sustainable approach to peacebuilding places more emphasis on social development and addresses underlying causes of conflict such as political, economic and social inequalities and injustices.
2. Education has a significant contribution to make to sustainable peacebuilding by contributing to greater security, as well as political, economic, social and cultural 'transformations' within conflict affected societies.
3. 'Transformation' is defined in terms of the extent to which education policies, individual and institutional agency, and development programmes promote redistribution, recognition, representation and reconciliation (Cardozo et al. 2014).

It is by concentrating on the 4 R's: redistribution, recognition, representation, and reconciliation, that peace education can facilitate youth agency in the forging of positive peace and social justice. More specifically, peace education should be concerned with:

- a) addressing economic disparities and unequal access to resources and opportunities (redistribution),
- b) acknowledging and respecting difference and diversity (recognition),
- c) fostering knowledge of and participation in society and in decision-making processes (representation), and
- d) promoting understanding of the injustices that underpin conflict (reconciliation) (ibid.).

By analyzing youth agency in relation to the 4 R's, children and young people can be understood as constituents of and contributors to current and future peace (Cardozo et al. 2015, 5). However, in order for educational interventions to be structured in a way that concentrates on the 4 R's in relation to children and young people, educators must be prepared to acknowledge that youth have agency. It is thus important to acknowledge how youth is talked about in peace education ventures. There needs to be a full understanding of how "discourse and ways of understanding youth agency are closely related to the way educational

interventions are developed and implemented” (ibid., 28), if those interventions are to enable children and young people to contribute to sustainable peace.

3.2 Discourse analysis

The theoretical roots of discourse analysis can be found in structuralism, and the temporal roots at the beginning of the 20th century. A core contribution to the foundations of the field has been attributed to the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who pioneered the idea of language being a system that is independent of the reality it aims to describe (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 9-10). According to Saussure, the meaning of linguistic signs (terms and expressions) is determined by our social understanding of the concepts they represent. Discourse analysis is the study of this process of attributing meaning to signs (Bergström and Boréus 2012, 365). Saussure’s structuralist ideas carried continued influence in the later emerging poststructuralist school of thought, which is alike structuralism in viewing language as an entity independent from reality, but unlike it in that it “rejects structuralism’s view of language as a stable, unchangeable and totalising structure” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 9-10). These principles have been carried forth into most later approaches to discourse analysis, but perhaps most clearly into Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s discourse theory, which is the theory that has arguably stayed the closest to the core of the poststructuralist field (ibid., 6).

3.2.1 Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory

The approach to discourse analysis formulated by Laclau and Mouffe, hereafter referred to as discourse theory, provides the theoretical foundation for this paper. Because of its closeness to poststructuralism, discourse theory maintains a clear emphasis on the variability in discourses, focused on what Laclau and Mouffe term discursive struggle. Key to discourse theory is that competing discourses are always at play, and thus a single discourse can never establish itself as the only one to structure social reality (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 30, 41).

In discourse theory, how we conceive of reality is relational. Laclau and Mouffe term the relational dynamic *chains of equivalence*. In such a chain, key signifiers of identity, concept, or space are discursively constituted by links that establish them as equivalent to other signifiers. For example, ‘man’ as a key signifier of identity, is typically linked to signifiers like ‘strength’ and ‘rationality’. ‘The West’ as a key signifier of space is typically linked to notions of ‘white people’ and ‘liberal democracy’ (ibid., 43, 50). Establishing chains of equivalence is part of the process through which a discourse becomes naturalized. Naturalization can be summarized as “a process of repeatedly establishing associations between different elements, so that these elements come to be seen as inherently or

necessarily connected and the meanings they produce come to seem natural, to be an accurate description of reality” (Weldes 1996, 285).

The idea of social reality being indistinguishable from its construction through discourse have been central to all approaches to discourse analysis since their earliest formulation. Foucault, one of the earliest thinkers of this school of thought, questioned whether it is at all possible to step outside of discourse when perceiving reality (Halperin and Heath 2012, 312). This conception has continued to varying degrees in later theories, but Laclau and Mouffe distinguish themselves by moving beyond pure linguistics. In discourse theory, Laclau and Mouffe do not distinguish between discursive and non-discursive actions. Their theory does acknowledge that there is a material reality, but there is no way to conceive of that reality other than through discourse. Therefore, discourse theory considers anything that ascribes meaning to reality in any way to be discursive, which can include actions, institutions, and social systems (Bergström and Boréus 2012, 357-359, 364; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 18-19). For the global scouting movement, this means that the movement’s programs, activities, and actions can also be considered a part of the movement’s discourse.

4 Method

This chapter moves on to explain how discourse analysis is applied as a methodological approach to analyze the discourse on youth agency through a lens of peace education. This includes an outline of the methods of discourse analysis, defining and operationalizing the concepts of “the global scouting movement”, “peacebuilding”, and “youth agency” as well as marking their delimitations, and describing the material selected for the discourse analysis.

