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Digital Peace

How Does Digitization Affect Conflict Transformation – and vice versa?
*Annual Conference of the German Platform Peaceful Conflict
Transformation (21-23 April 2023)*

Today, crises, conflicts, and outbreaks of violence always have a digital dimension. Whether social media, digital identities, AI, geographic information systems, blockchain, or big data - these technologies not only promote transnational exchange, de-democratization, and peace. Rather, digital transformation has advanced worldwide, especially in the areas of conflict - and violence, as well as autocratic abuse of power.

As a reaction to these developments, the field of digital peacebuilding has successfully established itself in recent years. Through the innovative use of digital technologies, positive experiences have been made with the transformation of conflicts at the interface between the online and offline worlds. However, these activities currently lag far behind the malign, autocratic, and peace-threatening application of digital technologies.

How do conflict transformation and digitization influence each other, and what practical and political conclusions can be drawn from this for the further development of the field of civil conflict transformation? Answers and recommendations to these questions were given by 70 participants at a conference in Loccum from April 21 to 23, 2023 - among them leading experts from the field of peaceful conflict transformation, digital experts, academics, and political decisionmakers.

Summary

Here we list the key findings of the conference. For more information, please consult the more detailed conference report starting on page 5.

■ Mainstreaming of Digital Peacebuilding

The discussants at the conference in Loccum agreed that we are now on the brink of mainstreaming digital peacebuilding. The digital dimension becomes more and more a standard feature of peacebuilding efforts. Ten years ago, digital peacebuilding was a niche. Now the niche has become a norm acknowledging that digital technologies are fundamentally altering conflict dynamics and therefore requiring an expansion of the peacebuilding toolbox. The question of whether digital peacebuilding is important is outdated since it is answered positively. As offline and online worlds continue to merge, digital peacebuilding is not just peacebuilding with some new tools, it also addresses digital conflict drivers, but still has considerable number of open questions. It is therefore crucial to mainstream digital peacebuilding and make this dimension a crucial part of all major areas of peaceful conflict management and complement, not replace conventional offline tools.

■ Focus on Digital Inclusion – Particular Fruitful Notion for Future Discussion

It appeared that inclusion is the most fruitful and promising notion for the future discussion of digitalized mediation and dialogue initiatives. How inclusion can be initiated, augmented, and secured by digital tools. In digital dialogue initiatives, it is, for example, possible to include large and remote conflict-affected groups that would not be reachable by offline efforts. Moreover, a more nuanced selection process is possible by applying an intersectional framework that goes beyond single identity markers and considers multiple and overlapping forms discrimination (such as the “women”, “age” or “the ethnic minority”).

■ Avoid Exclusion and Barriers of Entrance: Digital Literacy Empowerment and Security Procedures

Pointing out the notion of digital inclusion, the proposals for future development and improvement of online dialogue and mediation formats, the discussant at the Loccum conference highlighted that digital empowerment is a necessary element every effort in that field has to have in its portfolio. That requires to increase digital literacy and the supply of needed IT infrastructure should be included in the project planning processes from the very beginning. The same provision applies to digital security and safety provision which should be regarded as a necessary stable in each effort in that particular field.

■ Data Collection in Conflict Situation: Small is Beautiful and Less is More

Of course, ideally open-source data should be gathered as much as possible. But safety requirements are important when it comes to conflict and human rights-related evidence. By the same token, storage of large data is expensive and requires sufficient funding with a long-term perspective. Taking these limitations into account, it was pointed out at the Loccum conference that even smaller archives that follow a minimalistic approach could have a high impact – if only they are very clear focused on what data is relevant to the project goals.

■ Peacebuilding Awareness at Tech Companies

Social media and big tech companies are highly relevant for digital peacebuilding efforts and bear great responsibility. Liaison and awareness building with these actors will be crucial tasks in the future and would – if successful – considerably improve the impact of digital monitoring and documentation in conflict situations. After all, social media platforms can serve as archive for dealing with the past processes but are rarely perceived as such.

