

REGENERATIVE POWER OF EDUCATION: THE INVENTION OF POSITIVE PEACE

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary world is experiencing the most significant crisis of state conflicts since World War II, generating immense economic losses and societal instability. This study addresses the urgent need for a new peace paradigm by analysing Margaret Mead's concept of war as a flawed social invention, in contrast with the scientifically grounded Positive Peace framework. The research employs a qualitative content analysis integrated with a multiple case study strategy, examining structured responses from 37 Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) ambassadors across diverse geopolitical regions. The results reveal that education is a regenerative force, with a global network of over 7,000 experts serving as “system architects”. The study identifies a “Halo” effect², demonstrating how one empowered individual triggers a chain reaction of peace-building within their community, effectively transforming theoretical knowledge into systemic resilience. It is concluded that Positive Peace is a superior social invention that enables societies to mitigate the costs of conflict and enhance stability through decentralised, knowledge-based leadership. This regenerative educational model provides a strategic leverage point for addressing modern hybrid threats and fostering long-term global security.

Keywords: *Positive Peace; IEP Ambassadors; regenerative education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Human history is frequently interpreted through a sequence of wars and conflicts, often treating violence as an inevitable companion of civilisation. However, Steven Pinker [1] has demonstrated that, in the long term, violence has actually declined as education, critical thinking, and mutual understanding have evolved. Despite this historical trend, the third decade of the 21st century marks a critical turning point. While humanity possesses advanced technologies, it continues to employ obsolete and violent methods of conflict resolution. Data from the 2024–2025 Global Peace Index (GPI) reveals a dramatic reality: global peacefulness is deteriorating, and the number of state conflicts has reached its highest level since the end of World War II, imposing an astronomical \$19.97 trillion burden on the global economy [2]. These figures indicate that the traditional concept of “negative peace,” defined simply as the absence of armed conflict [3], is no longer sufficient to meet modern challenges. As Galtung

¹ IEP – Institute for Economics & Peace. Headquartered in Sydney, Australia, with offices in New York, Mexico City, Brussels, and The Hague, the Institute was founded in 2007 by IT entrepreneur and philanthropist Steve Killelea. Its mission is to shift the world’s focus to peace as a positive, achievable, and measurable metric of human well-being and progress. The Institute annually compiles and publishes the Global Peace Index (GPI), the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), and the Positive Peace Report.

² The “Halo” Effect (Thorndike, 1920) is a psychological cognitive bias where an overall impression of a person, organisation, or brand influences how we evaluate the specific characteristics of that entity. In the context of this article, it is a phenomenon in which a single ambassador's success generates trust in the entire peace program. Witnessing the positive actions of one individual leads those around them to place greater belief in the very concept of Positive Peace.

[4] emphasises, without fundamental structural and cultural changes, peace remains fragile; thus, a new paradigm is required in which peace is perceived not as a static state but as a dynamic social justice that requires continuous creativity and cooperation.

The core scientific problem lies not only in violence itself but in the entrenched belief that war is inevitable. Contrary to the view that conflict is inherent in human nature, anthropologist Margaret Mead [5] formulated the revolutionary thesis that war is not a biological instinct but a flawed "social invention." In this context, the essential question arises: how can this obsolete social invention be replaced? While our technological capabilities grow exponentially, human trust and the ability to coexist are weakening [6]. Therefore, there is a scientific need to justify education as a strategic regenerative lever capable of deconstructing outdated social models and of empowering society to generate a sustainable Positive Peace ecosystem systematically.

The scientific novelty of this study lies in conceptualising education as a "regenerative force." Drawing on Freire's [7] ideas, education is understood here as an empowering process that enables individuals to create their own environment. This theory is integrated with the experience of the IEP Ambassador program, analysing how a network of over 7,000 specialists creates a "Halo" effect—a chain reaction in which the success of an individual ambassador legitimises the Positive Peace methodology. This research connects Mead's [5] insights with contemporary systems theory [8] and evolutionary organisational models [9], demonstrating that peace is achieved not through rigid, top-down management but through collective knowledge and values.