4.1 Discourse theory

Method and theory are closely related when it comes to discourse analysis, and thus the specificities of the methodological approach in this paper build directly on the theoretical aspects of discourse theory.

The concept of discursive struggle in discourse theory is used to identify where there might be competing discourses on youth agency present in the scouting movement (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 30). The methodological tools employed in the analysis are therefore to identify the chains of equivalence in discourses on youth, where they differ, and to which extent a certain discourse becomes naturalized (Halperin and Heath 2012, 316). In Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory, the order of a discourse is grounded in a so-called floating signifier (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 148). A floating signifier has a “symbolic value zero” (Mehlman 1972, 23), meaning that it is the concept that competing discourses struggle to invest with conflicting meanings. The ambiguous content of a floating signifier places it at the center of the discursive struggle (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 28).

The following example illustrates the method of identifying discursive struggles and naturalization. Discourses on children in relation to politics often posit the child as a “human becoming” rather than a “human being” by linking the signifier ‘child’ to signifiers like ‘underdevelopment’, ‘victim’, and ‘passivity’. This is, in most cases, the naturalized discourse, the one which we treat as objective reality. In some cases, however, it competes with a discourse that links ‘child’ to ‘irresponsibility’, ‘need for validation’, and ‘culpability’ (Jonstoj 2011, 20). ‘Child’ can thus be seen as a floating signifier, the meaning of which opposing discourses struggle over. For this paper, the floating signifier of interest is ‘youth’, and the relevant discursive struggles are those that are centered on the meaning that ‘youth’ carries in a context of peacebuilding. As seen from previous research, conflicting discursive links have previously been made between ‘youth’ and ‘victim’, ‘youth’ and ‘perpetrator’, and ‘youth’ and ‘peacebuilding actor’. Highlighting discursive chains in this way is the method used in this paper to

discuss the meaning attributed to ‘youth’ in the global scouting movement’s discourse.

As noted above, in Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory, discourse is considered material (Bergström and Boréus 2012, 364; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 18-19). This understanding of discourse means that, in analyzing scouting as a social institution or social movement, attention should be paid to social practice as well as to linguistics. In my research this means that I analyze the language in the textual material, but I also interpret the meaning of the actions which the texts describe.

4.2 Conceptualization, operationalization, and delimitation

4.2.1 The global scouting movement

Scouting is unique as a case for many reasons. The scope of the movement, which makes it a complex subject of analysis, is at the same time the aspect which makes it most relevant as a subject.¹ As a movement, scouting consists of 172 National Scout Organizations (NSOs), and 72 additional countries and territories with non-official national organizations. In turn, the NSOs consist of a myriad of regional and local organizations, councils, and governing bodies (WOSM 2022: 1). It is only natural that within such a large and complicated structure, there should be a lot of internal variation and diversity. However, it is still bound together as a cohesive movement by a core of foundational ideas and values. In order to represent that cohesion and thus have a concrete representation of the movement as a global whole, I operationalize the global scouting movement by using the highest-level organizing body of the movement as the unit of analysis. This body is the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM).

WOSM grew from the earliest initiatives of global organization within the movement, with the first World Scout Conference (WSC) held during the first World Scout Jamboree in 1920, the founding of the Boy Scouts International Bureau (later becoming the World Scout Bureau) the same year, and the election of the first World Scout Committee in 1922 (WOSM 2022: 2). These forums coalesced to become WOSM and the three components, the Conference, the Bureau, and the Committee, constitute the main bodies of the organization to this day. Of these three, the WSC is the highest organ of decision making (WOSM 2020: 1, 8). The World Scout Conference has met every third (occasionally every

¹ The reader should be aware that I do not approach scouting as an outsider. Rather, my personal proximity to and knowledge of the movement is largely the basis of the case selection. I have been a scout since a young age and while I am currently not regularly active in scouting, I do consider myself a part of the movement. On the one hand, this may bias the analysis. On the other hand, critical theorists generally reject the fact that there is any such thing as unbiased research. In discourse analysis, it is especially hard for the researcher to separate themselves from the subject of analysis, because one is often in one way or another a party to that discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 21-22).

other) year since 1920, and is made up of delegations consisting of a maximum of six people from each of the member NSOs. The purpose of the conference is to “consider the policy and standards of the Scout Movement throughout the world, formulate the general policy of the World Organization, and take the action required to further the purpose of the Movement” (WOSM 2022: 3).