■ Of Taxing and Decentralization: A Structural Policy Focus on the Relations with Tech Companies

Participants at the Loccum conference also floated the idea of a special tax. Like transnational regulations on CO₂ emissions, there is the proposal to tax social media companies for the pollution of the digital space and by pricing the negative impact of hate, disinformation, and cyberattacks create incentives for more investment into preventive measures working towards mitigating at least some parts of the multilayered problems of the digital spaces. In parallel to tax policy proposals, there is a demand to decentralize and become in terms of technology more independent from big tech companies and the so-called Silicon Valley hegemony. Smaller companies may provide software solutions that are likewise relevant for digital peacebuilding efforts and provide – due to the limited quantity of pieces – a higher degree of safety.

■ Transitional Justice: Improving the Accessibility of Digital Data to Court Proceedings

Digital monitoring is not yet fully accepted in legal proceedings. Often there are different sorts of limitations to the admissibility of open-source information in court which hinders transitional justice efforts. Given that the relevance of this kind of evidence will grow in the upcoming years across the board, digital peacebuilders and human rights organizations should develop and use more rigorous methodology to meet evidentiary standards and to make them accessible to court. Furthermore, existing court regulation should be revisited and amended to allow a wider use open-source evidence.

■ “Archive Alliances”: More Teamwork and Collaboration between Data Collection Projects Working on the Same Case

In digital peacebuilding inter-accessibility of digital archives needs to be improved. Often there are several institutions covering the same conflict or case of human right violation and maintaining digital archives. Exchange or even cooperation is, however, often limited if not completely inexistent. More teamwork and collaboration in that regard is needed. What was demanded in Loccum was an increase in conflict and human rights related “archive alliances”, but not at the expense of security and with a concrete aim in mind.

■ Data Security by Minimalism

Especially when operating in contentious digital environments in conflict situations or under authoritarian rule, the safety of peacebuilders or endangered communities is substantially increased by a minimalistic approach. The less data is stored online, and the fewer platforms are used, the better users are protected against digital threats.

■ More Exchange between Separated Digital Peacebuilding Communities and Need for Cross-Cutting Formats and Forums

While digital activities in the field of peaceful conflict transformation are numerous and a fair amount of experience was gathered, there is still a lack of connection and insufficient exchange between different initiatives and actors. While focusing basically all on similar challenges and problems the different communities active in this field – like, for example, the pro-peace IT engineers, the digital democracy promoters, the propaganda and fake news myth-busting scene, or the digital peacebuilding community – are still relatively separated. There is a need for cross-cutting formats and forums to foster more interaction.

■ Complete Digital Care with Digital Security

In order to embed digital security into varying organizational cultures and instill it into daily working practice shifting from the digital security paradigm over to digital care might be fruitful.

After all, digital security is not only a matter of securing oneself but care for one's social environment since avoiding or mitigating digital threats is caretaking for colleagues, family members, local communities, etc.

■ **Growing Important of Digital Youth and Young Adults for Peacebuilding in the so-called Global South**

Younger generations have a fundamentally different approach to digital media. That is particularly relevant for digital peacebuilding efforts in the so-called Global South in which members of the younger generation will play a dominant role in the upcoming years.

Detailed Conference Report

The corona pandemic has triggered a significant surge in digitization in almost all areas of life. At the same time, the great optimism that was once felt toward digital technologies has increasingly faded. Whether social media, digital identities, AI, geospatial information, blockchain, or big data - these technologies not only promote transnational exchange, democratization, and peace. Rather, the digital transformation has progressed particularly in the area of conflict and violence as well as the autocratic abuse of power. In addition, digitization is believed to be inherently conflict-ridden due to the fundamental upheavals it will cause in the mode of economic production, power relations, and interpersonal exchange.

Despite all this disillusionment, the field of digital peacebuilding has increasingly established itself in recent years. Through the innovative handling of digitization at the interface between the online and offline world, positive experience was gained for crisis prevention, conflict management, and peacebuilding. However, these activities currently lag far behind the malign, autocratic, and peace-threatening application of digital technologies and there is an urgent need to enlarge digital peacebuilding activities and increase their impact.

