

On the interconnectedness of music and peacebuilding: A scoping review informing music education

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary study explores the interconnectedness between music and peacebuilding. The concept of interconnectedness shapes this study, in response to rapidly evolving global circumstances that require fresh interpretations of both peacebuilding and music. Through a scoping review, the aim of this study is to explore the characteristics of the available research literature bringing together music and peacebuilding. The explorative starting point is to examine both music and peacebuilding as social systems, focusing on their purposes and the respective contexts in which they operate. This study seeks to bridge the knowledge gap that remains, despite existing research, in identifying how this interconnectedness could be brought to life, and how it could inform the reflection of purposes and meanings in music education. A scoping review was conducted with 34 studies from 2013 to 2023. The inductive content analysis displayed geographic diversity with a specific focus on areas of past or present conflict. The characteristics of the studies were diverse, yet a tendency toward employing qualitative, ethnographic data was noticeable. As a result, five categories of interconnectedness between music and peacebuilding were identified: (a) music supporting understanding between differing groups, (b) music forming narratives to build peace, (c) music building peace within specific community settings, (d) music integrated into educational frameworks for peacebuilding, and (e) theoretical viewpoints on the interconnectedness between music and peacebuilding. These could be interpreted as glimpses of an emerging system, situated at the intersection of peacebuilding, music, and music education.

Keywords

conflict, interconnectedness, music education, music, peacebuilding, scoping review, systems thinking

Introduction

Music education can be seen as having various purposes in society (Bowman, 2009). In research, it is emphasized that music, as a social practice, enables a unique social existence, and can be seen to contribute to the formation of a collective identity and to fostering participation

in cultural and political contexts (Turino, 2008). Indeed, a social turn can be identified in the arts and music scholarship (Charnley, 2021; Westerlund & Karttunen, 2024). While global policies highlight the importance of reinvesting in cultural resources and reimagining education to build peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable futures (UNESCO, 2024), we also know that music has been intentionally used for violence (e.g., Cheng, 2019) and as a means of torture in war (Alanne, 2010). At a time when war and violence have become commonplace, and when we face increasing societal challenges, conflict, and segregation, it can thus be asked, “Can music be used for positive change in situations of crises or war, and what examples do we have of using music for peacebuilding and the interconnection between them?”

Peacebuilding definitions have developed over time. Definitions for the concept of peacebuilding have been given by Galtung (1996), both as “the absence/reduction of violence of all kinds” and as “nonviolent and creative conflict transformation” (p. 9). Galtung, critiquing fragmented approaches to peacebuilding, emphasizes that it does not start from just anywhere, but must progress across all of these axes simultaneously. Historically, the concept of peacebuilding has evolved beyond the mere absence of conflict to emphasize justice and equality (Galtung, 1995a, 1995b). For instance, Boulding (2000) has stressed the need for peace at multiple societal levels, whereas Lederach’s (2005) understanding of peacebuilding as a transformative process has been driven by engagement, dialogue, and reconciliation. The traditional liberal model of peacebuilding, which treats peace as something to be constructed, no longer appears to align with effective approaches for building lasting peace in societies. The outcomes of an adaptive peacebuilding system often emerge unpredictably from the interactions of multiple actors and elements (Ricigliano, 2012). From these ideas, it is understandable how creativity in conflict transformation could benefit from approaches in the field of music. The definitions presented here, especially those by Galtung (1996) and Lederach (2005), are adopted as the foundation of this study, defining peacebuilding as creative conflict transformation, driven by dialogue.

Previous research has linked music and peacebuilding. In his pioneering work, Urbain (2008, 2016, 2019, 2021), inspired by the work of Galtung, explores the role of music in conflict transformation and highlights its power to build dialogue and reconciliation. There are also existing reviews on identifying practical means of using music for peace or violence (Sandoval, 2016), how interdisciplinary collaboration could help us to understand the role of music in conflict situations (Grant et al., 2010), and how to use the “Harmonious Relations” framework to appraise music’s potential contributions to peace (Howell, 2023, p. 85). However, a gap remains regarding the possible interconnectedness of music and peacebuilding. In this study, interconnectedness refers to how music and peacebuilding are connected within wider social systems and are shaped by their societal and political contexts, allowing each to influence the other. This study thus aims to bridge this knowledge gap by exploring possible notions of interconnectedness in the available research literature.

Research approach and questions

The explorative starting point for this study is to examine our lived realities through systems thinking, focusing on the purposes of social systems and the respective contexts in which they operate (Luhmann, 1995; Meadows, 2008; Senge, 2006). Peacebuilding (e.g., de Coning, 2016; Gregorian et al., 2020), music (e.g., Burrows, 1997; Lauzon, 2011; Mikkonen, 2004), and music education (e.g., Väkevä et al., 2017, 2022) can all be seen as social systems, containing multiple subsystems and purposes.

The concept of a social system is based on how a system’s relational and cultural structures are shaped through social interaction, and how meanings and symbols emerge from these social practices (Meadows, 2008). Systems have their purposes, and they consist of and intertwine

with other systems (Ackoff & Gharajedaghi, 1996). A social system can thus be viewed as a structure where the purpose of the system governs its operations, providing meaning within a particular social context, thereby establishing its limits (Luhmann, 1995; Väkevä et al., 2017).