While WOSM does have an institutionalized structure and a governing objective, I have chosen to consider it less as a formal organization in itself and more as a representation of the wider scouting movement. The historical aspect is important to this definition, specifically that scouting was not founded in the form of a structured organization or institution but rather as an initiative for a training program which then spread organically and grew into a movement (WOSM 2022: 2). The founder himself, Robert Baden-Powell, said that “It is a movement, because it moves forward. As soon as it stops moving, it becomes an organisation and is no longer Scouting” (WSC 2021: 1). Moreover, WOSM itself recognizes its subservience to the movement. The organization's constitution states that its purpose is “(a) promoting unity and understanding of [the movement's] purpose and principles, (b) facilitating [the movement's] expansion and development, (c) maintaining [the movement's] specific character” (WOSM 2021, 8). Therefore, WOSM is primarily considered in this paper not as a global governing body of the scouting movement or as a centralized determinant of the movement's norms, ideals, and values, but rather as an arena where the norms, ideals, and values of its members are expressed.

Important to note is that the global scouting movement consists of two world organizations, WOSM and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS). Both are equally parts of the same wider scouting movement and in many cases comprise the same member organizations, but they are separate organizations (Vallory 2012, 52-53). I have chosen here to only analyze the discourse on youth agency in WOSM for the sake of streamlining the analysis and offering an in-depth account of one case. I have chosen WOSM, and not WAGGGS, because it is both the larger and the older organization. I also consider it more representative of the youth constituency in scouting. This is because WOSM allows any type of member organization, whether it be boys only, girls only, or mixed gender, whilst WAGGGS is more restricted in terms of the gender distribution of its members.

4.2.2 Peacebuilding

Based on the bottom-up and critical perspectives on which this paper builds, peacebuilding is conceptualized here in a broad and comprehensive sense. The goal of peacebuilding, in this view, is not short-term conflict management or achieving peace as a set and unchangeable state, but rather to foster a continuous process of peaceful transformation (Lederach 1995; Lederach and Maiese 2009; Paffenholtz 2009). The conception of peace itself is based on Galtung's concept of

positive peace, one that addresses not only direct violence but also structural and cultural violence (Galtung 1969). To address this conception of peace, peacebuilding is operationalized as a process that targets redistribution, representation, recognition, and reconciliation (Cardozo et al. 2015, 8-9).

4.2.3 Youth agency

Youth is defined here, in line with the Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding, as children and young people broadly between 10 and 30 years of age (Cardozo et al. 2015, 3). Youth agency in the context of the 4 R's of peacebuilding is operationalized in relation to the three approaches that peace education initiatives commonly take: socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural approaches. Signifiers of peace education are identified in the discourse of the scouting movement by relating them to these three approaches, described further below. Once identified in this way, the way that peace education initiatives in scouting discursively construct youth agency in peacebuilding is discussed by relating those educational initiatives to the 4 R's.

Most socio-economic approaches to peace education are geared at increasing future employability amongst children and young people and reducing poverty rates. Educational interventions such as vocational training have been argued to give better job opportunities and lessen economic marginalization (Izzi 2013; Johnson and Kane 2009), thus enabling young people to combat inequality and thereby address a key driver of conflict (Johnson and Kane 2009, 768). In addition, the increased security and standard of living which can be achieved through this type of peace education has in many cases been shown to lead to increased social and political participation (Cardozo et al. 2015, 30).

Socio-political approaches to peace education typically target the issue of children and young people being excluded from formal political and peacebuilding processes, where they are not acknowledged as potential contributors. In addition, children and young people are often devalued in these areas because of their age, because they are not seen as agents, or because they are seen as apathetic towards politics and peacebuilding (ibid., 33). Educational initiatives in this area focus on fostering active citizenship among young people in order to ensure their agency in regard to democracy, inequality, and holding those with power accountable (Dunne et al. 2014). This can involve equipping youth with the tools to be interruptive, reflexive, and questioning when they perceive injustice, as well as training them to take part in deliberative democracy by learning how to discuss controversial topics (Davies 2004; Cardozo et al. 2015, 37). It can also involve learning about democratic processes and human rights, as well as the social positions and civic identities that might challenge peaceful coexistence (Smith 2003, 25-27; Davies 2004, 239-242).

Lastly, educational initiatives that take a socio-cultural approach to promoting youth agency follow the logic of everyday peace theory, which focuses on the dynamics of intergroup contact and social relationships in deeply divided and conflict-torn societies (Mac Ginty 2014, 549). Everyday peace is about how people in their everyday lives engage with each other in ways that are “challenging (even subtly) the dominant norms that legitimize conflict and division” (ibid., 554). Socio-cultural peace education builds on the same idea, that the everyday experiences and practices of youth constitute an important aspect of peacebuilding (Cardozo et al. 2015, 49). It follows that the educational interventions in this area concentrate on providing an environment that fosters habits and interpersonal relationships amongst children and young people that are conducive to peacebuilding. This form of peace education can take the shape of sports or arts programs, which provide both a physical and/or creative outlet and a support for youth in “developing attitudes and skills they can exercise to contribute to improved community relations” (ibid., 48). Other iterations of socio-cultural approaches to peace education focus on facilitating intergroup contact, which can reduce prejudices, bolster understanding, and empower youth to advocate for recognition and reconciliation (Bargal 2004, 598-600; Ungerleider 2012). Finally, socio-cultural peace education can draw upon children and young people’s faith to encourage reflection on and application of religious concepts and practices in peacebuilding contexts. Religious understanding can help youth counter violence, build peaceful relationships across differences, and counteract radicalization based on religious grounds. However, integrating people’s faith in peace education has potential adverse effects, since the issue risks becoming politicized and exacerbating religious tensions (Cardozo et al. 2015, 55-56)