While digital peacebuilding is often depicted as a new field of action there is instead already large experience gathered in the past decade. But it was only very recently that more and more peacebuilding organizations have discovered the digital dimension and started implementing them in their daily work. Therefore, the conference in Loccum came at a particularly critical point in time. The discussant at the conference in Loccum agreed that we are now on the brink of mainstreaming digital peacebuilding. The digital dimension becomes more and more a standard feature of

peacebuilding efforts. Ten years ago digital peacebuilding was a niche. Now the niche has become a norm. As offline and online worlds continue to merge, digital peacebuilding is just peacebuilding but with new tools and a considerable number of open questions.

Against that background the conference aimed to shed light on how conflict management and digitization influence each other. In doing so, four areas of peaceful conflict management were focused on which are regarded as particularly relevant in the digital space: (1) Monitoring and Documentation (2) Digitization in the Field of Dialogue and Mediation (3) Digital Empowerment and Qualification (4) Pro-Peace Communication, Counterpropaganda & Awareness Raising.

(1) Monitoring & Documentation

In the digital age conflicts, human rights violations, and war fighting provoke a flood of images, video posts, and satellite images. Partly this information signifies fake news and propaganda. But to a considerable extent, digital evidence grasps actual reality on the ground. By the form of digital monitoring and documentation, this data could become an important building block of peace building. Once the verification of the accuracy of the available data is completed, digital monitoring and documentation could, for example, serve awareness-raising or peace advocacy initiatives and in that regard, help to counter hate narratives. For conflict-affected groups and civil society actors, who become active in the field, digital monitoring is often experienced as very empowering. In a post-conflict constellation, open-source documentation could function as a fundament for dealing with the past and building memorial procedures for social healing and reconciliation work. However, digital monitoring and documentation are currently most relevant in the field of transitional justice and in all efforts aiming to make conflict-related data available and admissible for juridical investigation and court proceedings.

A key question the discussants at the Loccum conference were focusing on is the role and the responsibility of social media platforms and tech giants. Liaison and awareness-raising with tech giants – although difficult to organize – would be crucial. When it comes to violent content on these platforms, digital peacebuilders are often confronted with two opposite trends.

On the one hand, particularly in non-western languages where major social media companies invest little in platform moderation, hate and violence propelling online entries and posts are spread unchecked and often gain inexcusable high attention. Disinformation and hate speech in non-western languages are far more volatile and predominant and is only deleted by social media companies lately – if at all.

On the other hand, access to conflict-related data is in many other contexts often handled very restrictively by social media platforms making it difficult for prosecution as well as for peace researchers or human rights advocates to get access to relevant information and evidence. Often, tech companies have little awareness that deleted social media content might signify at the same time deleted evidence which is urgently needed in transitional justice or peace research institutions. On many occasions, there are automatized procedures of deleting done by AI (artificial intelligence) and programmed algorithms which also leads to untransparent ways of ghosting activists and peacebuilders.

Thus, building awareness at tech and social media companies and improving accessibility signifies an important task for the future which would – if successful – considerably improve the impact of digital monitoring and documentation. After all, social media platforms can serve as archive for dealing with the past processes but are rarely perceived as such.

Focusing on prosecution as one mechanism of transitional justice, it was highlighted at the Loccum conference that improving the accessibility of digital data to court proceedings is also an important task for the future. Digital monitoring is not yet fully accepted in legal proceedings. Often there are different sorts of limitations to the admissibility of open-source information in court which hinders transitional justice efforts. Given that the relevance of this kind of evidence will grow in the upcoming years across the board, digital peacebuilders and human rights organizations should develop and use more rigorous methodology to meet evidentiary standards and to make them accessible to court. Furthermore, existing court regulation should be revisited and amended to allow a wider use open-source evidence.

Verification of data accuracy and fact-checking is another important field when discussing digital monitoring and documentation in conflict-related situations. The danger of manipulation is very high and – looking at the potential of deep fakes – will certainly grow in the coming years. However, it was carved out during the discussion in Loccum that even simple procedures – originating mainly from journalism – could help digital peacebuilders avoid falling for fake and manipulation. This includes, for example, figuring out where the first post was published or verifying if a video is taken in the place it is claimed.