Peacebuilding has increasingly been approached as a system, recognizing that the components of conflict, such as actors, institutions, behaviors, and attitudes interact in dynamic and nonlinear ways (e.g., Körppen et al., 2011). Peacebuilding functions as an intricate social system involving multiple actors and interrelated processes aimed at long-term stability (Navarro Forero, 2023). As a complex and context-sensitive system, peacebuilding has increasingly focused on adaptive, bottom-up approaches, rather than aiming to build peace top-down with one-size-fits-all solutions (de Coning, 2016; Ricigliano, 2012).

Music, as viewed through systems-based approaches such as the cultural sustainability framework (Schippers & Grant, 2016), identifies key system elements as dynamic and interconnected, understanding music cultures as ecosystems. Other system-oriented frameworks, such as the model for critically engaging with music interventions in war-affected places (Howell, 2024), further stress the complexity of cultural ecosystems. Turino's (2008) concept of music operating between the possible and the actual highlights how music can create openings within social systems—spaces where alternative connections and futures can be sensed and explored. In the context of creative conflict transformation, this means that music may allow us to imagine possible futures before they materialize.

As for music education, viewing it through a systems lens encourages professionals to look beyond individual teaching and learning environments. It invites them to see their work as part of broader, interconnected systems and to reflect on the role of music education in a constantly changing society (e.g., Ilmola-Sheppard et al., 2021; Väkevä et al., 2017; Westerlund et al., 2022). The systems of music education are defined by the purposes that practitioners assign to them—or leave out (Barrett & Westerlund, 2023, p. 30).

In this study, peacebuilding, music, and music education (see Figure 1) are seen as interconnected systems, each shaped by cultural and relational dynamics within a constantly changing society. None of these three systems are fixed or closed practices, but rather living systems that evolve in relation to one another and their social, political contexts. To explore what a potential, emerging system at the crossroads of peacebuilding, music, and music education could look like, it is not necessary to define each system in detail. Instead, the aim is to identify insights, or glimpses, drawn from this scoping review, and to use them to better understand how these systems relate to one another. This exploration thereby offers a generative space for potential cross-system learning. The insights gained may also be useful for music education research and practice, as well as teacher education, especially in times marked by societal tension, polarization, and conflict.

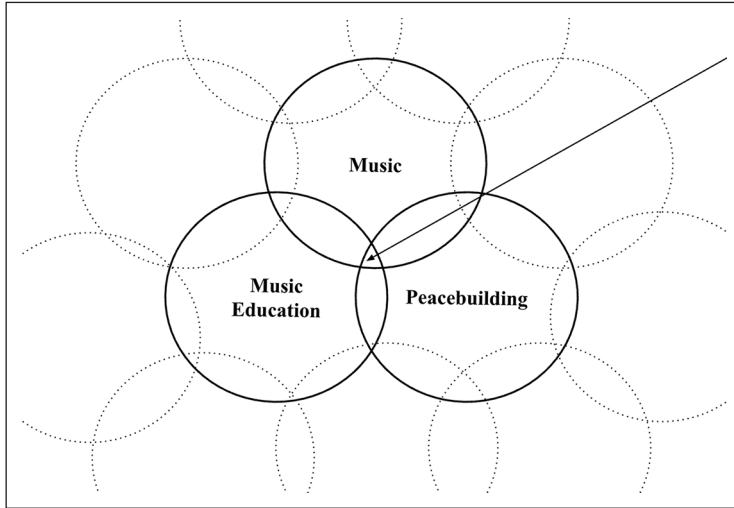
The following research questions were identified to define the aim of this review:

Research Question 1: What are the common characteristics of the reviewed research on the interconnectedness of music and peacebuilding?

- a. What are the geographical contexts of the studies?
- b. What is the temporal distribution of the studies?
- c. What kind of research designs are used in the studies?
- d. What are the outcomes of the studies?
- e. What kind of musical practices are the studies focusing on?

Research Question 2: What kind of interconnectedness is constructed between music and peacebuilding in the studies, if any?

Figure 1. The Emerging System of Peacebuilding, Music, and Music Education as the Interest of This Study.



Method

A scoping review was conducted following a predetermined unpublished protocol. The reporting follows the PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR) (Tricco et al., 2018). In this study, a scoping review is understood as a type of systematic literature review with the specific aim of mapping the existing field of topic area literature in terms of the volume, nature, and salient characteristics (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Peters et al., 2020).

Whereas a systematic review aims to sum up the best available research in question, gather empirical evidence from a more limited set of studies centered around a specific research query, and provide answers based on a limited selection of carefully evaluated studies (Armstrong et al., 2011), a scoping review aims to offer a broad view of a wide-ranging and varied body of literature on a general subject (Munn et al., 2018). Scoping reviews assist researchers in outlining the scope and parameters of their systematic review by providing a broader perspective on the available evidence. Scoping reviews are, therefore, less concerned with addressing highly specific research questions and, as a result, do not typically assess the quality of the studies included in the review (Lockwood et al., 2019; Teare & Taks, 2020).