By examining how the global scouting movement deals with the above approaches to peace education, the way that youth agency in relation to peacebuilding is construed in the movement’s discourse is brought to light.

4.3 Material

The main concern for my research is that the material being analyzed should be as representative as possible of the values, ideals, goals, and norms of the scouting movement. The first scouting organizations, the British Boy Scouts and Girl Guide associations (established in 1909 and 1910, respectively), grew sporadically into a movement under the moral authority of the founder, Robert Baden-Powell (Vallory 2012, 8). His conception of the movement’s character and objectives was thus constitutive of it. For this reason, I have included in each subsection of the empirical analysis a short background on Baden-Powell’s views of the movement, based on his early writings. This is to place the analysis of the current discourse in scouting within its historical context.

Since the movement was formalized in 1920, the new world organization and the democratic decisions stemming from the world conferences gradually began to replace the previously authoritative words of Baden-Powell (ibid., 24). The WSC has since then been the highest organ of decision making of the global scouting movement (World Scout Bureau 2020, 8), and thus has become the body that is now most constitutive of the movement's character and objectives. I have therefore chosen to analyze documentation produced or referenced by the 42nd World Scout Conference. This documentation includes resolutions passed at the WSC, a new Youth Engagement Strategy, amendments to the constitution of WOSM, support documents for draft resolutions, a triennial report of the movement's operations since the last WSC, and a triennial plan for the period of time until the next WSC. The material of this paper also includes web pages, publications, and other documents references in the aforementioned WSC documentation. The 42nd WSC was held in 2021 and covers the time period 2017-2020. It is the most recent WSC at the time of this paper's publication, and can thus be considered representative of the most current iteration of the movement's discourse.

5 Empirical Analysis

The following discourse analysis is divided into three parts, wherein the educational initiatives deployed by the scouting movement are analyzed in relation to the characteristics of socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural approaches to peace education.

5.1 Socio-economic approaches

If different types of education were a binary consisting of either vocational or theoretical approaches, then the methods employed in scouting are much closer to vocational training than to formal academics. “Learning by doing”, one of the movement’s common slogans, captures the spirit that has been present since the very beginning. In the book that started the movement, *Scouting for Boys*, Robert Baden-Powell (1908) focused extensively on describing methods of education or training that would teach children practical skills. Those included woodcraft, cooking, tracking, camping, first aid, and the like.

The teaching of these types of skills is, from personal experience, highly present at the grassroots level of the scouting movement to this day, but largely absent from the discourse on youth agency at the global level. Instead, the educational approaches geared at economically enabling youth agency at the global level focus mainly on centrally organized funding for youth-led local initiatives and projects (WSC 2021: 1, 26). The idea is that this enables youth agency by allowing children and young people to “share and inspire others with their own story, and [...] transform their ideas into reality, funding their projects and helping further Scouting's vision of creating a better world for everyone” (WOSM 2022: 5). Such initiatives are grounded in funds like the Scout Donation Platform and the Messengers of Peace Support Fund, which distribute funding to community-based initiatives targeted at having local impact (WSC 2021: 1, 26).

This focus does not mean that there is no talk in the global discourse of providing young scouts with the practical skills that will set them up for success and increase their future employability. Based on the WSC documents, there is generally a greater emphasis on teaching children and young people soft skills, such as leadership, collaboration, and public speaking, rather than hard skills, such as technological or economic literacy or other proficiencies that may help them qualify for specific work fields. A summary of the movement’s “educational initiatives to create a better world” states that it is the goal of those initiatives to “equip young people with the life and leadership skills to tackle some of the world’s most pressing social, economic and environmental challenges” (WSC 2021: 1, 19). A key point here is that the movement promotes the importance of

children and young people learning vocational soft skills (ibid., 104), but not for explicitly vocational purposes.

