THE ROLE OF NGOS, PUBLIC AUTHORITIES, AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN SUPPORTING EXTRACURRICULAR INITIATIVES

ROLUL ONG-URILOR, AUTORITĂȚILOR PUBLICE ȘI INSTITUȚIILOR EDUCAȚIONALE ÎN SPRIJINIREA INIȚIATIVELOR EXTRACURRICULARE

CZU: 37.091.398:061.2:352/354 **https://doi.org/10.59295/eie2026.10**

Lourenco Moreno DANIA,
Master's student
Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China
E-mail: *danialourencomoreno@gmail.com*

Rezumat. *În societățile contemporane marcate de tensiuni sociale și marginalizarea tinerilor, consolidarea păcii depinde din ce în ce mai mult de procese sociale incluzive care se extind dincolo de cadrul politic și de securitate formale. Din perspectiva relațiilor internaționale, acest articol examinează rolul organizațiilor non-guvernamentale (ONG-uri), al autorităților publice și al instituțiilor de învățământ în sprijinirea inițiativelor extracurriculare ca instrumente de consolidare a păcii și a coeziunii sociale. Studiul adoptă o abordare calitativă și analitică bazată pe analiza documentelor și exemple de caz selectate din țări precum Portugalia, Brazilia, SÃO TOMÉ și PRÍNCIPE. Constatările evidențiază modul în care cooperarea dintre actorii statali și nestatali sporește eficacitatea educației non-formale în promovarea unor valori precum empatia, responsabilitatea, solidaritatea și cetățenia activă în rândul tinerilor. Inițiativele extracurriculare demonstrează consolidarea participării tinerilor, reducerea conflictelor sociale și promovarea mediilor de învățare incluzive și pașnice. Articolul susține că parteneriatele durabile dintre ONG-uri, autoritățile publice și instituțiile de învățământ sunt esențiale pentru consolidarea păcii pe termen lung și reziliența comunității. Concluziile subliniază importanța strategică a integrării educației extracurriculare pentru pace într-un cadru mai larg de guvernanță și dezvoltare.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *educație pentru pace, inițiative extracurriculare, ONG-uri și instituții, cetățenie activă, coeziune socială, prevenirea conflictelor.*

Summary. *In contemporary societies marked by social tensions and youth marginalization, peacebuilding increasingly depends on inclusive social processes that extend beyond formal political and security frameworks. From an international relations perspective, this article examines the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), public authorities, and educational institutions in supporting extracurricular initiatives as instruments of peacebuilding and social cohesion. The study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach based on document analysis and selected case examples from Lusophone countries, namely Portugal, Brazil, SÃO TOMÉ and PRÍNCIPE. The findings highlight how cooperation between state and non-state actors enhances*

the effectiveness of non-formal education in promoting values such as empathy, responsibility, solidarity, and active citizenship among young people. Extracurricular initiatives are shown to strengthen youth participation, reduce social conflicts, and foster inclusive and peaceful learning environments. The article argues that sustainable partnerships between NGOs, public authorities, and educational institutions are essential for long-term peacebuilding and community resilience. It concludes by emphasizing the strategic importance of integrating extracurricular peace education into broader governance and development frameworks.

Keywords: *Peace education, Extracurricular initiatives, NGOs and institutions, Active citizenship, Social cohesion, Conflict prevention.*

Introduction

In the contemporary international context, societies are increasingly confronted with complex social challenges, including rising social polarization, inequality, youth marginalization, and tensions within local communities. These dynamics directly affect social cohesion and stability, highlighting that peace is not solely a matter of international diplomacy or post-conflict agreements, but rather a multidimensional and long-term process rooted in everyday social interactions. From the perspective of International Relations, peace is increasingly understood as a continuous and dynamic process that involves governance, civic participation, and the promotion of shared social values. Over recent decades, peacebuilding has evolved from a state-centered and security-oriented approach to a broader framework that emphasizes human security, social inclusion, and community resilience. Contemporary peacebuilding theories argue that sustainable peace cannot be achieved exclusively through top-down political decisions, but must also address the structural, cultural, and social causes of conflict. In this sense, local actors and social institutions play a crucial role in fostering environments that prevent violence and promote peaceful coexistence *(Galtung, 1996; Lederach, 1997)*.

