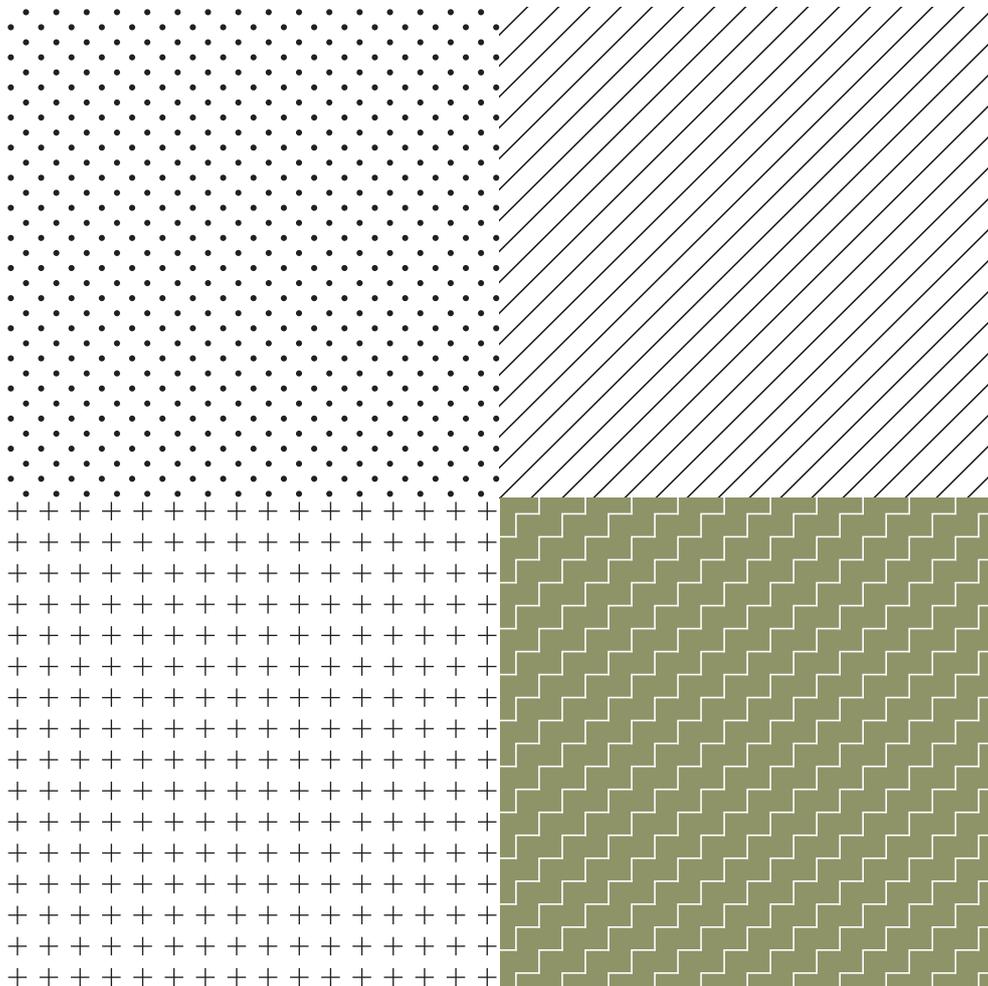


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ENHANCING EU PEACEBUILDING CAPABILITIES



# Owning the Peace in International Interventions: a Delusion or a Possibility?

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## Colophon

# OWNING THE PEACE IN INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS: A DELUSION OR A POSSIBILITY?

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Deliverable 2.1: Scoping Study on Local Ownership

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## Whole of Society Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

This scoping study was produced as part of the project “Whole of Society Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding”, which aims to enhance the EU’s peacebuilding and conflict prevention capabilities.

It is one of the seven scoping studies that aim to define the state of the art knowledge about civilian means for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and identify research gaps in relation to several cross-cutting themes and clusters that the project focuses on. More information at [www.woscap.eu](http://www.woscap.eu)

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## Executive Summary

The interest in local ownership in peacebuilding scholarship and practice has grown in parallel with accumulated evidence that suggests a failure of the current practice of international interventions to foster dynamics conducive to sustainable peace. The recognition of locally owned peace for its sustainability has sparked rich academic debate, which has however also grappled with the imprecision of the concept and the implications of it for assessing and rethinking the practice of peacebuilding. The EU upholds the principle of local ownership in its programmatic and policy documents and this paper identifies some of the main implementation challenges related to the tensions, dilemmas, and contradictions associated with the notion of local ownership.

The literature surveyed in this paper underscores the ambiguity of the concept in both of its components, namely 'local' and 'ownership' and suggests its salience as a policy idea/ideal rather than as an objective goal of international intervention. Peacebuilding interventions bring together a variety of actors with different mind-sets regarding the meaning of local ownership and how it should be implemented, alongside local actors' understanding of what acceptable peace looks like. The liberal peacebuilding mainstream 'top down' and 'outside in' approach has come under strong criticism regarding its ability to honour the rhetorical commitment to local ownership. This concerns foremost a consensus about 'what to owe', which in its turn is central to the legitimacy of external intervention. The essence of the criticism is that the state-centric, institution building understanding of the task of building peace is decoupled from the fundamental problems of societal reconstruction and deep reconciliation. This has resulted in international interventions' failure to address the needs of local societies effectively and in a durable manner. In this context, the question of 'who is to own' is equally controversial and a failure to facilitate mobilisation of different actors has been identified as directly contradicting the pursuit of local ownership by external actors.

The third issue that preoccupies much of the local ownership debate is that of 'how', focused on coordination primarily between external actors and their mutual relations. This goes against the ideas of emancipatory peace as suggested in the more recent 'local turn' in the peacebuilding literature, which has identified local agency and the issues of empowerment as being at the heart of the peacebuilding problematique.

Against the backdrop of the diverse scholarship on local ownership, the paper puts forward a relational perspective on local ownership that centres on the interaction between external actors and their local counterparts as a way of understanding how local ownership can emerge through their shared experience, and how through these relationships issues of competence, responsibility and power can be worked out to support locally grounded peace. Such an approach affords equal relevance to local and external peacebuilding actors and their concerns, perceptions and expectations regarding their engagement, and addresses head on the inherent contradictions of externally-led peacebuilding interventions.