With regard to data verification, peer review procedures are also very important as well as a certain “culture of doubt” that needs to be installed at initiatives and institutions doing digital monitoring and documentation on a regular basis. This requires, for example, embracing the likelihood of unexpected and counterintuitive outcomes and not jumping straight to conclusion although the outcomes might look at first glance obvious. Moreover, it was assumed that in the near future open-source AI technology will be used for fact-checking and might help digital peacebuilders to

keep up with more advanced forms of data manipulation.

While peer procedures are crucial for data verification, digital monitoring and documentation require per se a good and careful handling of teams. Digital evidence of war, conflicts, and human right violations are often highly disturbing for those who collect the data in the first place. The mental health of the investigators needs to be taken care of on a daily basis. That includes for example a constant process of psychological counseling for team members but also technological provisions like the use of black and white screen instead of full color or splitting sound sequences from video material and investigating them separately.

Likewise, it is crucial to reflect on biased views that might exist within the investigation team and how that might affect the process of data collection. Team members who might show partiality or prejudice towards one side of the conflict should not take an active role in monitoring projects. This may sound like a matter of course, but in everyday practice impartiality represents a major challenge that requires continuous reflection and supervision within the team of data collectors. These provisions and requirements need to be taken care of particularly when working with volunteers – which many initiatives and organizations active in that field do. Here, the selection, training, and supervision needs special attention and is in essence an ongoing task.

Very similar to team management procedures in terms of relevance and importance is – according to the discussants at the Loccum conference – the exchange between organizations and initiatives that work in the field of digital monitoring and documentation. In that regard, there is room for improvement. Particularly, the inter-accessibility of digital archives is a field that would improve the peacebuilding efforts. Often there are several institutions covering the same conflict or case of human rights violation and maintaining digital

archives. Exchange or even cooperation is, however, often limited if not completely inexistent. More teamwork and collaboration in that regard is needed. What was demanded in Loccum was an increase in conflict and human rights-related “archive alliances”.

The discussants at the Loccum conference advocated for a minimalistic approach to data collection which is suitable for most digital peacebuilding organizations. Of course, ideally, open-source data should be gathered as much as possible. But safety requirements are important when it comes to conflict and human rights related evidence. By the same token, storage of large data is expensive and requires sufficient funding with a long-term perspective. Taking these limitations into account, it was pointed out at the Loccum conference that even smaller archives that follow a minimalistic approach could have a high impact – if only they are very clear focused on what data is relevant to the project goals. Thus, a clear strategy and strict prioritization are crucial for applying the minimalistic approach. As an example, the field of transitional justice and court proceedings was in that regard highlighted at the Loccum conference. It is crucial to choose the violation that has the highest chance of being admitted in court and where the available documentation methodology works best, as discussants underlined at the Loccum conference. Considering the high volume of information that is potentially available for documentation, it is always important for the involved organizations to have a constant reasoning about the questions of what is possible and meaningful.

Looking at the relationship with tech companies from a more political perspective, participants at the Loccum conference also floated the idea of a special tax. Like transnational regulations on CO₂ emissions, there is the proposal to tax social media companies for the pollution of the digital space and by pricing the negative impact of hate, disinformation, and cyberattacks create incentives

for more investment into preventive measures working towards mitigating at least some parts of the multilayered problems of the digital spaces.

In parallel to tax policy proposals, there is a demand to decentralize and become in terms of technology more independent from big tech companies. Smaller companies may provide software solutions that are likewise relevant for digital peacebuilding efforts and provide – due to the limited quantity of pieces – a higher degree of safety.

(2) Digitization in the Field of Dialogue and Mediation

Dialogue and mediation efforts signify crucial activities in offline peacebuilding. Understandably, adding a digital dimension to this important field was intensively debated at the Loccum conference. One of the key takeaways of this session was the high importance of digital inclusion. It appeared that inclusion is the most fruitful and promising notion for the future discussion of digitalized mediation and dialogue initiatives. How inclusion can be initiated, augmented, and secured by digital tools but also what negative side effects might occur in the wake of digital mediation and dialogue projects and how they can be contained and mitigated are critical questions that – according to the discussants of the conference – need to be addressed in the future.