Within this evolving framework, the role of non-state actors has gained increasing relevance. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society groups, and educational institutions are now widely recognized as key contributors to peacebuilding processes. These actors operate at the intersection between the state and local communities, facilitating dialogue, trust-building, and cooperation. Their proximity to social realities enables them to respond more effectively to local needs, particularly in contexts marked by social vulnerability or limited institutional capacity. Civil society organizations, especially NGOs, contribute to peacebuilding by creating participatory spaces that promote social engagement, intercultural dialogue, and community-based learning. Through non-formal education initiatives, volunteering programs, and youth-centered projects, NGOs foster values such as empathy, responsibility, solidarity, and active citizenship. These values are fundamental for strengthening social cohesion and preventing the escalation of social conflicts. From an international relations perspective, the growing in-

fluence of NGOs reflects broader transformations in global governance, where authority and responsibility are increasingly shared among state and non-state actors *(Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Kaldor, 2003)*. Public authorities also play a decisive role in shaping peace-oriented initiatives. Governments and public institutions provide the legal, financial, and strategic frameworks that enable the implementation of educational and social programs. Through public policies, funding mechanisms, and institutional partnerships, public authorities support the integration of peace education and youth participation into national and local development strategies. The concept of multi-level governance helps explain how cooperation between public institutions, civil society, and educational actors enhances policy effectiveness and social impact.

Education occupies a central position within this governance framework. While formal education systems are essential for academic development, they often face limitations in addressing social, emotional, and civic learning. As a result, extracurricular initiatives have emerged as vital complementary spaces for youth development. These initiatives provide flexible and inclusive learning environments where young people can actively participate, express themselves, and engage with community issues beyond the traditional classroom setting. Peace education, when implemented through extracurricular activities, emphasizes experiential learning, dialogue, and critical reflection. It seeks to equip individuals with the skills and attitudes necessary to manage conflicts peacefully, respect diversity, and participate constructively in society. Extracurricular initiatives such as cultural projects, community service, youth clubs, and volunteering programs allow young people to develop leadership abilities, communication skills, and a sense of social responsibility. These experiences contribute not only to individual development, but also to the creation of inclusive and peaceful communities. Youth engagement is a particularly important dimension of peacebuilding in International Relations. Young people are often disproportionately affected by social exclusion, unemployment, and political marginalization, factors that may increase vulnerability to conflict and instability. At the same time, youth represent a significant potential for positive social change. International frameworks increasingly recognize young people as active agents of peace, highlighting their role in conflict prevention, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

The effectiveness of extracurricular initiatives, however, largely depends on the level of institutional cooperation. When NGOs, public authorities, and educational institutions operate independently, their actions tend to be fragmented and limited in scope. In contrast, coordinated efforts based on shared objectives and mutual support enhance the sustainability and social relevance of peace-oriented programs. Public authorities provide policy direction and resources, educational institutions offer structured learning environments, and NGOs contribute innovation, flexibility, and direct community

engagement. Together, these actors form a collaborative model capable of addressing complex social challenges more comprehensively. Lusophone countries offer relevant examples of such collaborative approaches. In contexts characterized by social diversity and historical inequalities, partnerships between NGOs, schools, and public institutions have supported extracurricular initiatives focused on citizenship education, youth participation, and conflict prevention. Experiences from Portugal, Brazil, and São Tomé and Príncipe illustrate how coordinated actions strengthen social cohesion, empower young people, and promote a culture of peace at the community level.

Therefore, this article aims to analyze the role of NGOs, public authorities, and educational institutions in supporting extracurricular initiatives as instruments of peacebuilding and active citizenship. By examining collaborative practices and selected examples from Lusophone countries, the study seeks to demonstrate how non-formal education contributes to youth empowerment, community resilience, and sustainable peace. From an international relations perspective, extracurricular education is presented not as a peripheral activity, but as a strategic component of contemporary peacebuilding and governance processes.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research approach, appropriate for analyzing social processes related to peacebuilding, education, and institutional cooperation. Given the exploratory nature of the topic and its focus on understanding roles, interactions, and impacts rather than measuring variables, a qualitative methodology allows for a deeper and contextualized analysis of extracurricular initiatives and their contribution to social cohesion and youth development.

The research is based primarily on document analysis and secondary data. Academic literature on peacebuilding, civil society, governance, and peace education was reviewed in order to establish a theoretical foundation grounded in International Relations. Policy documents, reports from international organizations, and official publications related to youth, education, and community development were also examined to contextualize the role of public authorities and educational institutions in supporting extracurricular initiatives. In addition, the study draws on selected case examples from Lusophone countries, namely Portugal, Brazil, and São Tomé and Príncipe. These cases were chosen due to their shared linguistic and cultural background, as well as the presence of collaborative practices involving NGOs, public authorities, and educational institutions. The selected examples illustrate different national and local approaches to extracurricular initiatives focused on peace education, active citizenship, and youth participation. Rather than aiming for exhaustive comparison, the cases serve an illustrative and analytical purpose, highlighting common patterns and challenges in institutional cooperation.