The main aim of this work is to analyse the concept of Positive Peace as a superior social invention and to reveal the role of regenerative education in empowering a global network of experts to implement this model. The principal conclusion highlights that by shifting the focus from military deterrence to the pillars of Positive Peace, societies can transform systemic violence into sustainable development.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative content analysis, integrated with a multiple-case study strategy, to examine the practical application of peace-building methodologies. The theoretical framework is grounded in systems theory [8], which enables each Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) ambassador to be evaluated not as an isolated unit but as a strategic "leverage point" initiating regenerative change within the social ecosystem.

Empirical data were collected between November and December 2025. The research sample consists of structured qualitative responses from 37 participants of the IEP Ambassador program. To identify patterns in the applicability of the Positive Peace model, representative cases were selected from diverse geopolitical regions, including Italy, Spain, Syria, the USA, Japan, and Kenya. This geographical diversity underscores how the eight pillars of the Positive Peace model are translated into local solutions across regional cultural and economic contexts.

The collected data were systematised using deductive coding guided by the eight pillars of Positive Peace. The analysis identified how theoretical concepts are translated into practical interventions (e.g., environmental conservation in Kenya or legal empowerment in Indonesia).

In accordance with scientific ethical standards and to ensure participant confidentiality, the identities of all 37 respondents were anonymised. An

alphanumeric coding system (D1–D37) was utilised for data analysis and presentation. Representative cases illustrating the practical adaptability of the Positive Peace pillars are presented in the tables within the Results section. Generative artificial intelligence was not used for data generation or analysis; its use was limited to superficial text editing and formatting.

2.1. The evolution of peace education: from an idea to a regenerative system

In scientific literature, peace education is understood as a broad field that combines ancient wisdom with modern scientific methods. It is an ancient yet constantly renewing process: primary records of peace philosophy are found in the teachings of Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, Moses, or Lao Tzu, who emphasised inner peace and compassion as the foundation of societal stability, a perspective further developed in Gittins' [10] collaborative approach to peace education." However, academic peace studies, as a structured discipline, emerged only in the 20th century in direct response to the catastrophic experiences of the World Wars, which forced scholars to seek alternatives to violent conflict resolution.

A fundamental shift in this thinking was made by anthropologist Margaret Mead [5], who advanced the revolutionary thesis that war is neither a biological instinct nor an inevitable part of human nature. By studying communities that had no concept of war, she proved that war is a social invention—just as writing, marriage, and the judicial system are. Mead argued that any social invention can be rejected only when humanity creates a superior tool that achieves the same goals. In this context, Positive Peace can be treated as that "better invention" envisioned by Mead. It is no longer an abstract idea, but a scientific system developed by the Institute for Economics and Peace, presenting eight specific pillars: well-functioning government, low levels of corruption, good relations with neighbours, high levels of human capital, free flow of information, equitable distribution of resources, sound business environment, and acceptance of the rights of others [2].



Figure 1. The 8 Pillars of Positive Peace Model [2].

These pillars are not merely theoretical indicators describing what a society "should" be like. The essence of the IEP model lies in its functional applicability. Unlike utopian projects, these pillars serve as a diagnostic tool: they allow communities to identify their weakest points (e.g., the free flow of information or corruption) and direct resources precisely where change can yield the greatest return in terms of

stability in practice. The role of education in this process became essential after 1945 with the adoption of the UNESCO Constitution. It enshrined a fundamental thought: "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" [11]. This statement changed the direction of peace education—moving from the simple urge "not to fight" (so-called "negative peace") [3] toward the creation of "positive peace". De Rivera [6] adds that true peace in a country arises only when a specific "culture of peace" is formed, where people feel safe, respected, and included in community life. This means that education must not only stop conflicts but also actively cultivate society's ability to create justice, prosperity, and mutual trust. In contemporary Europe, where the old maxim³ *si vis pacem, para bellum*⁴ (if you want peace, prepare for war) still dominates, this transformation is critical: the education system must choose whether to prepare youth for armed resistance or to foster critical thinking and creative strategies for peaceful coexistence, as analysed by Thwe and Kalman [12].