Experience throughout recent years in different contexts and organizational settings has shown that online mediation and dialogue approaches could generate a variety of positive implications. For example, digital tools in this field allow to engage large groups and high numbers of participants that would have not had a chance to take part in conventional dialogue or mediation efforts. Likewise, the digital dimension allows for more diversity and more meaningful representation. With digital tools there is the chance for a more nuanced selection process which is applying an intersectional framework that goes beyond single

identity markers and considers multiple and overlapping forms discrimination (such as the “women”, age”, or “the ethnic minority”).

The speakers at the Loccum conference highlighted instead that digitization allows to take into consideration an entire set of identity indicators which would facilitate a more nuanced selection process for dialogue and mediation processes. Moreover, digital tools in mediation and dialogue process allow, for example, the involvement of conflict-affected communities in remote areas or marginalized actors that face suppression in authoritarian regimes who would not have a chance to take part in offline dialogue formats. Here, digitization provides an opportunity to make the voice of these groups heard in the diplomatic and political realm and allow them to have a say.

While these examples – which all rotate about the notion of digital inclusion – showed the numerous positive implications of digital dialogues and mediation, the debate at the conference pointed also to some challenges and risks. For example, a certain level of digital literacy is an essential prerequisite for online dialogues. The potential benefits of digitalized efforts turn into opposite and in consequence raise entrance barriers – instead of lowering them – if would-be participants do not have sufficient access to necessary IT-infrastructure, suffer from narrow bandwidth or have – due to bad experience, or lack of training – limited trust in digital tools. Misrepresentation and exclusion could easily follow if this dimension is not handled properly.

Moreover, digitalized dialogue and mediation efforts could potentially increase insecurity and endanger participants. The digital space provides violent actors with new opportunities for escalation, suppression or surveillance through data leaks, spyware, or cyber-attacks. Online formats of dialogue and mediation signify no “safe haven” from that danger. Alone the probability of these threats might increase thresholds for

partaking in such processes – particularly for those participants who have experienced digital authoritarianism or cyber violence in the past.

Another potential challenge to digitalized dialogue and mediation efforts that need to be kept in check – according to the discussants at the Loccum conference – is the danger of data exploitation and forms of digital colonialism. Digital tools render it relatively easy to extract significant amounts of information from large groups of participants. It appears that participants of dialogue and mediation formats are often not fully aware of what will happen with their contributions and their data afterward. There is the danger that messages become detached from the actual senders and that dialogue processes end up in a state of pseudo-participation. Insights provided and the impulses uttered during these digital formats could turn into impersonalized information of certain not further specified conflict-affected groups. In addition, there are even cases where even the organizers had no clear picture of what to do with the received information and collected data for the sake of data collection. Moreover, there is often also misperception and exaggerated expectations that uttered impulses and statements might reach in a follow-up highest political level and would have a considerable impact on a solution of a particular conflict. Although this is a common feature in offline dialogue processes too, it appears to be more common in online formats – maybe due to the high number of participants and the larger outreach.

Against that background, it was elaborated in the discussion at the Loccum conference that expectation management about the possible impact of the achieved results in digitalized mediation and dialogue initiatives is essential. False expectations need to be addressed already at the beginning of the formats. Inclusion is here again crucial – since when participants are in the loop in the follow-up process in the aftermath of an actual dialogue and mediation process the problem of detached data extraction as well as the emerging

false expectations of the participants is mitigated. In a nutshell, the inclusion of participants should not stop after the dialogue process is adjourned but should be extended to the follow-up process. In addition to that, organizers of digitalized dialogue and mediation formats should follow the principle – particularly in conflict-related settings where data leaks and breaches could lead to security threats to participants – that data is only collected with a minimalistic approach and only if necessary due to a clear purpose.

Coming finally back to the notion of digital inclusion, the proposals for future development and improvement of online dialogue and mediation formats, the discussant at the Loccum conference highlighted that digital empowerment is a necessary element each and every effort in that field has to have in its portfolio. That requires to increase digital literacy and the supply of needed IT infrastructure should be included in the project planning processes from the very beginning. The same provision applies to digital security and safety provision which should be regarded as a necessary stable in each effort in that particular field.