Other than providing youth with the tools to achieve economic security, socio-economic peace education should also work to reduce inequality by targeting poverty and economic marginalization. One of the ways in which the global scouting movement strives to tackle these concerns is through the Ticket to Life project, which aims to support “young people by providing holistic services that address education and training needs along with social support and life skills” (WSC 2021: 1, 84), specifically children and young people in “developing countries” in the Asia-Pacific region who face difficult circumstances such as “inequalities and more barriers to education and a prosperous life” (ibid.). The focus of the project is again on the development of soft skills; “discovery of self-worth and self-esteem, character development, self-exploration and team spirit; enabling them to develop a plan and start a meaningful life through Scouting - preparing them as responsible adults” (WOSM 2022: 6).

When the global scouting movement does highlight the teaching of hard skills, they are commonly related to the emerging demands of the modern age. At the annual digital scouting event JOTA-JOTI (Jamboree on the Air and Jamboree on the Internet), children and young people can “participate in fun and engaging group activities over the Internet and amateur radio focused on developing 21st century skills through Scouting” (WSC 2021: 1, 109). However, those initiatives, which are arguably the closest to the socio-economic approach to peace education, are rarely highlighted in the peace education discourse in the global scouting movement. A telling example is the difference between the activities on offer at the 24th World Scout Jamboree in 2019 and the activities which were chosen to be highlighted afterwards. I personally worked as a volunteer at the camp in an area called “Living in the 21st Century: Knowledgeable Workforce”, where we introduced young scouts to everything from drones to 3D-printers in order to provide them with the knowledge and experience needed to familiarize them with the ongoing technological development of the workforce. However, the triennial report from the WSC zeroed in on the following camp activities:

Among the many educational learning opportunities at the Jamboree, the Better World Tent and Global Development Village offered Scouts a space to learn more about the Sustainable Development Goals from 39 of World Scouting’s global and regional partners [...] Through hundreds of engaging activities, campfires and workshops, Scouts learned about some of the most pressing global issues facing our planet and how to take action in their communities to tackle these challenges (WSC 2021: 1, 104)

The World Scout Jamboree spanned 12 days and 43 square kilometers packed full of activities so naturally, not everything can be included in a short summary. However, the choice is indicative of what the movement prioritizes, perhaps at the expense of vocational initiatives; community action and socio-political initiatives.

5.2 Socio-political approaches

Socio-political approaches to peace education are arguably the most evident strain in the global scouting movement. Since the beginning, the movement has explicitly characterized itself as a citizen training venture. The subtitle of the foundational handbook, *Scouting for Boys*, makes the objective of the training methods clear: *A handbook for instruction in good citizenship* (Baden-Powell 1908). Fostering scouts to be active citizens is a core aim of the movement, and the goal of instilling a sense of grander social responsibility in children and young people is implied from the earliest foundational documents.

The modern day global scouting movement places a significant amount of importance on involving youth in democratic processes. The WSC documentation touches on several initiatives to integrate youth representation and engagement in the organizational structure of WOSM and of the World Scout Conference itself, such as an initiative that aims to “evolve the current events with a new integrated Conference format that aims to strengthen youth involvement and diversity throughout its approach” (WSC 2021: 1, 21). Other initiatives included training 12 youth representatives to advocate for the movement at global events (ibid., 22, 47), and enhancing the roles of existing youth advisor positions in the WSC (ibid., 69). These types of educational ventures can be seen as methods of enabling active citizenship by involving youth in democratic processes and including them in environments from which they are often excluded. However, it should be noted that these initiatives often target fostering global citizenship, rather than citizenship defined by national or local identity. The youth representatives have to channel the “voice of the largest youth organisation” (WOSM 2022: 7), and the youth advisors to the WSC “do not represent a single country or region, but are required in their inputs to represent a global perspective” (WOSM 2020: 2).

In addition to a focus on democratic involvement and youth representation, many socio-political educational initiatives in scouting work to equip children and young people with the tools to question injustices, especially in regard to gender discrimination and child abuse. The triennial report from the WSC highlights the work being done to advance gender equality through educational, institutional, and communication strategies that provide “adults and young people with guidance to become agents of positive change, contributing to gender equality in their organisations and communities” (WSC 2021: 1, 62). Moreover, the movement has invested a great deal of work into strengthening their Safe from Harm program, which aims to address and prevent cases of abuse in scouting (WSC 2021: 4). Safe from Harm is a recurring topic in the WSC documentation, with a clear call for youth agency in the matter formulated in resolution 2021-04:

The Conference, [...] requests the World Scout Committee and the World Scout Bureau to consider the implementation of the World Safe from Harm Policy as a key priority for Member Organizations, supporting this by [...] ensuring a culture of learning when Safe

from Harm incidents occur at World and Regional Scout Events, to reduce the risk of future incidents; [...] requests all Member Organizations to [...] raise the awareness of young people and adults on their rights and obligations to protect their safety and to report potential cases of abuse (WSC 2021: 2, 2-3).