Modern theory emphasises that peace education must be holistic. Harris [13] identifies five essential directions—international education, human rights, sustainable development, environmentalism, and conflict resolution—that form the basis of Reardon's [22] definition of comprehensive peace education: a framework for global responsibility. New concepts, such as critical peace education [14], call not only for learning about peace but also for a bold analysis of the causes of injustice. Meanwhile, post-humanist education, as analysed by Duoblienè [15], and indigenous knowledge, as explored by Kester [16], teach us to see peace as a harmonious relationship among humans, technology, and nature. Finally, pedagogical anthropology [17] reminds us that no single theory can encompass the full complexity of human knowledge; therefore, the evolution of peace education must remain an open, ongoing process of inquiry. This is where the regenerative power of education emerges: a process in which knowledge is not only transmitted but also constantly renewed through live human connection. This system, realised through a global network of 7,000 IEP ambassadors (which is constantly growing), allows theoretical concepts to become an active force—ambassadors "install" the new invention of peace in their communities, gradually replacing obsolete and violent social models.

2.2. The global peace index (GPI) and its links to education

The Global Peace Index (GPI) serves as a primary analytical tool, allowing the transformation of the abstract concept of peace into measurable data. The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) compiles this index using 23 quantitative and qualitative indicators, organised into three dimensions: societal safety and security, ongoing domestic and international conflict, and the degree of militarisation [2]. Although the GPI methodologically measures "negative peace"—the absence of violence and the fear of violence [4]—a deep analysis of the data reveals that these indicators depend directly on the foundations of "positive peace," at the centre of which education plays a vital role. One of the most staggering indicators in modern conflictology is the

³ Maxim (Lat. *maxima propositio* – the greatest proposition) – a briefly formulated fundamental rule, moral principle, or subjective law of action guided by an individual or group. In philosophy (especially in the works of I. Kant), a maxim is considered a behavioural guideline. In this article, the term is used to emphasise the transition from the old logic of military deterrence (*si vis pacem, para bellum*) to the new rule of building Positive Peace.

⁴ Lat. "If you want peace, prepare for war". This maxim is derived from the 4th-century work *Epitoma Rei Militaris* by the Roman military theorist Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus [31]. It reflects the classical realist principle that strong military power is the primary means of deterrence and the guarantor of peace.

economic impact of violence on the global economy, which, according to 2024 data, amounted to \$19.97 trillion, or approximately 13.5% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [2]. This means that violence "costs" the average global citizen approximately \$2,418 per year. Collier [18] argues that these funds represent a "lost development opportunity," as countries caught in cycles of conflict experience a "conflict trap," where military spending directly drains resources from education and healthcare systems; therefore, in this context, education must be perceived not as a burden-generating expense but as a regenerative investment capable of reducing the cost of violence and redirecting funds toward the cultivation of human capital.

In the Positive Peace framework, education is identified through the "High Levels of Human Capital" pillar, and research by Hanushek and Woessmann [19] confirms that cognitive skills developed through quality education are a fundamental driver of long-term economic growth and social stability. Education within the context of the GPI operates across several critical levels, starting with ensuring structural stability and reducing polarisation, where developed critical thinking helps society recognise propaganda and avoid internal conflicts. However, history also reveals a darker side of this process. In regions of ethnic conflict, the education system can be manipulated to incite hatred and deepen divisions—a phenomenon famously described by Bush and Saltarelli [20] as the 'two faces of education.' This dual nature explains why simply having schools is not enough; the *content* and values of that education are what determine whether a society moves toward stability or collapse. Simultaneously, civic education programs directly strengthen institutional trust and align with another pillar of peace—low levels of corruption—because, according to UNESCO [21], an educated society demands greater transparency, thereby increasing overall social cohesion. This is further supported by the insights of Acemoglu and Robinson [33], who argue that nations prosper when their institutions are inclusive of all citizens rather than just a select few. This principle directly aligns with the "Well-Functioning Government" pillar of Positive Peace, which IEP ambassadors strengthen through their activities. Furthermore, education provides economic empowerment and the tools to participate in the labour market, which reduces marginalisation and poverty—key risk factors for individuals joining violent groups [22].