Finally, it was highlighted that digital dialogue and mediation facilitation are at some points very different from classical offline settings. Breaking the ice at the beginning or engaging people during the process requires certain techniques in the digital space that clearly differ. In recent years many techniques that work in digitalized formats were however tested and there are now a series of free online training resources available (for example at the Build-up website).

(3) Digital Empowerment and Qualification

In the digital age, data protection as well as safe use of devices and digital communication becomes a crucial ability for all organizations and civil society actors operating in conflict situations or under authoritarian rule. Unobscured access to digital space is for example essential when reporting about

developments on the ground, involving diaspora actors living abroad in peacebuilding efforts, or getting access to live-saving information in hazard situations. Empowering and qualifying endangered communities and peacebuilders operating under these harsh digital circumstances signifies therefore a crucial task for peaceful conflict transformation.

The discussant at the Loccum conference highlighted that reduction of complexity might be one of the most essential steppingstones towards more digital security and therefore an important principle in empowering and qualification efforts. The less data is stored online, and the fewer platforms are used, the higher the personal safety of users. Especially in a contentious digital environment, the tendency to use numerous software applications, social media platforms, and digital devices is potentially dangerous. A minimalistic approach that is following the principle “less is more” would instead signify one of the best safety provisions. Along the line of this minimalistic approach, it is advisable – according to the discussion in Loccum – to choose platforms that apply security by default and not as an option.

Focusing more specifically on online hate, the discussants highlighted the need for a holistic approach which requires activities on different layers including efforts to strengthen the attacked, mobilize bystanders, stop the actual hater(s), and work towards creating a safe, inclusive, and free digital space in the medium term. The central goal is to protect affected individuals and communities and avoid they become silent and passive due to the effects of online hate. Along that line, it is most important in terms of empowerment to prioritize on fighting the impact of hate and to put actions against haters second in line. Since digital harassment is ubiquitous particularly in conflict situations, it is crucial to develop strategies to handle the consequences and effects of hate speech and build resilience.

Apart from coaching professional social media teams or peer-facilitation in chat groups, one important tool to qualify organizations to become more active in terms of digital resilience and counter digital threats is simulations and online roleplaying. Here, participants are allowed to develop and test resilience strategies in a safe and secure environment.

Another aspect important to qualification efforts is to focus not only on procedures and structures of digital security in peacebuilding organizations but establishing an actual safety culture instead. That requires us to resist the urge to try to apply a one-size-fits-all approach to different organizations but adapt digital security procedures to varying organizational cultures and atmospheres. Taking this into account, data backups or password renewal routines could have in consequence very different forms depending on the nature of the institutions they are applied to. In that regard working in intercultural and interdisciplinary settings – as it is often the case in the field of peaceful conflict transformation – plays an important role too.

In order to embed digital security into varying organizational cultures and instill it into daily working practice, the discussant at the Loccum conference advocated for a paradigm shift. Instead of digital security, digital care might be a more productive and fruitful focus. After all, digital security is not only a matter of securing oneself but care for one’s social environment since avoiding or mitigating digital threats is caretaking for colleagues, family members, local communities, etc. This paradigm shift requires further integration into conflict transformation approaches.

(4) Pro-Peace Communication, Counter-propaganda & Awareness Raising

Taking stock of the activities taking place in the field of pro-peace communication, counterpropaganda, and awareness raising, the participants of the Loccum conference arrived at a rather positive

conclusion. There is an active scene of projects and initiatives as well as a relatively large amount of experience that was gathered in recent years. The major challenge in that field lies rather in the lack of connection and exchange between the different actors and initiatives. While focusing basically all on similar challenges and problems the different communities active in this field – like, for example, the pro-peace IT engineers, the digital democracy promoters, the propaganda and fake news myth-busting scene, or the digital peacebuilding community – are still relatively separated. There is a need for cross-cutting formats and forums to foster more interaction and exchange and initiate a process of mutual learning between these communities.