While much of the discourse on youth in relation to abuse in the WSC documentation posits children and young people as (potential) victims and places the onus on adults in the movement to educate and be educated, the above shows that there is also an interest in promoting youth involvement. By promoting safe environments where children and young people can discuss difficult topics, and by fostering a culture of learning in relation to instances of abuse, the Safe from Harm program can enable youth agency by equipping children and young people with the tools to be able to act in the face of injustice.

Besides the many educational initiatives developed *for* children, the scouting movement also devotes some attention to making space for initiatives developed *by* children. A project conducted to improve youth engagement in the movement included “asking young people how to improve their involvement in decision-making at all levels of Scouting, and how we can support them to continue to lead the way in making the necessary changes and improving their communities to create a more fair, just and equal world” (WSC 2021: 1, 85). The resulting Youth Engagement strategy emphasizes the need for both structural and attitudinal changes in order “to recognise youth engagement as a key educational component of the Scout Movement, deeply rooted in the Scout Method, and reinforce its implementation in every aspect of Scouting at all levels” (WSC 2021: 3, 9). Many of those changes focus on enabling youth agency through addressing cultural and attitudinal challenges at the grassroots level, which is the area of interest in socio-cultural approaches to peace education that is further explored below.

5.3 Socio-cultural approaches

The scouting movement has always focused on ideals of friendship and brotherhood. At first, it was rather apolitical, but Robert Baden-Powell soon realized the peacebuilding potential in fostering friendly relationships across national and cultural borders. These thoughts were heavily influenced by World War I, and Baden-Powell wrote in 1917 that

Nations disillusioned by war are seeking something better than pieces of paper produced by unscrupulous statesmen. They are proposing war reparations and indemnities but beyond these material obligations it is surely possible to encourage the feelings and emotions of peoples as the best hope of permanent peace. The Scout Movement on its relatively small scale has taken root among the youth of all civilized countries and is still growing. It is not too much to hope that in the years to come, with increasing numbers joining this fraternity in the coming generations, they will unite in personal friendship and mutual understanding such as never before and thus find a solution to these horrendous international conflicts (Baden Powell 1917 in Vallory 2012, 38).

Here, Baden-Powell highlights the grassroots nature of the scouting movement, and that it is in the emotions, friendships, and mutual understandings amongst peoples that we can find hope for permanent peace. This socio-cultural approach to peace education in scouting has continued to permeate the movement since then.

The WSC documentation tells of several initiatives to strengthen cross-cultural community building at the local level. One goal which was set, and achieved, in the triennial plan for 2017-2020 was for at least 15 national scout organizations to “develop a major project on the integration of migrant and refugee young people and adults” into scouting and thereby into local communities (WSC 2021: 1, 41). Similar initiatives work to align the scouting movement’s program with the Global Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, which promotes “local youth-led initiatives in humanitarian settings, and [...] mechanisms to empower and enlist local youth groups in humanitarian action” (WSC 2021: 1, 83; Youth Compact 2022). With initiatives like this, the movement works to utilize children and young people’s agency, through their capacity for everyday relationship-building, to foster peaceful coexistence and understanding where there might otherwise be tension.

In addition, the movement mobilizes communication and resources to bring attention to the impacts of youth agency at the local level. Through highlighting for example local actions and projects under the Messengers of Peace program (WSC 2021: 1, 29), or community action by scouts during the COVID-19 pandemic (ibid., 79), the movement directs attention toward how small, everyday actions and habits can promote social cohesion.

Facilitating opportunities for young people to connect and establish friendships is a recurring theme in the socio-cultural educational ventures of scouting. It describes itself as an international youth movement that “promotes cross-cultural exchange through its events, allowing young people to meet with peers from different cultures, share experiences and develop friendships”. This emphasis is especially noticeable in how providing digital scouting events during the pandemic was a high priority for the movement. A special edition of JOTI was held during the pandemic, which

served as a space for young people and Scouts to connect, learn and build friendships during these challenging times and while socially distanced [...] the event offered a unique opportunity for young people to connect and promote friendship and global citizenship through a wide range of fun and educational opportunities (WSC 2021: 1, 107).

A final iteration of socio-cultural peace education in the global scouting movement is interreligious collaboration.

Scouting has always had a concern with matters of faith. The centrality of “duty to God” in the Promise has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the Movement, while finding ways of

expressing this which are appropriate to the situations of its youth members. For the Founder, religion was not a part of Scouting, but something that lay at its very foundation” (WOSM 2022: 8, 6).