The analytical framework focuses on identifying the specific contributions of NGOs, public authorities, and educational institutions, as well as the dynamics of collaboration among these actors. Particular attention is given to how extracurricular initiatives promote non-formal learning, civic engagement, and conflict prevention among young people. The analysis also considers the structural conditions that enable or limit the effectiveness of such initiatives, including policy support, funding, coordination mechanisms, and access to resources.

This study acknowledges certain limitations. As a qualitative analysis based on secondary sources and illustrative case examples, it does not include primary fieldwork or quantitative data. However, this approach is suitable for achieving the main objective of the research, which is to provide a conceptual and analytical understanding of extracurricular initiatives as instruments of peacebuilding and governance. Future research could complement this analysis through empirical studies, interviews, or comparative evaluations across different regional contexts.

Results

The Role of NGOs in Supporting Extracurricular Initiatives. The findings indicate that non-governmental organizations play a central role in the design, implementation, and sustainability of extracurricular initiatives aimed at peace education and youth engagement. NGOs are particularly effective in developing non-formal educational programs that respond to local social challenges, including social exclusion, inequality, and intercultural tensions. Their close connection with communities allows them to adopt flexible and context-sensitive approaches, especially when working with young people and vulnerable groups. Through activities such as volunteering programs, community-based projects, cultural initiatives, and citizenship workshops, NGOs promote values closely associated with peacebuilding, including empathy, responsibility, solidarity, and cooperation. These initiatives provide young people with opportunities to participate actively in community life, develop leadership skills, and engage in constructive dialogue. As a result, NGOs contribute directly to youth empowerment and to the strengthening of social cohesion at the local level. NGOs often act as intermediaries between educational institutions, public authorities, and local communities. By facilitating partnerships and encouraging participation, they strengthen school–community relationships and enhance the social relevance of extracurricular programs. This intermediary role highlights the importance of civil society actors within contemporary governance and peacebuilding frameworks.

The Role of Public Authorities. Public authorities play a decisive role in establishing the institutional conditions that enable extracurricular initiatives to function effectively. Governments and public institutions contribute primarily through the development of

public policies that support youth participation, peace education, and community engagement. These policies provide a strategic framework that legitimizes extracurricular activities as part of broader educational and social development agendas. Beyond policy formulation, public authorities are responsible for providing financial and logistical support. Funding programs, public grants, and institutional partnerships allow NGOs and educational institutions to implement and maintain extracurricular initiatives over time. The analysis shows that public support is particularly important for ensuring continuity and accessibility, especially in socially disadvantaged contexts. Moreover, public authorities facilitate coordination among different stakeholders by promoting formal partnerships between NGOs, schools, and community organizations. This coordination reduces fragmentation, enhances coherence, and increases the overall effectiveness of peace-oriented initiatives. In this sense, public institutions function not only as regulators, but also as enablers of collaborative governance in the field of youth and peace education.

The Role of Educational Institutions. Educational institutions, including schools and universities, provide structured environments that connect formal education with non-formal learning opportunities. Schools play a key role in integrating extracurricular initiatives into students' daily routines by hosting clubs, workshops, artistic activities, and service-learning programs. These activities complement academic curricula by fostering moral, civic, and social values essential for peaceful coexistence. Through collaboration with NGOs and public authorities, educational institutions facilitate access to extracurricular programs and encourage student participation. Teachers and school administrators often act as mediators, supporting youth engagement and guiding learning processes. By opening their institutional spaces to community initiatives, schools strengthen their role as centers of social interaction and civic education. Furthermore, educational institutions contribute to the institutionalization of peace education by incorporating extracurricular initiatives into long-term educational strategies. This integration reinforces the idea that peacebuilding and active citizenship are integral components of education rather than peripheral or optional activities.

Outcomes of Institutional Collaboration. The results demonstrate that collaborative models involving NGOs, public authorities, and educational institutions produce more significant and sustainable outcomes than isolated initiatives. When these actors work together, extracurricular programs benefit from shared planning, combined resources, and joint evaluation mechanisms, which enhance both quality and impact.

The analysis identifies several key outcomes associated with institutional collaboration:

- increased youth participation in community and civic activities;
- improvement of communication, cooperation, and teamwork skills;
- strengthening of civic engagement and social responsibility;

- reduction of conflicts within schools and local communities;
- creation of more inclusive and peaceful learning environments.