Ultimately, education becomes a primary instrument for changing cultural norms and deconstructing the "image of the enemy," thereby reducing religious or ethnic extremism, as argued by Harris and Morrison [23]. Historical examples, such as South Africa's post-apartheid reforms or Rwanda's efforts to integrate peace education into national curricula, confirm that purposeful education can transform the attitudes of entire generations toward conflict. Bajaj [14] adds that critical peace education not only provides knowledge but also empowers learners to become agents of change. This is directly linked to the activities of IEP ambassadors, as data analysis shows that states where peace education is integrated into formal and non-formal systems (e.g., Scandinavian countries) consistently rank at the top, not because of military power but because of high social resilience. Thus, education in the context of the GPI is not only an indicator but also a strategic lever for replacing the flawed "invention of war" with a sustainable peace system.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: HOW THE PEACE AMBASSADOR NETWORK FUNCTIONS

After conducting the study and analysing responses from the October 2025 graduates of the IEP Ambassador program, a fundamental insight emerged: education is a force that, in practice, changes the world through people, empowering them to become

conscious "system architects." The research revealed four main areas illustrating this transformation.

3.1. The first area: the individual as a "leverage point" in systemic transformation

Scientist D. Meadows [8] stated that in complex systems, one need not try to change everything at once; it is enough to find a place where a small shift can move the entire structure. The study revealed that each of the more than 7,000 IEP ambassadors acts as such a "leverage point," shifting the paradigm of societal functioning from passive to active. They cease to be passive observers and become "system architects," translating peace theory into concrete action within their environments. The table below presents research data illustrating how specialists from various fields transform IEP methodology into practical changes.

Table 1. Ambassador activities are a systemic "leverage point".

Participant (Code)	Represented Field / Region	Positive Peace Pillar	Nature of Activity and Quote
D29	Law (Indonesia)	Rule of Law	Uses legal knowledge as a tool for peacebuilding.
D30	Environment (Kenya)	Good Relations with Neighbours	Reduces inter-tribal conflicts through shared environmental conservation.
D21	Data Analysis (Italy)	Free Flow of Information	Disseminates Positive Peace Index data in communities to ensure people understand the real situation.
D36	Activism (Kenya)	Social Cohesion	Unites people through shared activities, such as tree planting.
D37	Business (Dubai)	Sound Business Environment	Combines business logic with peacebuilding principles.

While observing the ambassadors' activities, an "empowerment effect" becomes evident. For instance, a participant from Spain (D7) states: "I feel empowered to work so that peace prevails in the world." This indicates that science here functions as a psychological engine. The program serves as a kind of "digital laboratory" in which an individual progresses through three stages: diagnosis, integration, and restoration. Participants (D21 and D20) use IEP indices (the Positive Peace Index and the Ecological Threat Report) as a scanner—they identify the root causes of conflict rather than merely alleviating pain. This confirms Meadows' [8] idea that understanding the system's structure is the first step toward changing it. Instead of fighting consequences, ambassadors act where the change provides the greatest benefit.

Participants from Dubai (D37) and Nigeria (D5) demonstrate that peace is not just a beautiful idea—it can be "installed" into business, banking, or law. As Killelea [6]

noted, peace is the foundation without which no other human activity can flourish. Interestingly, even when faced with technical obstacles (e.g., system glitches), the participants did not give up. Their desire to obtain the certificate shows that they seek not just a piece of paper, but the recognition that grants them the authority to act. This recalls the "critical consciousness" described by Freire [7]—when a person realises their power to change the world. A participant from Kenya (D36), where peace is built through shared environmental protection, confirms Mead's [5] thought—war will disappear only when we find a better "social invention". In this study, that invention is the "human lever". Equipped with scientific data and official status, the individual becomes a force capable of transforming even the most complex conflicts into sustainable development. This proves that education is the cheapest and most effective defence, allowing society to heal and strengthen itself.