As a movement, scouting is non-denominational, but it integrates spiritual development as a core value in its programming and comprises many NSOs of different religious denominations. The motivation behind focusing on spirituality in scouting as a whole is that “spiritual development is connected to young people’s efforts to understand the meaning and causes of life experiences; therefore it is not apart from everyday life but a part of it” (ibid., 10). So, through integrating spirituality in its educational initiatives, the scouting movement strives to create an environment for children and young people to make sense of their everyday experiences. The movement also facilitates interreligious connections through events like the World Scout Interreligious Symposium and World Scout Interreligious Forum, which sets a standard that can potentially help foster understanding and coexistence in religiously divided societies (WSC 2021: 1, 115)

6 Discussion

Youth agency is a strong discursive theme in the global scouting movement. Even by just analyzing a limited selection of material to represent what is in reality an enormous and diverse movement, the result is that educational ventures in scouting are in many ways aligned with the approaches that peace education calls for. The different socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural educational initiatives in turn enable youth agency with regards to the 4 R's. For example, providing funding and skills training allows youth agency through redistribution, potentially improving children and young people's equal access to opportunities. Including children and young people in democratic processes and equipping them with the tools to deal with injustices allows for agency through representation. Creating space for children and young people to interact and build friendships across cultural divides enables agency through recognition. Finally, while I found no direct evidence in the WSC discourse of initiatives that promote understanding and dealing with the injustices that underpin conflict, it could be assumed that in a post-conflict setting, scouts who have received education in line with the other R's would be better equipped for agency through reconciliation. Throughout the WSC documentation, there are recurring discursive associations between 'youth' and signifiers such as 'leadership', 'responsibility', 'visionary', 'engagement', and 'relationship building' in ways that ultimately contribute to a strong discursive link between 'youth' and 'agency' in relation to peacebuilding.

However, certain questions should be raised in regard to how well the discourse on youth agency in the scouting movement actually aligns with the core values of peace education. As defined by Bajaj (2016) and Cardozo et al. (2014), peace education should be based on a holistic and positive conception of peace, and it should address direct, structural, and cultural violence. A key aspect of this is accounting for political, economic and social inequalities and injustices. In many ways, the educational initiatives in the scouting movement do address inequality, but rarely are there signs of acknowledging the deeply rooted causes of inequality. There is thus a risk of establishing a generalized discursive link between 'youth' and 'equality' that might inhibit the transformational potential of peace education in scouting. In order to fully embrace this potential, the movement would need to take into account the ways in which some children and young people are more disadvantaged than others when it comes to acting on their agency. The examples that come closest to doing this are perhaps the Ticket to Life program, as well as a reference to solidarity programmes that have "been extended to enable wider participation of young people in events, particularly for those who previously would not have had access to these opportunities" (WSC 2021: 3, 8). Yet, these examples alone do not do much in terms of proving that there is a greater level of attention being paid to the root causes of inequality within the movement.

This lack of attention to inequality might compromise the extent to which scouting promotes youth agency. For example, the main method of economically enabling youth in scouting is through external funding, rather than through providing youth with the knowledge and skills that will grant them the possibility of self-generated economic security. This inhibits the redistributive potential of the approach and risks making youth agency conditional; it is only enabled insofar as it has external support. Similarly, by not making inequality a priority, the ways in which the scouting movement facilitates interaction and relationship-building might be compromised. If youth are not made to fully understand the origins of potential differences and prejudices they might have, then that can present a challenge to true recognition and reconciliation.

There should also be a discussion on the extent to which global scouting is a movement *by* young people, versus a movement *for* young people. This largely stems from a question of to what extent youth are at the center of the movement, and of how much room there is for their diverse interests and experiences. A review of the literature on youth agency in peacebuilding stated that

Considering a widespread lack of collaboration or engagement with youth in the planning and implementation of educational interventions, a more collaborative approach that includes youth perspectives on their agency, their needs and challenges is essential. Particular efforts should be made to engage with and involve youth constituencies that go beyond elites, and include the more marginalized groups, such as hard to reach young people (e.g. the disabled, rural youth, young mothers and other minority groups) (Cardozo et al. 2015, 4)

Although including children and young people's voices in shaping scouting is a recurring discursive theme in the movement, many of those initiatives place some restrictions on youth agency through representation. For peacebuilding in line with a positive conception of peace to be possible, there needs to be a will to address the diverse needs, interests, and experiences of peace constituents (Del Felice and Wisler 2007, 6). In the global scouting movement, there seems to be an element of generalizing children and young people's needs, interests, and experiences to the point where they can be represented by one or a few voices and only in an advisory capacity, such as with the 12 youth representatives and the youth advisors to the WSC. This is especially evident with the latter, where the advisors are explicitly encouraged to represent a global youth perspective. This can be construed as a discursive link between 'youth' and 'homogeneity'.

