

SPRINGER BRIEFS ON PIONEERS IN  
SCIENCE AND PRACTICE 5

Johan Galtung  
Dietrich Fischer

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## Pioneer of Peace Research

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# Preface

To me has fallen the great honor of writing a preface for this fine book: “*Johan Galtung, A Pioneer of Peace Research*”.

For the last 15 years I have had the privilege of working closely with the person the book is about. His contagious passion has motivated me to be a “girl scout” for peace, dreaming big and working hard to fulfill the ideals that are most meaningful and most transcendent for our communities and nations.

Trying to approach my task creatively, trying to be fair to all, and trying to write the adequate preface this book deserves, I ask myself the question, What makes Johan Galtung special, outstanding? What defines him as a genius?

A genius is someone who, among other things, achieves a paradigmatic shift. His or her ideas shake up and reconfigure the foundations of the field written about and worked in. This is precisely what the ideas of Johan Galtung have done in the field of peace and conflict.

His deep and precise thoughts and concepts have shaped the science he has founded. He has made constitutive contributions to its methodological, philosophical, social, and historical underpinnings. With his passionate way of being-in-the-world, charismatic and profound, he has changed the way we see conflicts. He has changed the way we “read” conflicts. He has changed the way we think about and approach political and social situations, especially for those of us who have the high honor to be his disciples.

Our world enlarges, and our responsibility and participation in our world grow, as we apply and operationalize his ideas. His theory is no longer just a theory as it becomes an educational, social, and political toolbox. We necessarily become lifelong learners, like our teacher himself who constantly revises his ideas and brings them up-to-date while our digital society changes around us at a dizzying pace.

His thinking incites us to become better and more responsible persons.

His ideas respond to new situations, always opening new horizons. They never rest. More than once following out his trains of thought I have arrived at a point where I look around and say to myself, “Now that I have learned all the answers, I find that all the questions have changed!”

Johan redefines “success” to make it less a personal achievement and more the achievement of a society, culture, or population. Although he uses a simple

definition of “conflict,” *his analysis of it* is complex. In the face of dominant logics of power, he proposes to give voice to all of the parties to a conflict, especially those who are weak and powerless.

For him mediation may require as many mediators as there are parties, in order to accomplish the aim of creating a discursive space where all can be understood.

In every conflict or complaint there are some legitimate needs of the parties that deserve to be heard and validated. In order to be sure this happens, Johan asks and expects that the mediators be primarily spokespersons. Their role calls on them to understand the demands of the parties, taking as a basis for negotiation the components of the demands that express underlying legitimate needs.

Among the many strands of Johan’s theoretical contributions, an important line of thought is his proposal to articulate dimensions of conflict juxtaposing variables from the past and the future; constructive and destructive. Thus he opens up new ways to analyze possible solutions to disputes. We need to learn from the destructive past to avoid repeating it. We need to learn from the constructive past to let it guide us in the present and in the future. Ideally we are trending toward a constructive and positive future. We build with the material found in the criteria of legitimacy already present in the conflict.

Sigmund Freud held that learning about the experiences lived in infancy is fundamental to understanding how a person behaves ever afterwards. The memories of infancy published in Johan Galtung’s autobiography help to explain his theories and his actions as an adult. The opening scene of the book describes his father being carried off to prison, certainly a traumatic incident in the life of a young boy. I believe that this childhood experience is related to the origin of his theory that most nations begin in trauma. I permit myself to add that the majority of individuals have lived through traumas that have marked our lives.

What is most significant about the fact of trauma is that both in the cases of nations and in the cases of individuals there are widely differing capacities to recover from it.

The existence of the trauma, the response to it, and recovery from it, all vary from case to case. Toward the end of the twentieth century, scientists began to develop what is known as the theory of “resilience”. “Resilience” refers to capacity to continue projecting the self into the future in spite of experiences of trauma, crisis, and emotional pain.

Persons showing high levels of resilience share qualities similar to those of the person whose life and work are celebrated in this book. They are creative, optimistic, and passionately engaged. In a crisis situation they focus on the glass half full and not on the glass half empty.

Johan has lived through, learned from, and moved on beyond traumas typical of those so many of us have endured. He has achieved a great capacity to understand and to accompany communities devastated by war and/or by other disasters natural and/or unnatural. His own life and background have contributed to making him the man whose contributions to science and practice the reader will learn so much about in the following pages. Johan is a scientist who brings to crisis situations a

wisdom born of experience underlying the marvelous conceptual tools he has created for analyzing them, for rethinking them, and for finding positive solutions that can be accepted as legitimate by all the parties involved.

Buenos Aires, March 2013

Sara Rozenblum de Horowitz



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**Part I**  
**On Johan Galtung**



Photo 1: Johan Galtung. Photo by Fernando Montiel, Mexico

# Chapter 1

## Johan Galtung, the Father of Peace Studies

**Abstract** This brief overview of Johan Galtung's life and work begins with some of his childhood experiences (such as his father being imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp) that shaped his determination to work for peace. It surveys some of his main new concepts and theories (such as direct, structural and cultural violence, negative and positive peace, rank discordance as a factor of genocide, and peaceful conflict transformation, among many others). It summarizes his contributions in mediating in over one hundred international conflicts, founding peace institutes around the world, publishing over 160 books and over 1,600 articles, teaching thousands of people around the world in conflict resolution and peace building, and inspiring many to devote their lives to peace.

### 1.1 Introduction

Johan Galtung's parents and ancestors were mainly medical doctors and nurses for several generations. So when Johan was born on 24 October 1930, an uncle congratulated his parents saying, "Today a new doctor is born!" Johan indeed became a kind of doctor, but rather than treating individuals, his patients are entire societies with their pathologies, for which he developed diagnosis, prognosis and therapy, using the terms he heard repeatedly at the dinner table.

On 9 April 1940, when Johan Galtung was nine years old, the German warship *Blücher*, with over 2,000 soldiers and sailors on board, led a flotilla into Oslo Fjord to conquer Oslo and occupy Norway. An old torpedo hit the ship, and it burst into flames and sank. Many of the soldiers could swim ashore, but suffered from burns in their throats. Johan's father, an ear-nose-throat surgeon, feverishly operated day and night to save the lives of as many of those soldiers as possible. Johan asked his father, "Were you not sometimes tempted to let your scalpel slip a little?" His father answered, "Absolutely not! The most essential duty of a physician is to save lives, anyone's life, without distinction." This left a deep impression on little Johan.