Overall, the findings highlight that institutional cooperation is a decisive factor in maximizing the peacebuilding potential of extracurricular initiatives. By aligning the efforts of NGOs, public authorities, and educational institutions, these initiatives become effective instruments for youth development, community resilience, and the promotion of a culture of peace.

Discussion

Extracurricular Initiatives as Instruments of Peacebuilding. The findings of this study confirm that extracurricular initiatives function as effective instruments of peacebuilding when analyzed from an international relations perspective. Rather than operating exclusively within the educational sphere, these initiatives contribute to broader social processes that address the structural, cultural, and relational dimensions of conflict. By promoting dialogue, participation, and cooperation, extracurricular activities help reduce social tensions and create environments conducive to peaceful coexistence. From a peacebuilding standpoint, the results reinforce the understanding of peace as a dynamic and continuous process rooted in everyday social interactions. Extracurricular initiatives provide practical spaces where young people can experience peaceful conflict management, collective decision-making, and civic responsibility. These experiences are consistent with bottom-up peacebuilding approaches, which emphasize the importance of local actors and community-based actions in sustaining long-term peace beyond formal political agreements *(Lederach, 2005)*.

Extracurricular initiatives allow peace education to move from theoretical discourse to lived practice. Through non-formal learning, young people internalize values such as empathy, respect for diversity, and social responsibility. This experiential dimension strengthens the transformative potential of peace education, as it encourages behavioral change rather than merely cognitive understanding. Consequently, extracurricular initiatives contribute not only to individual development but also to the formation of social norms that support peaceful coexistence.

Civil Society, NGOs, and Contemporary Governance. The central role of NGOs identified in the results reflects broader transformations in governance structures within International Relations. NGOs are increasingly recognized as influential non-state actors capable of shaping social norms, policy agendas, and local implementation processes. Their involvement in extracurricular initiatives illustrates how civil society contributes to peacebuilding beyond formal political institutions. From this perspective, NGOs act as mediators between communities, educational institutions, and public authorities. Their flexibility and proximity to local realities enable them to address social challenges

that state institutions alone may struggle to manage effectively. Through non-formal education and youth-centered programs, NGOs foster inclusive participation and empower young people as active agents of social change. This dynamic reinforces theoretical arguments that sustainable peace requires cooperation between state and non-state actors within shared governance frameworks. Furthermore, the engagement of NGOs in extracurricular initiatives enhances social capital by strengthening trust, cooperation, and networks within communities. These elements are widely recognized in peace and conflict studies as essential for conflict prevention and community resilience. By facilitating interaction among diverse social groups, NGOs help reduce polarization and promote mutual understanding, which are key conditions for long-term peace.

Public Authorities and Multi-Level Governance. The discussion of public authorities' role highlights the importance of multi-level governance in supporting peace-oriented extracurricular initiatives. The results demonstrate that policy frameworks, institutional recognition, and financial support provided by governments are essential for the sustainability and scalability of such programs. Without consistent public support, extracurricular initiatives risk remaining fragmented, short-term, or dependent on limited external resources. At the same time, public authorities play a critical role in legitimizing extracurricular initiatives as part of broader educational and social development strategies. By integrating peace education and youth participation into public policies, governments signal the importance of these initiatives for social cohesion and stability. This institutional recognition strengthens cooperation between public authorities, NGOs, and educational institutions, enhancing overall policy coherence. Beyond policy formulation, public authorities contribute to coordination among stakeholders. Formal partnerships and collaborative frameworks reduce duplication of efforts and facilitate the sharing of resources and expertise. From a governance perspective, such coordination reflects a shift from hierarchical models toward more collaborative and participatory forms of governance, which are increasingly emphasized in contemporary International Relations.

Youth Engagement and Long-Term Peacebuilding. Youth engagement emerges as a central theme in the discussion of peacebuilding and social cohesion. The findings confirm that extracurricular initiatives provide meaningful opportunities for young people to develop civic competencies, leadership skills, and a sense of belonging. These outcomes are particularly significant in International Relations, where youth are increasingly recognized as key stakeholders in peace and security agendas *(United Nations, 2018; UNDP, 2019)*.

By participating in extracurricular activities, young people acquire practical skills related to communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. These competencies enhance their ability to participate constructively in public life and contribute to democratic processes. From a long-term perspective, investing in youth-centered peace

education helps address structural vulnerabilities that may otherwise lead to social unrest or conflict.

At the same time, extracurricular initiatives help counteract processes of marginalization and exclusion. By offering inclusive spaces for participation, they reduce the risk of disengagement and alienation among young people. This preventive dimension highlights the strategic importance of youth engagement for sustainable peace and community resilience.