3.2. The second area: leadership, the "halo" effect, and economic rationality

This area explains why investing in peace leaders is not only a value-based choice but also a prudent financial decision. The study demonstrated that a single empowered ambassador triggers a chain reaction known as the "Halo" effect. This means that the authority the leader naturally acquires naturally spreads further, positively influencing an additional 5–15 individuals in their environment.

Table 2. The link between leadership and economic impact.

Analysis Level	Mechanism	Research Insight (Participants' Experience)	Economic Value
Institutional	Authority	Participants from Spain (D7) and the USA (D14) state that the certificate provides legitimacy to build alliances with police and universities.	Reduces expenditures on combating violence through stronger institutions.
Psychological	Trust	Participants from Syria (D6) and Somalia (D13) emphasise that restoring community trust is the first step toward stability.	Growth in trust helps avoid up to 25% of GDP losses in crisis zones.
Global	Investment	IEP data shows that countries that strengthen peace pillars attract more capital.	3 times higher flows of foreign direct investment.

Leadership within this network functions as an economic engine. An analysis of participants' experiences shows that an ambassador's status becomes a kind of "currency of trust". Social capital theorist R. Putnam [24] argues that community trust has a direct value for a country's economic efficiency. When participants (D6 and D15) persistently pursue certification, they are effectively seeking to acquire the social capital described by J. S. Coleman [25]. This recognised status creates an "expert halo," enabling the leader to persuade local politicians and businesses to support peace projects more easily.

This process is economically rational. Today, the cost of violence to the global economy is estimated at \$19.97 trillion (approximately 11.6% of global GDP). IEP founder S. Killelea [6] emphasises that prevention through education is the most cost-effective alternative. The participant from the USA (D14), who integrates peace

science into law enforcement work, applies economic logic in practice: countries with strong Positive Peace pillars attract up to 3 times more foreign direct investment than conflict-ridden regions.

The restoration of trust, mentioned by participants from Somalia or Syria, is directly correlated with societal wealth. According to research, in post-conflict zones, a lack of trust can burn through up to a quarter of a country's GDP. The activities of the ambassadors create a so-called "peace dividend"—funds that were not lost to violence but remained available for societal innovation and education. This scientifically demonstrates that investing in a single "system architect" is more profitable than financing costly, often unsuccessful mitigation efforts later.

3.3. The third area: ecological resilience and digital citizenship

This area emphasises that modern peace depends not only on human relationships but also on how we protect nature and manage information online. The research revealed that IEP ambassadors act as "early warning systems"—they utilise technology and environmental conservation to stop conflicts before they even begin.

Table 3. Use of environmental conservation and technology for peacebuilding.

Direction	Tool	Participant Activity (Research Insight)	Why is this important?
Environmental Conservation	Ecological Threat Report	Participants from Kenya (D20) and Somalia (D31) use data to predict droughts.	Reduces disputes over water and land.
Internet	Information Flow	Participants from Nigeria (D33) and Indonesia (D4) combat fake news.	Prevents lies from dividing society.
Data	Mapping (GIS)	Participants from Ecuador (D10) and Italy (D21) mark high-risk areas.	Allows precise knowledge of where help is needed most.
Unity	Tree Planting	A participant from Kenya (D36) mobilises people toward a common goal: protecting forests.	Shared work brings even enemies together.

The research shows that today's peacebuilders require not only diplomacy but also smart tools. Analysing the participants' experiences, we observe a transition toward "data citizenship." According to Gürsoy and Eğinli [8], digital peace education is essential in the information age because it teaches people to critically evaluate what they see online and create a secure digital environment. For instance, a participant from Kenya (D20) works with communities that disagree over dwindling resources. This scientifically confirms the insight of geographer J. Diamond [26] that civilisations often collapse due to improper management of natural resources. By teaching people to protect nature, ambassadors simultaneously teach them to live peacefully, as the reasons for fighting disappear.