The eligibility criteria for the selection of studies within the present review were defined with a focus on ensuring relevance and contemporary insights into the field (see Table 1). First, only studies relating to both peacebuilding and music were included. Second, those identifying a connection between peacebuilding and music in any part of the study were also included. Only peer-reviewed journal articles were included, for reasons of consistency and transparency. The timeframe for eligible studies was restricted to those published within the last decade, specifically from 2013 to 2023. This criterion was established on the premise that research conducted and published within 10 years will effectively capture the recent

Table 1. Eligibility Criteria.

| Inclusion | Exclusion |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Studies related to both peacebuilding and music | Studies only related to either music or peacebuilding, or neither music nor peacebuilding |
| Peacebuilding and music have an identifiable relation/connection in any part of the study | Peacebuilding and music do not have an identifiable relation/connection in any part of the study |
| Peer-reviewed journal articles | Book chapters, comments, briefing papers, non-peer-reviewed articles, letters, conference abstracts |
| Studies published in 2013–2023 | Studies published before 2013 or after 2023 |
| The language used is English | The language used is anything but English |

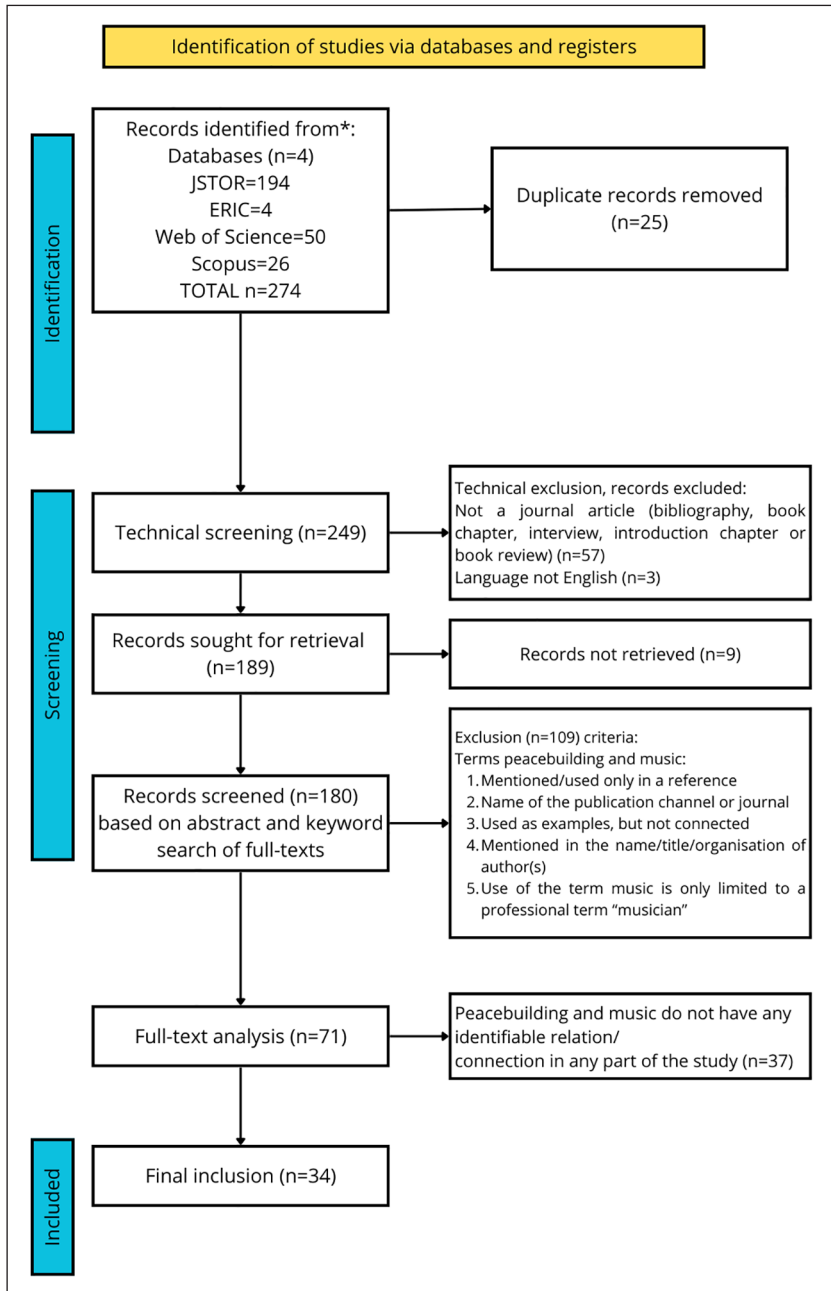
literature, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of research and the latest developments in the field. Finally, only articles written in English were considered for inclusion. Excluding non-English articles from this scoping review was justified by the challenges of translation, which can also lead to potential errors and misinterpretations, as well as by the need for consistency in terminology and methodologies to facilitate effective comparisons across studies.

The information sources for this scoping review were four databases: Journal Storage (JSTOR), Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Web of Science (WoS), and Scientific Abstract and Citation Database (Scopus). These sources were selected based on their potential scope on the topic of the review. It was deemed important to use databases with studies from various disciplines. The searches were conducted in December 2023. The search terms for the databases were (peacebuilding AND music*). The search terms were carefully selected to align with the study's objective. The term "peacebuilding" was specifically chosen, as it directly reflects the focus of the research, which is peacebuilding rather than *peace* or other terms that could be interpreted similarly (e.g., *empathy* or *conflict resolution*). In addition, it was considered important to include a wider range of research on music in this study, rather than restricting it to only music education. The searches concerning "music education" and peacebuilding also led to an insufficient number of studies—only two articles were found in ERIC, WoS, and Scopus. These articles were also identified through the broader search terms strategy, and were, therefore, included in the study.

The screening of the data, based on PRISMA-ScR (Figure 2), was conducted in several stages. The four databases produced a total of 274 articles. After the removal of duplicates ($n = 25$), 60 records were removed due to technical exclusion, meaning that the article was not a peer-reviewed journal article. Then, a total of 189 reports were sought for retrieval, out of which nine could not be retrieved. In the second screening, abstracts were screened based on keywords, and if the abstract did not show both keywords (peacebuilding and music), the whole text was scanned. In the final screening, the identifiable relation, connection, or association between music and peacebuilding in any part of the study was investigated, and 37 articles were excluded on the basis of no such relationship being found. Thus, the final number of articles included in this scoping review was 34.

The data charting process was conducted on the basis of the research questions. The data were charted in a separate Excel spreadsheet developed for the purposes of this review. The

Figure 2. The PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Scoping Review (PRISMA-ScR, Tricco et al., 2018).



spreadsheet included the following data items: (a) author(s) and year of the study; (b) the geographical context of the study (if applicable); (c) research objectives; (d) participants; (e) research design; (f) data collection instrument(s); and (g) major outcomes.

Synthesis of the analysis

The characteristics of the studies (in response to research question 1) were collected, described, and presented in table format supplementary material. Each characteristic subquestion was reported individually. A second coder was used to confirm the analysis.

The interconnectedness between music and peacebuilding (in response to research question 2) was analyzed with inductive content analysis (Vears & Gillam, 2022). The articles were first read several times with a focus on the aim of the research and specific research question (Table 2), to identify how music and peacebuilding were interconnected in each case. General, preliminary content categories of interconnectedness were thus identified. These categories were broken down into subcategories using an iterative analysis with similarities and divergences. The emerging subcategories were given a short summarizing title and a content description. Following this, five main categories were developed by critically examining the subcategories and assessing their relevance to research question 2. The final categories were then named and described. At each stage of the process, a second coder was consulted to support consistency and credibility.

Findings

Common characteristics of the reviewed research on the interconnectedness of music and peacebuilding (RQ1)

The findings of the first research question are presented below. An overview of the characteristics of all the included studies ($n = 34$) can be found in the online supplementary material.

Geographical contexts of the studies. The geographical distribution of the articles can be seen in Table 2 and Figure 3. The geographical distribution includes the countries or areas described in the studies, mainly representing data collection in the area or the context of intervention implementation. Some studies identified multiple contexts, and in 10 of them no specific definition of or discussion about a geographical context was given. As can be seen in Figure 3, the largest number of studies were identified as being situated in European countries.

Table 2. Geographical Distribution of the Studies.

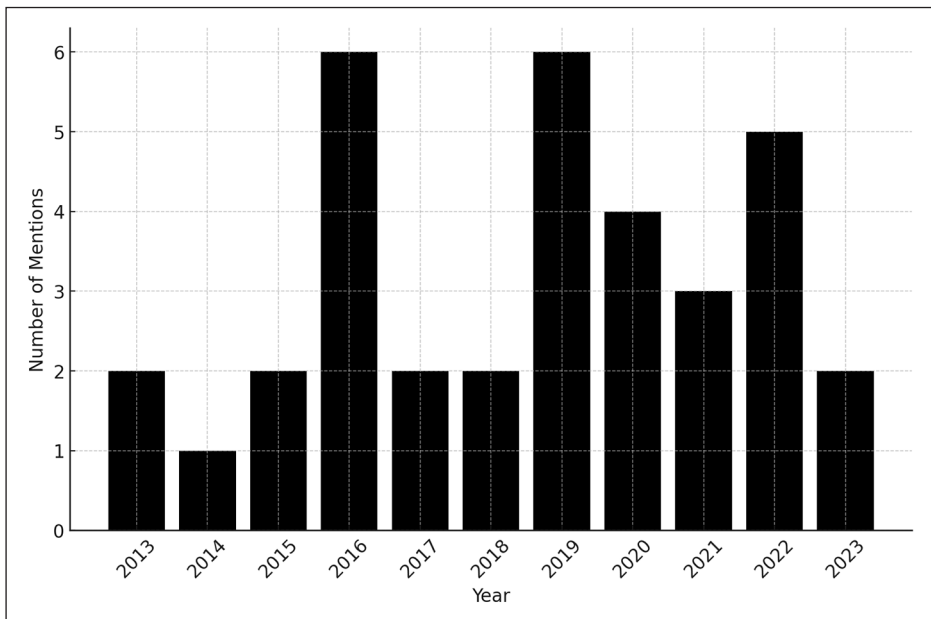
| Country/Area | <i>n</i> | Country/Area | <i>n</i> |
|----------------------|----------|--------------------|----------|
| Bosnia & Herzegovina | 6 | Gaza | 1 |
| Northern Ireland | 4 | Rep. of Liberia | 1 |
| Croatia | 3 | Nepal | 1 |
| Indonesia | 3 | Russia | 1 |
| Rep. of Uganda | 3 | Serbia | 1 |
| Kosovo | 2 | Somali territories | 1 |
| Afghanistan | 1 | Spain | 1 |
| Australia | 1 | Sri Lanka | 1 |
| Canada | 1 | The Nile Area | 1 |
| Colombia | 1 | USA | 1 |
| D.R. Congo | 1 | Ukraine | 1 |

