

ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING IN MOUNTAIN AREAS
BIO-CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND THE ARTS OF LIVING ON DAMAGED SLOPES

Call for Abstracts

International Symposium, 5-7 July 2027, University of Innsbruck, Austria

Unit for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Innsbruck, in association with the Environmental Peacebuilding Association (EnPAx)

Deadline for prioritized abstracts: 1 December 2026 (later submissions will be considered as space permits)

The Environmental Peacebuilding Association (EnPAx) and the Unit for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Innsbruck invite abstracts for a three-day symposium on environmental peacebuilding in mountain areas.

Ever since Humboldt depicted Chimborazo as a single tableau, with vegetation belts, temperatures, and human activities arranged along a single slope, mountains have been privileged sites for contemplating the intertwining of nature and culture, as well as for disregarding this interplay. The vertical compression of climatic zones produces refugia, habitat mosaics, and endemism, and has also sustained an extraordinary density of languages, cosmologies, agrarian techniques, and property regimes. Examples range from the Andean vertical archipelago to Alpine commons, transhumance, and Himalayan irrigation systems. In the mountains, it is not merely the case that biological and cultural diversity coincide; the same terrain generates both. This is why the modern separation of nature and culture is ineffective as an analytical tool, and why peacebuilding that presupposes this separation tends to reproduce the very asymmetries it seeks to overcome.

Mountains are among the most persistently contested spaces on Earth. Far from being remote margins, they are places where several logics of conflict converge and overlap:

- High ground serves military strategy, from the Alpine front of 1915–18 to Siachen and the Line of Control.
- Watersheds serve as borders and are beginning to migrate as glaciers retreat.
- Highlands have been spaces of evasion from state-making (Scott 2009), and states have treated them accordingly as peripheries to be pacified through infrastructure, conservation, and counter-insurgency.

- Slopes are frontiers of extraction, where land and environmental defenders face disproportionate violence.
- Headwaters feed downstream geopolitics, in which mountain communities rarely have a say.
- Cryospheric hazards are becoming increasingly common, and managing them raises questions of political membership as well as engineering.

Mountain conflicts are therefore layered. For example, a dispute over a mine or a dam is simultaneously a dispute over autonomy, livelihoods, sacred ground, downstream water, and who is recognized as a legitimate interlocutor or authorized to speak for the mountain.

Three fields that should be in conversation with each other rarely meet on the slope:

- Environmental peacebuilding has evolved from initial expectations of environmental peacemaking (Conca & Dabelko 2002) to include more critical perspectives including introspective examination of its “dark side” (Ide 2020; Ide et al. 2021). Nevertheless, it still tends to treat mountains as an upstream input into someone else’s river basin.
- Critical Peace and Conflict Studies has refined its critique of the liberal peace, hybridity, the everyday, and the colonality of intervention. However, it has rarely considered terrain, altitude, ice, or more-than-human relations to be political matters.
- Mountain research is methodologically sophisticated, but its vocabulary for violence, memory, and contestation remains comparatively limited (cf. Debarbieux & Rudaz 2015).

We invite contributions that consider environmental peacebuilding *from the perspective of the mountain rather than the basin*. Ideally, these contributions should draw on discourses that problematize or transcend the nature/culture divide, e.g.:

- the arts of living on a damaged planet (Tsing et al. 2017);
- violent environments (Peluso & Watts 2001) and green militarization (Lunstrum 2014; Duffy 2016);
- slow violence (Nixon 2011) and the environmentalism of the poor (Martínez-Alier 2002);
- earth-beings and cosmopolitics (de la Cadena 2015) and glaciers that “listen” (Cruikshank 2005);
- multispecies approaches;
- feminist political ecology;
- cryopolitics (Radin & Kowal 2017); and
- rights of nature.

Symposium Themes

The symposium advocates a mountain-centric approach. Rather than treating mountains as mere scenery or reservoirs of resources, or as the upstream margin of lowland basins, it recognizes them as social-ecological worlds in their own right. Mountain communities, both human and non-human, are agents of peacebuilding rather than objects of it, and terrain, altitude, and ice are political matters. The five themes below are derived from this perspective. Starting with the cryosphere and the water it releases, they move on to the frontiers where borders, war, and extraction converge, before moving on to the bio-cultural and multispecies fabric of mountain life and the sacred and commemorative relations people maintain with mountains. Finally, they address the question of how environmental peacebuilding can actually be achieved in mountain areas.

There are two concerns that run through all themes, which should be integrated into contributions rather than added as an afterthought:

- **Gender and intersectionality:** This explores how gender, class, race, ethnicity, indigenous status, age, and minority status influence access to land and water, exposure to violence and hazards, migration and care work, and who is recognized as a legitimate voice. Relevant fields of study include feminist political ecology and critical race studies.
- **The political economy of mountain peacebuilding:** This includes the macro- and microeconomics of livelihoods, investment, and tourism, as well as the question of who finances peacebuilding and conservation, on what terms, and with what consequences for local autonomy.

In the spirit of plural, context-sensitive understandings of peace, we also invite methodological reflection on researching and intervening in remote, sensitive or contested terrain.