Moreover, children and young people are few in number and arguably tokenized in other decision-making bodies of the movement than the WSC. This is illustrated by, for example, the goal that "30 NSOs will have a young person under 30 as a voting member on their national board" (WSC 2021: 1, 39) and by the fact that the movement hosts a World Scout Youth Forum, but as a subsidiary event to the WSC. This dynamic of adding a youth component to otherwise adult dominated environments carries some similarities to the dynamic of gender

mainstreaming in peacebuilding that has received frequent scholarly criticism. An argument against gender mainstreaming is that it

too often takes the form of being “added on” to a preexisting structure, institution, or policy—it comes from the outside in (the proverbial “add women and stir” approach). As a result, the transformative capacity of mainstreaming and its ability to deeply entrench gender roles and perceptions is highly questionable (Ni Aolain et al. 2011, 12)

If children and young people’s representation is mainly implemented in an advisory capacity and based only on a generalized experience of youth, then that does not constitute a youth-centered movement. Nor does it fully embrace the representational element of peace education. If adults are at the core of all decision making, then ‘youth’ becomes linked to ‘dependency’ and youth representation becomes more of an “add youth and stir” approach, which is not conducive to the image the movement seems to have of itself as centered on youth agency.

There is, however, an awareness of the above issues within the movement. At the 2021 WSC, a resolution was passed which initiated the process of evolving the World Scout Conference and the World Scout Youth Forum into one event in order to “guarantee sufficient mechanisms and space for effective and meaningful youth engagement and greater representation of young people in the governance processes, as well as the leadership, programmatic planning, delivery, evaluation and educational” (WSC 2021: 2, WSC 2021: 5). A significant amount of attention was also dedicated to the issue in the new Youth Engagement Strategy, which amongst other things acknowledges that one challenge at the institutional level to greater youth engagement is “lack of clarity on how to implement youth engagement in the structures and systems without being merely about tokenism” (WSC 2021: 3, 8). These are clear indicators of a will to improve the way in which the scouting movement involves children and young people, and thereby also a will to acknowledge youth agency in peacebuilding to a greater extent.

A last aspect of the lack of attention to diversity is the strong discursive link between children/young people and peace. Youth seem to be seen as inherently, naturally peaceful, as there is no mention of issues or conflicts arising from youth acting on their agency. If such were the case, then all one needs to do is find the right way to engage that peacefulness. This discursive link between ‘youth’ and ‘peacefulness’ erases the complexities of children and young people, and the many conflicting emotions, interests, and experiences that children can have which might make them act in ways that are not inherently peaceful. Without accounting for those complexities, educational ventures in scouting risk falling into the “positive utopianism” that peace education has been criticized for (Gur-Ze’ev 2001, 329), which makes a blanket statement about youth being the answer to all future problems, without acknowledging the factors that may also make them the cause of those problems.

Even though there is a concern within the scouting movement for improving in regard to youth agency, the issues highlighted in this discussion may be indicative of a greater shift in direction for the movement. At its core, scouting might be moving away from being purely a youth education movement, to being a movement of advocacy for youth education. Several aspects of the WSC documentation point to a strive to “Advance WOSM’s position and contribute significantly to discussions on education and youth-related issues in various national and international settings” (WSC 2021:1, 46). The global scouting movement thus seems to straddle the line between being a grassroots, localized, bottom-up movement, and a highly institutionalized form of governance, norm creation, and non-formal education advocacy.

7 Conclusions

In response to the research question of to what extent youth are considered agents in peacebuilding in the contemporary discourse of the global scouting movement, this paper offers a response focused on conditionality. On one hand, the global scouting movement is in many ways an exemplary showcase for implementing peace education to promote youth agency in peacebuilding. A discourse analysis of the 2021 World Scout Conference documentation shows evident concern with addressing at least three of the 4 R's that can facilitate agency in peacebuilding for youth; redistribution, representation, and recognition. On the other hand, the above discussion shows that there are clear signs of a discursive struggle centered on the relationship between 'youth' and 'agency'. 'Youth' and 'agency' are frequently discursively linked in scouting, and the association between those signifiers is naturalized to the point that it, in the scouting movement, seems to be largely perceived as objective reality; youth have agency in peacebuilding. But at the same time, opposing discourses link 'youth' to other signifiers in ways that make that agency conditional. The discourse in scouting in many ways constructs youth agency in a way that implies that it is dependent on adult intervention, inherently peaceful, or rooted in a generalized experience of youth rather than in diverse experiences and interests. This then makes 'youth' equal to signifiers such as 'dependent', 'peaceful', or 'homogeneous', in ways that challenge its link to 'agency'. This struggle highlights the ways in which the peace education potential of the global scouting movement is compromised, because it is indicative of a conception of peacebuilding which contrasts with the idea of youth agency.

The global scouting movement is enormous, multi-faceted, and diverse. There are undoubtedly many initiatives in many different parts of the movement that address the issues laid out in this paper. The critique given here has likely already been integrated into the way the movement operates somewhere by a local unit, a regional council, or an individual scout. However, the social constructionist point stands. If the way that children and young people are discursively constructed at the highest decision-making level of the movement compromises their agency in peacebuilding, then that will to some extent compromise that agency in practice.

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