Another crucial aspect is online security. Participants (D33, D4) emphasise that fake news (disinformation) functions today as a weapon that turns people against one another. The IEP model promotes strengthening the "Free Flow of Information," which, in scientific terms, echoes R. Kaplan's [27] warnings that chaos arises when informational and ecological order collapses. A participant from Ecuador (D10) mentions that the use of mapping systems allows peace to be "seen" in numbers and images. This changes the entire logic: aid is sent not to where it is most loudly

requested, but to where the data indicate the highest risk. In this way, education provides ambassadors with a technological advantage—they become professional analysts who extinguish the sparks of conflict before a fire breaks out.

3.4. The fourth area: systemic resilience and Lithuania's strategic security

This section demonstrates how the entire ambassador network functions as a "living organism." It does not merely survive a crisis; it learns from it and becomes even stronger. Scientist N. Taleb [28] refers to this quality as the ability to thrive during volatility (antifragility), while C. S. Holling [29] defines it as an ecosystem's capacity to absorb shocks and maintain its integrity.

Table 4. Network self-regulation and its application to Lithuania's security.

Object of Analysis	Key Principle	Research Insight (Participants' Experience)	Significance for Lithuania
Crisis Management	Resilience with Growth	When the learning and administration system of the IEP Ambassador program stalled (D21, D6, D13), participants did not stop; instead, they formed self-help groups.	The ability to operate independently, even if official governance is disrupted.
System Restoration	Self-regulation	Participants from Yemen (D28) and Nigeria (D33) personally calmed others and helped solve problems.	A society that finds its own solutions and does not succumb to panic.
Cost of Security	Peace Dividend	Analysis of how to intelligently allocate funds between weaponry and human education.	A strong, united society is the most cost-effective and efficient form of national defence.
Global Connection	Collective Power	Participants (D15, D18) emphasise the desire for worldwide cooperation.	Lithuania's ties with global experts strengthen our national influence and security.

The research shows that this network is exceptionally resilient because it lacks a single central point of failure. Analysing how participants responded to technical obstacles (e.g., delayed certificates), an interesting phenomenon emerged: instead of complaining, they began assisting one another. This scientifically proves that education creates a "social armour." As N. Taleb [28] observes, some systems benefit from stress—they become smarter and more flexible. For Lithuania, this implies that, in the event of a hybrid threat or disinformation, an educated society can stabilise itself without top-down instructions.

This insight is crucial for planning Lithuania's future. While we currently invest heavily in the military, the study serves as a reminder: weapons are of little value without a united society. If a nation trusts its citizens and state institutions (the so-called Pillars of Positive Peace), it becomes a "hard nut to crack" for any aggressor. As C. S. Holling [29] stated, true resilience is the ability to change and adapt without losing one's essence. For Lithuania, investing in IEP ambassador programs and community strengthening is the most prudent way to build security. This would allow for savings that would later return as a "peace dividend"—funds dedicated to science,

innovation, and a better quality of life, rather than merely covering losses. In this way, ambassadors become true "system architects," protecting not only their communities but also the country's overall stability.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study demonstrate that peace is not merely the absence of weapons—it is a functional system that can be constructed through education. While it is common to assume that security is ensured solely by the military, the experiences of 37 ambassadors prove that the true foundation of a country lies in public trust, knowledge, and the ability to recognise disinformation. As emphasised by Gursoy and Eginli [32], digital peace education has become a fundamental requirement in the information age to counteract such threats and promote global stability. This confirms anthropologist Margaret Mead's [5] insight that war is merely a flawed social "invention" that can be replaced with a superior tool: Positive Peace. This model is economically advantageous, as it transforms the immense costs of violence into investments in societal well-being. Investing in a single specialist creates a "Halo" effect, spreading peace ideas to dozens of others. For Lithuania, this is particularly vital; in the face of hybrid threats, a united and educated society is the most cost-effective and efficient form of national defence.

Ultimately, education transforms peace from a distant dream into a tangible force protecting the stability of our state. This is the true regenerative power of education—the invention of Positive Peace. However, in closing, it is worth asking ourselves: if war is indeed only a flawed social invention, why are we still afraid to replace it with a better one? Moreover, what would happen to our world if even a fraction of the trillions currently spent on weaponry were invested in education that teaches us not how to fight but how to build a shared future?

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