Challenges, Limitations, and Policy Implications. Despite the positive outcomes identified, the discussion also reveals several challenges that limit the effectiveness of extracurricular peace-oriented initiatives. These challenges underscore the need for more consistent and strategic approaches to institutional collaboration. Key issues include:

- insufficient or unstable funding for long-term youth programs;
- weak coordination and communication between institutions;
- limited availability of trained professionals in peace education;
- unequal access to resources across different communities.

Addressing these challenges requires sustained political commitment and long-term investment. Policymakers are encouraged to institutionalize peace education within educational and youth policies and to strengthen capacity-building initiatives for educators and practitioners. For NGOs and educational institutions, continuous evaluation and community involvement are essential for maintaining relevance and impact. The discussion highlights that extracurricular initiatives represent a strategic component of contemporary peacebuilding and governance processes. When supported by effective institutional collaboration, these initiatives contribute significantly to youth empowerment, social cohesion, and the promotion of sustainable peace.

Conclusions

This article has examined the role of non-governmental organizations, public authorities, and educational institutions in supporting extracurricular initiatives as instruments of peacebuilding and social cohesion. From an international relations perspective, the analysis demonstrates that peacebuilding is not limited to diplomatic negotiations or post-conflict interventions, but is deeply connected to social processes, governance structures, and everyday educational practices within communities. The findings highlight that extracurricular initiatives constitute a strategic space for promoting peace education, particularly among young people. By fostering values such as empathy, responsibility, solidarity, and active citizenship, these initiatives contribute to the development of social competencies that are essential for conflict prevention and community resilience. Non-formal learning environments enable young people to engage actively with social issues, develop leadership skills, and participate cons-

tructively in public life, reinforcing their role as agents of peace rather than passive beneficiaries of policy interventions.

The analysis also confirms the central importance of institutional collaboration. When NGOs, public authorities, and educational institutions work in isolation, the impact of extracurricular initiatives remains limited and fragmented. In contrast, coordinated approaches based on shared objectives, mutual trust, and complementary roles significantly enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of peace-oriented programs. Public authorities provide policy frameworks and resources, educational institutions offer structured learning environments, and NGOs contribute innovation, flexibility, and close engagement with local communities. Together, these actors form a governance model capable of addressing complex social challenges in a comprehensive and inclusive manner.

Experiences from Lusophone countries such as Portugal, Brazil, and São Tomé and Príncipe illustrate how collaborative practices can successfully integrate extracurricular initiatives into broader educational and social development strategies. These cases demonstrate that institutional partnerships strengthen youth participation, reduce social tensions, and promote a culture of peace at the community level. Although contextual differences exist, the shared emphasis on cooperation and youth engagement highlights the broader relevance of these approaches for other national and regional contexts. Despite these positive outcomes, the study also recognizes several limitations and challenges. Insufficient funding, weak coordination mechanisms, and the lack of trained professionals in peace education continue to hinder the long-term sustainability of extracurricular initiatives. Addressing these challenges requires sustained political commitment, investment in capacity-building, and the institutionalization of peace education within national educational and youth policies.

In conclusion, extracurricular initiatives should be recognized as an indispensable component of contemporary peacebuilding and governance processes. Integrating peace education into non-formal learning spaces strengthens social cohesion, empowers young people, and contributes to resilient and inclusive societies. From an international relations perspective, supporting collaboration between NGOs, public authorities, and educational institutions is not only an educational priority, but also a strategic investment in long-term peace and stability. Strengthening these collaborative models is therefore essential for ensuring that peace education remains a continuous and transformative element of educational systems and community development.

Bibliography:

1. GALTUNG, Johan. *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1996. ISBN 978-0-8039-8553-

2. KALDOR, Mary. *Global civil society: An answer to war*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003. ISBN 978-0-7456-2992-6.
3. KECK, Margaret E.; SIKKINK, Kathryn. *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998. ISBN 978-0-8014-8456-5.
4. LEDERACH, John Paul. *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997. ISBN 978-1-878379-73-
5. LEDERACH, John Paul. *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. ISBN 978-0-19-517454-2.
6. OECD. *Global competence for an inclusive world*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 2018.
7. PUTNAM, Robert D. *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000. ISBN 978-0-7432-0304-3.
8. UNESCO. *Learning to live together: Education for peace, human rights and democracy*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2014.
9. UNESCO. *Education for sustainable development: A roadmap*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2020.
10. UNITED NATIONS. *Youth, peace and security. Report of the Secretary-General [online]*. New York: United Nations, 2018 [cited 10 March 2025]. Available at: https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-peace-and-security/
11. UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP). *Youth empowerment for sustainable peace*. New York: UNDP, 2019.