Figure 3. Geographical Distribution of the Studies.



Source: Google Maps, map data ©2025 Google.

Figure 4. The Temporal Distribution of Articles ($n = 34$).



Temporal distribution of the studies. The *temporal distribution* (Figure 4) of the articles was investigated to identify potential trends in publication over the 10-year study period (2013–2023). During this time period, a slight increasing trend in the number of publications was identified, as well as relatively low peaks in publications in 2016 and 2019.

Research designs in the studies. The studies employed a range of different research designs within their methodologies. These included philosophical and theoretical studies (e.g., Golden, 2016; Naples, 2013; Urbain, 2016), descriptive qualitative methods (Mutanda, 2024; Opiyo, 2015); ethnographic approaches (e.g., Levesque, 2022; Robertson, 2016; Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2022; Rush, 2021), and arts-based research (Becker, 2019).

The most common method for data gathering was interviews, which were used in 10 of the studies. Other studies included questionnaires, observations, document analysis, social media, music videos, lyrics, and narratives, often using a multimethod approach to data collection (see online supplementary material).

Outcome characteristics of the studies. To some extent, the characteristics of the outcomes intersected with the analysis of interconnectedness. However, there were some emergent themes around the outcomes of the reviewed articles worthy of separate attention (see the online supplementary material for more details of the outcomes). As the research designs were often more descriptive and thought-provoking than interventionist, the outcomes tended to be nuanced and context-dependent. Here I will raise only examples—these are not to be understood as a comprehensive categorization.

In many of the studies, the outcome was greater insight into the research focus. When investigating the role of spaces in building peace in divided cities (Howell et al., 2019; Howell & Korum, 2022), the research outcomes were focused on building a deeper understanding of what were, for the youth participants, in actuality the most important aspects of having a space of music asylum:

Yet when asked to consider the role of the physical building in creating a feeling of sanctuary, Kenet expressed ambivalence. More important, he said, was that it was a dedicated, purposeful space, “a place where people can come, even if it’s under a tree . . . and where other people can see that and ask themselves, ‘What’s going on, can I be part of it?’ And then engage.” (Howell & Korum, 2022, p. 264)

In studies looking at a specific method, like the Playback Theatre (Dirnstorfer & Saud, 2020) or active music-making (Hirschmann & Van Doesum, 2021), the outcomes presented an analysis of whether and how the method could successfully contribute to peacebuilding:

Playback Theatre, when integrated well into an overall dialogue-facilitating strategy, can contribute significantly to the process of reconciliation. (Dirnstorfer & Saud, 2020, p. 139)

Our observations and interview data suggest that the hypothesized listening mechanism did emerge, but only in specific settings. (Hirschmann & Van Doesum, 2021, p. 326)

Some studies returned more to the overall context in question, and their original problematization—what would happen next, or in the future, as a reflection of the research outcome:

An intentional effort to engage in the type of dialogue that includes mutually shared sacred experiences by means of participation in religious performances is largely absent. As a consequence, there has been little measurable progress in Muslim–Christian interconnectedness. (Azdajic, 2019, p. 206)

Come-home messaging continues to be part of the broader effort to end the LRA (Lord’s Resistance Army) conflict and bring the rebels home. (Ross, 2016, p. 50)

Encouraging agency based out of pluriversal experiences of indirect violence is what would allow a cosmopolitan education to contribute to the decolonial project, and thus peacebuilding. (Sandoval, 2016, p. 246)

Musical practices in the studies. The musical practices utilized in the studies were varied (see online supplementary material; “N.A.” refers to studies in which musical practices were not specified). In many studies, the musical practice itself was only briefly described: The studies simply referenced “music” without detailing practices or settings. In some studies, the musical practice was tied to a local context, and specifications beyond this were not described (e.g., local music of the Maluku Islands in Bräuchler, 2022). Sometimes only a genre (e.g., popular music of Croatia in Baker, 2019) was mentioned as a specification.

Music as a social practice (Turino, 2008), however, could be seen as present in most. The articles demonstrated various settings where musical practices could take place: In a refugee camp, mediated popular music in the form of digital song was made together by the camp residents (Frishkopf, 2018); a theater-based method incorporating music was used in a Nepali setting (Dirnstorfer & Saud, 2020); and the researchers themselves sang lullabies in an urban apartment in a mid-sized Canadian city (Levesque, 2022).

The musical practices ranged from specific actions such as choir singing with different religions (Azdajic, 2019) to peacebuilding through various streams of musical engagement such as performing, entering a space, listening, and coming together to play (King, 2016). In one study, musicians from different musical practices in East Africa played together on different instruments to find a common language (Becker, 2019). Enhanced listening, aimed at perfecting a performance together, was another way music facilitated collaboration (Hirschmann & Van Doesum, 2021). The place itself could also be seen as embodying the social practice of music, such as at the music centers of Batuta (Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2022).

The interconnectedness between music and peacebuilding (Research Question 2)

The findings of the second research question are presented below. The analysis resulted in 12 subcategories in five categories in total (see Table 3).

Music as supporting understanding between differing groups. The first category identified in the studies ($n = 8$) was music as supporting understanding between differing groups. In this category the studies reflected a postconflict setting or were linked in other ways to longer periods of distrust of the other. The studies in this category shared clear similarities, so the two subcategories offer slightly different perspectives on the same overall theme.

In the subcategory, as interreligious *dialogue*, all of the studies centered on building understanding between people of Muslim and Christian faiths. Different approaches were taken to investigate this topic: the possible success of peace education by foreign agencies in schools with religious divides in the Indonesian Moluccas (Amirrachman, 2014); whether reimaging engagement with the Psalms helped promote peace (Sarwar, 2020); how sharing

Table 3. Categories of Interconnectedness Between Music and Peacebuilding.

| Number | Category | Subcategory |
|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | <i>Music as supporting understanding between differing groups</i> | 1.1 Music as interreligious dialogue 1.2 Music as interethnic dialogue |
| 2 | <i>Music as narratives to build peace</i> | 2.1 Individual artists setting peacebuilding agendas 2.2 Peacebuilding through contextual storytelling by those impacted 2.3 Public media and information-sharing as peacebuilding |
| 3 | <i>Music building peace within specific community settings</i> | 3.1 Music tackling societal issues 3.2 Music as a mediator 3.3 Music communities and organizations as peacebuilders |
| 4 | <i>Music integrated into educational frameworks for peacebuilding</i> | 4.1 Curriculum and education design |
| 5 | <i>Theoretical viewpoints on the interconnectedness between music and peacebuilding</i> | 5.1 Framework design 5.2 Literature reviews 5.3 Music as a method in research |

a religious practice, such as singing in a choir together, could help build a more holistic understanding of the other beyond the intellectual dimension (Azdajic, 2019); and, finally, how “musicking” could help to promote peace and living with the other in sustainable ways (King, 2016):

This article suggests that Muslim–Christian relations would significantly benefit from including shared participation in sacred religious performances as part of the strategy for a successful encounter. (Azdajic, 2019, p. 196)

In *music as interethnic dialogue*, all of the studies focused on conflict-affected contexts of different ethnic groups (e.g., Bosnia-Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, and Kosovo). They looked into active listening during music-making as having a positive effect on intergroup contact (Hirschmann & Van Doesum, 2021), and how a theater project involving music for ethnically segregated youth could create an opportunity to cross borders and support the complexity of reconciliation through the works of Shakespeare (Milatovic-Ovadia, 2019):

After initially experiencing mistrust and a tense atmosphere in the early contact, returning participants had built a new ingroup that was characterized by trust. Their shared experiences contributed to the formation of a common identity that went beyond their respective national identities and distinguished the veteran group from “newcomers” who had not built this kind of trust yet. (Hirschmann & Van Doesum, 2021, p. 326)

In addition, some studies looked into interethnic dialogue in the context of cities and urban peacebuilding. Two studies focused on reflecting how musical interaction can connect to spatial and social partitions in divided cities, focusing on building peace (or violence) inside the space of a city (Howell et al., 2019; Howell & Korum, 2022):

Music has functional and symbolic contributions to bring to peacebuilding at the urban scale. It can be a drawcard towards working cooperatively, interacting socially, and building peaceful relations, even if participants are not initially driven to be peacebuilders. (Howell et al., 2019, p. 23)

Music as narratives to build peace. The second category identified in the studies ($n=8$) was forming narratives to build peace. In this category, the studies focused on telling stories from past events and building identities through stories that were present in music. Three subcategories were identified: *individual artists setting a peacebuilding agenda*, *peacebuilding through contextual storytelling by those impacted*, and *public media and information-sharing as peacebuilding*.

The first subcategory included a link to how popular music artists contributed to the identities of veteran masculinity in Croatia (Baker, 2019), and investigated artists as agenda setters for peace, economic equity, political justice, social harmony, and development in Zimbabwe (Mutanda, 2024).

In studies that emphasized *peacebuilding through contextual storytelling by those impacted*, this was investigated in the form of artistically enacted storytelling to support bottom-up reconciliation and deconstruction of war-related identities (Dirnstorfer & Saud, 2020), or the concept of polyphonic peace through the different narratives brought up at a peace festival in Belfast (Rush, 2021). Furthermore, studies focused on healing from trauma through storytelling and arts-based approaches (Jeffery, 2023), as well as healing in the context of reconciliation and postpeace accord in Northern Ireland (Maiangwa & Byrne, 2015).

Finally, the third subcategory analyzed *public media and information-sharing as peacebuilding*, with questions on how informal structures in the media intervened in shaping information flows in the context of Somaliland and Somali territories (Stremlau, 2013), and what kind of a role the radio and its “come home” messaging played in peace and conflict in the contexts of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Ross, 2016):

In this context, poems have multiple roles; they function as bearers and transmitters of information as well as mediators and agitators of conflicts. Whether music, poetry, or sermons, these informal information flows are not only difficult for those in power to control, but they can spread quickly and have significant reach. (Stremlau, 2013, p. 289)

Music building peace within specific community settings. The third category ($n=7$) was music building peace within community settings. This category often included elements from the other categories (e.g., links to ethnicity questions), but the main ingredient was that a specific community was placed at the core of the research. Three subcategories were identified: *music tackling societal issues*, *music as a mediator*, and *music communities and organizations as peacebuilders*. In the first subcategory, two studies by Bräuchler (2022a, 2022b) focused on how arts and creativity in Eastern Indonesia can be used in communities as alternative methods to maintain peace, fight social injustices, and promote transformative justice. Similarly, another study looked into music as restorative peacebuilding in community-level peacebuilding efforts, in the context of a youth-led activist community and grassroots-level networking (Esteves & Abusalama, 2020). One other considered how the Acholi communities in Northern Uganda experienced and perceived music as creating peaceful change through the community-identified roles of music as education, voice, memory, and healing (Opiyo, 2015). A third study explored how the transformations in certain music programs helped to rebuild families’ social fabric after the war in Columbia (Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2022).

In the second subcategory, music (or more particularly, digital song) was investigated as a *mediator* in post-civil war Liberian refugee camps (Frishkopf, 2018):

Song reminds camp residents of each other's humanity, indirectly yet powerfully, while also addressing the world at large, "subjectifying" the refugee community as human beings in need of full respect and compassion. Mediated popular music, then, can be deployed so as to sustain the lifeworld against the depredations of the system. (Frishkopf, 2018, p. 116)

Finally, the gaze was shifted to *international organizations* (in this case, American Voices and Bond Street Theatre) and how they conceptualized their role in building peaceful societies (Stephenson & Zanotti, 2017).

Music integrated into educational frameworks for peacebuilding. In the fourth category ($n=2$), music as peacebuilding was tied to the context of education. One study investigated how *values in education are reflected and organized* within arts education curricula, comparing Spain and Australia (Cabedo-Mas et al., 2017). Another study looked into whether music education could contribute to peace education by pursuing decolonization through revising curriculum and pedagogy based on cosmopolitanism (Sandoval, 2016):

Understanding the inclusion of community experiences in arts education as a way of work values education in and beyond the classroom is indeed an example of educational practices that, correctly managed, have contributed to peacebuilding. However, in Australian and Spanish school curricula, the possibility to undertake such experiences is not acknowledged and encouraged; moreover, they are not mentioned. (Cabedo-Mas et al., 2017, p. 19)

Theoretical viewpoints on the interconnectedness between music and peacebuilding. The fifth category identified theoretical viewpoints ($n=8$) on the interconnectedness between music and peacebuilding. The three subcategories were *framework design*, *literature review*, and *research methodology*.

The first subcategory included three different approaches to creating a framework for understanding the interconnectedness between music and peacebuilding: first, a framework of interconnectedness within music-based peacebuilding (Howell, 2021); second, an investigation into how inclusive forms of democratic practice could be developed (Naples, 2013); and third, a study on how the Min-On Music Research Institute has conceptually integrated music and peace in their work (Urbain, 2019).

In their *literature reviews*, the studies focused on building upon existing fields of research. First, music-based programs were investigated as emancipatory approaches to peacebuilding through an overview of influences on conceptualizing peacebuilding by Galtung, BoutrosGhali, and Lederach (Dean, 2019). Second, the lens of ecological thinking was used in analyzing "musicking" as a tool in peace education (Golden, 2016). The third synthesized the thinking of Galtung and Ikeda to explain music and peacebuilding (Urbain, 2016).

Finally, different *methods* were used to bring together music and peacebuilding. This occurred in three studies: first, interdisciplinary methodologies, mainly musicological ethnography, were applied as a tool to peacebuilding efforts (Robertson, 2016); the second study utilized arts-based methodology, with music as a part, in the research interviews (Becker, 2019); and finally, the third focused on lullaby singing as a space to expand the "peace" imaginary of the researcher (Levesque, 2022).

Limitations of the study

Some limitations can be identified in the present scoping review. The process of identifying studies to include in the review focused explicitly on the exact term *peacebuilding*, omitting any synonyms. Due to this, some potentially relevant studies may have been missed. However, four main international databases were used to cover the research field as widely as possible. Moreover, the inclusion criteria of an “identifiable relation” between music and peacebuilding was ambiguous in practice. Regarding the full-text analysis and whether the inclusion criterion of an “identifiable relation” between music and peacebuilding was deemed as met, the aim was to use the same lens in all of the studies to follow a coherent strategy for inclusion. To support the validity of the analysis, a second coder was used, and the analyzed reports are described in the online supplementary material. As there are multiple ways in which music and peacebuilding can interconnect—a central theme of this study—the nature and clarity of that connection inevitably varied across the material, and a broad rather than narrow interpretation was consistently applied, in line with the exploratory nature of the research question.

Limitations in the analysis also included the high variation in the studies. In many of the reports, the empirical research was not thoroughly described. The same applied to the methodological descriptions related to analyses. Thus, it was not always possible to find the required details. Moreover, the research aims or questions were not explicitly stated in some cases, which made it challenging for the reader to grasp what the research aimed to investigate.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the interconnectedness of music and peacebuilding through a scoping review—and, ultimately, whether this could make the potential of music education in the field of peacebuilding and the arts more visible, asking whether there was an emerging system bringing together the three. Altogether, 34 articles were analyzed. By characterizing the studies, it was evident that many of the studies focused on areas of conflict, past or present, within a wide range of global contexts. Regarding the research designs and their outcomes, most studies were grounded in philosophical or theoretical frameworks, offering conceptual insights into the interconnection between music and peacebuilding. However, more detailed documentation of specific interventions and empirical research settings would be needed to move the field forward.

Only two out of the 34 publications could be classified under the category of education. While this may be due in part to the selection of concepts used, it also suggests that there is unexplored potential—for instance, in building peace and values through arts education (Cabedo-Mas et al., 2017), or in simply learning other traditions through music (Amirrachman, 2014). Interestingly, music as a social practice was central in most of the articles—the coming together of specific people, from specific backgrounds, in a specific time and context. This focus thus appears to connect the three components central to this review: peacebuilding, music, and music education (see Figure 1). Because a system’s purpose is shaped by the context in which it operates (Luhmann, 1995; Väkevä et al., 2017), and systems are defined by their purpose (Ackoff & Gharajedaghi, 1996), then exploring these purposes more deeply could open up broader reflection on why—or for what aims—peacebuilding and music might or should be brought together.

This study offers insights that can inform cross-system learning. Drawing from the five categories identified here, glimpses of an emerging system at the intersection of peacebuilding, music, and music education can be seen: that theoretical and philosophical viewpoints could

assist in how music teachers relate to peacebuilding; how moments in music education settings can either contribute to or hinder understanding between different groups; and that the building or eroding of communities, how narratives are made or chosen, and how educational frameworks are used can contribute, through reflection, to building peace.

As stated, a critical lens is crucial to the discussion of these findings. Although none of the articles in this review explicitly address violence, the interconnectedness between music and peacebuilding does not always lead to successful outcomes. This was illustrated in the study by Hirschmann and van Doesum (2021), where active listening during music-making supported intergroup dialogue but participants encountered considerable difficulties afterwards—some were accused of being “brainwashed” (p. 327). This review, however, did not aim at assessing the success of peacebuilding through music, but instead has explored their interconnectedness. For music educators, this means that success in one moment can mean violence in another. This indicates an urgent need for a critical investigation of understanding music education from the point of view of complex social systems. These systems can include smaller subsystems with their own roles, shaped by contexts, times, and situations. In other words, the focus is not solely on any particular learning outcomes, but on rethinking what music education is for and why it matters, within its broader social and political context.

The present results suggest that the intersection of peacebuilding, music, and music education form a meaningful area for multidisciplinary collaboration. This kind of systems thinking may also further support the development of multiprofessional practices and inform policy. However, investigation is needed to support more precise recommendations for educational and social practices that aim to connect music and peacebuilding. In particular, there is a need for further development and experimentation using appropriate methodological tools to explore these interconnections in practice, which could be valuable for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers alike.

Conclusion

This scoping review was meant to explore the interconnectedness of music and peacebuilding. A simple, yet true, finding of this study is that music is a significant part of the lives of many, but music also simply “is” (Kenny, 1985), and it in itself does not generate peace, nor should it be exclusively regarded to serve as a tool for peacebuilding. However, as emphasized by the UNESCO (2024) framework ratified by all its member states, integrating arts and culture into education can foster cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral skills, vital for addressing global challenges. With their varied aims, methodological approaches, and outcomes, the studies included in this review offered insights—especially from contexts of conflict—that should prompt reflection in music education: on its purpose and on the emerging system this scoping review offers glimpses of, situated at the intersection of peacebuilding, music, and music education.

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Author Contribution(s)

Jenni Kilpi: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources, Software; Visualization; Writing—original draft; Writing—review & editing.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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