I. Water, Ice, and Hazard. Contributions in this theme may address, for example: cryosphere loss; the reordering of hydrological regimes; hydro-hegemony; dams and basin negotiations that exclude upstream communities; borders drawn along shifting watersheds; glacial lake outburst floods; permafrost thaw; landslides; early warning systems; protection; planned relocation; questions of rights; who is deemed worth protecting; and disaster diplomacy across hostile borders.

II. Frontiers of Conflict: Borders, Militarization, and Extraction. Contributions in this theme may address, for example: high-altitude militarization and its ecological footprint; war remnants and unexploded ordnance surfacing from retreating ice; the toxic legacy of mines and military installations; mining, hydropower, and the energy transition as new waves of extraction; the criminalization of land and environmental defenders; treating mountains as persons rather than deposits; and conservation-based de-escalation in peace parks.

III. Bio-cultural Diversity, Coexistence, and Recognition. Contributions in this theme may address, for example: commons and customary institutions under modern property regimes; autonomy arrangements for conflict resolution; heritage designation for recognition and enclosure; pastoralism and transhumance; grazing rights; the return of large carnivores and conflicts over coexistence between urban and mountain communities; fortress conservation and eviction; anti-poaching enforcement; tourism and overtourism; mega-events and migration as pressures on and commodification of bio-cultural diversity; and depopulation and just transitions at altitude.

IV. Sacred Heights, Memory, and the Arts of Peace. Contributions in this theme may address, for example: mountains as sacred sites and destinations of pilgrimage, from Kailash and Athos to Sri Pada, Kirinyaga and the Qoyllur Rit'i pilgrimage at Ausangate; shared and contested holy places; offerings, processions, and seasonal rituals as practices of reciprocity and peace; commemoration and reconciliation in former mountain war zones; ecological grief, solastalgia, and glacier funerals; and mountain films, literature, art, and curation as peace practices.

V. Doing Mountain Peacebuilding: Methods, Technologies, and Practice. Contributions in this theme may address, for example: access to remote, sensitive, and contested areas; research ethics, safety, and participatory methods; practitioner-researcher collaboration, mediation, and training; financing mechanisms and the conditions attached to them; the use of remote sensing, GIS, modelling, and AI in the production of mountain knowledge and designing interventions; the question of who owns, controls, and benefits from mountain data; the coloniality of mountain knowledge, from survey and cartography to mountaineering and conservation; and conflict-sensitive approaches.

VI. Open theme. We also welcome other contributions on environmental peacebuilding in mountainous regions that do not fit into the above themes, including comparative, theoretical, and experimental work.

Contributions

We welcome scholarly presentations from the natural and social sciences, the humanities, and law, as well as contributions from policy makers, decisionmakers, practitioners, and artists, and curatorial work. We particularly encourage contributions that link several mountain regions, such as the Andes, the Caucasus, the Hindu Kush-Himalayas, the East African highlands, the Levant, the Southeast Asian massif, and the Alps. Panels will be composed across disciplines rather than sorted by them. Alongside the panels, the program will include case clinics, practitioner-researcher labs, 90-minute training modules, a poster session, and film and arts sessions. These formats are designed to encourage exchange rather than sequential presentation. Early-career researchers are encouraged to submit proposals for the panels or the poster exhibition.

Practical information

- **Venue:** the symposium is designed as an in-person event at the University of Innsbruck, so in-person contributions are strongly preferred. However, a limited number of online sessions will be offered for contributors who are unable to travel. Please indicate in your submission if you can only present online.
- **Language:** the working language of the symposium is English. If you would prefer to present in another language, please indicate this in your submission. Depending on demand, the organizers may consider providing translation support.
- **Papers:** full papers are not required. Authors of selected contributions will be invited to submit their work to a special issue of the journal *Environment and Security*. Please indicate in your submission whether you intend to develop your contribution into a full paper.
- **Onward agenda:** the symposium's results will feed into the 5th International Conference on Environmental Peacebuilding (Nairobi 2028).
- **Fellowships:** a limited number of travel fellowships for contributors from low- and middle-income countries is planned, subject to funding.
- **Symposium fees:** The symposium fees cover coffee breaks, two lunches, the welcome reception, and the symposium dinner.
 - **Standard rate:** EUR 180.
 - **Reduced rate:** EUR 90 (for students, early-career researchers, civil-society representatives, and participants from low- and middle-income countries)
 - **Fee waiver:** available for participants who are unable to pay; it does not include lunches or the symposium dinner.
 - **Voluntary contribution:** participants who are able to are invited to add a voluntary contribution to support colleagues from the Global South and students.

Submission

Please send the following by **1 December 2026** for priority consideration to: <https://www.environmentalpeacebuilding.org/symposia/mountain-areas-2027/submit-proposal>; later submissions will be considered as space permits:

- the title of your contribution
- an abstract (max. 300 words)
- a short bio (max. 100 words)

- the type of contribution: presentation, panel of 3-5 presentations, facilitated roundtable discussion, training course (90 minutes), practitioner-researcher lab, case clinic, artistic contribution (links or supporting material may be added), poster, or other
- one or two preferred themes
- whether you intend to develop a full paper for publication
- whether you will present in person or can only present online, and your preferred language of presentation

Applicants will be notified of the outcome by **31 January 2027**, in good time for visa procedures. Letters of invitation for visa purposes can be issued upon request to confirmed speakers and participants.

Contact

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