Looking at the debate of digital counterpropaganda from the angle of peacebuilding, the discussants in Loccum advocated to work more towards positive agenda-setting and help to mitigate the inherently binary and conflictual narrative of “information warfare” that often dominates the public debate. Helping to elaborate an effective but peace-oriented answer to digital propaganda and online hate speech could become one of the major contributions that civil conflict transformation may deliver in the digital sphere. In that regard it would be particularly interesting and fruitful to develop alliances with top influencers who have large numbers of followers on relevant social media platforms – like Twitter or TikTok – and cooperate with them in the development and dissemination of pro-peace narratives against disinformation and political polarization in the online world. That would be a strong form of “allyship” for the sake of digital peacebuilding efforts.

One approach that was discussed in detail at the session was the concept of “digital street work”. In conflict situations reaching out to marginalized and endangered communities and engaging with them in a low-threshold and practical hands-on manner signifies a field that – if further developed and established – could signify a fruitful and productive

entry point for empowering conflict transformation in the digital sphere.

Turning more precisely to fake news, it was pointed out that particularly in conflict-related constellations the phenomenon of digital propaganda and fake news must be handled with sensitivity and by applying procedures of doublechecking. The label “fake news” as such could be easily used as a form of censorship and lead to distorted analyses of the situation on the ground. By the same token, it was highlighted at the conference that numerous fact-checking platforms and initiatives, which signify currently the most important tool to combat fake news, are already existing. However, what is unclear so far is how they are used and what impact they have.

Looking into the future and thinking of scenarios for the upcoming years, what appears of utmost importance – according to the discussants at the Loccum conference – is to bear in mind the fundamental different usage of digital media by younger generations. Since the relationship between older and younger generations will not only shift in Germany but also in many countries worldwide particularly in the so-called Global South, this generational trend will have a substantial impact on digital peacebuilding in the future.

About the generational perspective, the discussant at the Loccum conference discussed the potential of peer-to-peer approaches. These concepts are widely used in offline settings, for example in handling conflict in educational systems – most famously among pupils – and could be a fruitful scheme for future elaboration. What is needed here is a transformation into the digital world.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this conference report do not necessarily represent the position of all conference participants or their institutions. While the report conveys the main themes, conclusions, and recommendations, it is not a full account of the very rich and productive discussions held at the Protestant Academy Loccum. It aims to highlight the main points of convergence and divergence among the participants and to stimulate further work on digital peacebuilding.

About the Annual Platform Conference

The German Platform Peaceful Conflict Transformation is an open network that involves 60 organizations and around 110 individuals from the fields of peace work, mediation, human rights work, humanitarian aid, development cooperation, and science. The aim of the association, which was founded in 1998, is to promote civil conflict transformation. This is done through the exchange of information, conceptual debates or advocacy functions. The annual conference, which takes place regularly in the spring each year, serves this purpose.

About the Protestant Academy Loccum

Conferences at the Protestant Academy Loccum provide forums for open-minded discussions on urgent and pressing issues. They endeavor to establish dialogues between actors from different fields and backgrounds with the intention to provide impetus to “think out of the box”. The Protestant Academy Loccum hosts meetings over 48 hours/two nights for between 60 to 80 participants and is open to those with the expertise to share or an interest in the subject. To allow a free exchange of thoughts, the conferences are off-camera and off-record and strictly follow the Chatham House rules which allow participants to use the information received freely but neither reveal the identity nor the affiliation of the speakers or any other participant.

Contact

Ginger Schmitz

Dr. Thomas Müller-Färber

Plattform Zivile Konfliktbearbeitung
Großbeerenstr. 13a
10963 Berlin

Evangelische Akademie Loccum
Münchehäger Str. 6
31547 Rehburg-Loccum

Tel: +49 (0) 30 4000 65 118
e-mail: ginger.schmitz@pzkb.de
Internet: <http://www.pzkb.de>

Tel: + 49 (0) 57 66 81-109
Fax: + 49 (0) 57 66 81-9 00
e-mail: Thomas.Mueller-Faerber@evlka.de
Internet: <http://www.loccum.de>

The conference was founded by: