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ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION AS INSTRUMENT OF CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION IN CONFLICT-PRONE AREAS: WHERE DOES IT START, HOW DEEP IT CAN BE AND WHAT EFFECTS IT CAN HAVE?¹

Šárka Waisová*

ABSTRACT

The idea of environmental cooperation as a conflict transformation instrument emerged since the 1990s among scholars as well as among international institutions and non-governmental organizations. The idea presumes that conflict and cooperation can coexist and that a cooperative approach to planning, management and use of environmental resources is able to initiate and sustain a dialogue between the parties of a conflict and facilitates conflict transformation and peacebuilding. This article tests one hypothesis on four case studies, and asks one question to find out more about the origin and functioning of environmental cooperation in areas of political conflicts. The results of the case studies show that political conflict and environmental cooperation can coexist, but in distinctive conditions. Environmental cooperation has begun in all the cases in the time when no violent clashes between conflict parties took place. The case studies also showed that if the relationship between the conflict parties has worsened and the conflict intensity increased, the environmental cooperation was stopped. Some of the cases demonstrated that non-political environmentally engaged actors are less sensitive to the change in conflict intensity than the political agents, and they have been trying to maintain communication during the period of worsened political relations. Finally, the case studies showed that environmental cooperation in areas of political conflicts has, despite the duration of the cooperation and the intensity of external support, remained weak.

Key words: environmental cooperation; cooperation in conflict areas; Armenia; Azerbaijan; China; Taiwan; Israel; Palestinian Authority; South Korea; North Korea.

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Introduction

The analyses of environmental cooperation in conflict-prone areas have been emerging since the first half of the 1990s. The very first authors (e.g. Arthur H. Westing) often worked as environmental specialists and they supported the existence of trans-border nature peace parks, which would protect local ecosystems from the negative effects of violent conflicts. The idea of peace parks has been elaborated further and some scholars (Baechler et al, 1995; Brock, 1991; Conca and Dabelko et al., 2002; Dabelko, 2006; Matthew and Gaulin, 2001; Rustad, Lujala and Le Billon, 2012; Westing, 2010) started to think about environmental cooperation as an instrument of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. These scholars argued that conflict and cooperation can coexist and that a cooperative approach to planning, management and use of environmental resources can support trust, communication and interaction between (potential) adversaries and help transform threats. According to these scholars environmental cooperation helps internalise norms, form regional identity and interests, operationalise routine international cooperation and marginalise the acceptance of the use of violence. These scholars believed that positive experiences which conflicting communities could win through environmental cooperation can spill over into political behaviour and are able to transform and reorient conventional political behaviour of conflicting communities.

This idea has been firstly applied on resource and environmental driven conflicts, later it has been applied more general – environmental cooperation was thought of as a conflict transformation instrument in any conflict. The research of **Aaron Wolf** and his colleagues (1997) has been cardinal for further evolution of the idea about peacebuilding potential of environmental cooperation. **Wolf** and his team tested more than 1800 cases and showed that states sharing water resources are more willing to cooperate than use the violence. Not only **Wolf's** research influenced the evolution of the idea about peacebuilding and transformative potential of environmental cooperation; another four ideas has been important: 1) environmental protection is the vital and joint goal of all humankind, 2) environmental issues transcend political borders and environmental protection is the politically-free issue, 3) unilateral approach brings nothing and 4) environmental issues have cooperative

potential² (see Brock, 1991; Dabelko, 2006; Sadoff a Grey, 2002).

The idea of environmental cooperation as a conflict transformation instrument emerged not only among scholars, but also among international institutions. This idea broke through in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (hereunder the term “environmental confidence building”; OSCE, 2012), United Nations Environmental Program (hereunder the term “environmental peacebuilding”; UNEP, 2009), Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2011), European Union and NATO (ENVSEC, [online]), and international environmental agencies such as the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO, 2010) or the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN, 2013) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Despite the growing number of projects declaring the use of environmental cooperation as a conflict transformation instrument I believe that the conditions of its emergence and functioning in conflict-prone areas are not clear. There is growing number of analyses of particular cases (see for example Conca, Dabelko et al., 2002; Matthew, Halle, Switzer, 2002) or studies recommending to use environmental cooperation as the conflict transformation instrument in the particular conflict (Ali, 2005; Westing, 2001; Westing, 2010) but we lack systematic analysis and research through the integrated analytical framework or testing particular hypotheses in more cases. This article offers the small-N-case study to test the genesis and functioning of environmental cooperation in areas of political conflicts. It tests one hypothesis and looks for an answer for a question in four cases. Data for the research has been collected through the review of existing literature concerning environment, natural resources, conflict management and particular conflict, the analysis of governmental and non-governmental documents including web-pages of various institutions and newspaper articles. Data concerning the intensity of conflicts has been derived from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP/PRIO). In all cases the field research has been done. It has included semi-structured interviews with environmental journalists, NGOs, university and governmental representatives

² Recent analyses (Phillips et al, 2006; Sadoff and Grey, 2002) have shown that there exists at least four groups of reasons why are governments and other actors interested in trans-border environmental cooperation and management: 1) ecological reasons (protection of biodiversity) , 2) economic reasons (environmental cooperation can bring direct or indirect economical gains such as ecotourism), 3) political reasons (environmental cooperation is connected to institutionalisation, regionalisation, democratisation and integration) and 4) peacebuilding/catalytic reasons (environmental cooperation can spill over into political dialogue).

and direct observation (conferences, workshops and demonstrations). The field research has been carried out in Taiwan (May – August 2012), in Israel (July – August 2013), in South Korea (September 2013 and August 2014) and Armenia and Azerbaijan (October 2013).

The first part explains the selection of cases. The second part introduces the causal mechanisms, which are tested in the case studies. The third part includes case studies, and the fourth part concludes the findings.

1 The selection of cases

For this article four political conflicts have been selected, the criteria for which are: 1) went through various intensity stages including military violence defined as “minor military conflict” (see below), 2) have not yet been solved, 3) environmental cooperation began during the conflict, and 4) the conflict parties were identifiable.

The political conflict is defined as „*a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths*“ (UCDP/PRIO Codebook 2012, p. 1). The start date of the conflict is the date of the first battle-related death in the conflict (UCDP/PRIO Codebook, 2012, p. 5).

The following cases are researched (listed alphabetically):

- conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which started in 1990 (i.e. within the Soviet Union);
- conflict between China and Taiwan, which started in 1949;
- conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (Palestine Liberation Organisation before), which started in 1948; and
- conflict between South and North Korea, which started in 1949.

2 Hypothesis and question

One hypothesis is tested and one question is asked to find out more about the origin and functioning of environmental cooperation in areas of political conflicts.

2. 1 Hypothesis 1 (H1): Environmental cooperation starts in the time when the intensity of the conflict is low.

The goal of the first hypothesis is to gain more information about the

relationship between the intensity of conflict and environmental cooperation and spill-over effect between environmental activities and politics. If we find out that the intensity of conflict decreased before the emergence of environmental cooperation, it would provide evidence that it is not the effect of environmental cooperation. The observable indicators are in this case the data from the UCDP database about the intensity of the conflict in that particular calendar year compared with the environmental cooperation. We look for the evidence of environmental cooperation, analyze the context and investigate how intensive the violence has been in the time when the environmental cooperation emerged.

To bring the relationship between the intensity of the conflict and the emergence of environmental cooperation to light, both have to be defined. To classify the intensity of the conflict the UCDP methodology has been used. UCDP (Codebook, 2012, p. 5) defines explicitly two intensity levels – “minor armed conflict” and “war”. Implicitly UCDP uses three levels of intensity – conflict as such which is recorded in the database when the first battle-related death occurred; minor armed conflict, and war. For the purposes of the present research the low intensity conflict is the situation which did not reach the level of the minor armed conflict, i.e. in a given year there were less than 25 battle-related deaths.

Environmental cooperation is defined here as the situation when actors adjust their behaviour to actual or anticipated preferences of others in issues concerning environmental resources, their quality and sustainability (Keohane, 1984). Environmental resources are such goods, which have a value of their own or have value for sustainable life of mankind at regional or global level. Environmental resources are hard to extract, loot and transport, they have a limited profit margin, and their quality is directly influenced by the behaviour of local actors. For example, they can include high biodiversity; natural, historic-cultural, aesthetic, educational, research and monitoring value of the landscape; protection, anti-erosion, health-oriented and aesthetic function of vegetation; water and soil for local and regional climate and incidence of a pest; and regulative function of vegetation, water, and soil in biochemical cycles in the landscape.

2.2 Question 1 (Q1): How intensive is the environmental cooperation in the areas of political conflict, which went through the violent stage?

I suppose that in political conflict where violence occurred there are no responsive conditions for the deepening of any cooperation including the environmental one. Despite the fact that some authors (Mitrany, 1966) believe that environmental politics as low politics bore the potential for the collective pursuit of common interest, other authors (Barnett, 1991) proved that issues which had been understood as a part of low politics, can in particular context emerge as a part of high politics and as such are inapplicable to the area of cooperation. Trans-boundary environmental cooperation may be sensitive for particular actors, because they are aware of their authority. Neo-functionalists predict that cooperation in low politics will spill over into high politics – in our research it means environmental cooperation will spill over into political dialogue between conflict parties. However, a lack of cooperation in high politics can also lead to a similar deadlock in low politics. This shows that our existing knowledge about the potential and intensity of environmental cooperation is both diverse and limited. This research is interested if environmental cooperation reflects political power and if there is a chance that deep environmental cooperation can develop in areas of political conflicts which once went through violence. In each case it will be examined for how intensive the environmental cooperation has been, when it has reached the most intensive level and in what context.

Answering this question is important for knowing more about if and how environmental cooperation can be utilised as a broader conflict transformation tool – i.e. if there is potential for spill over in this regard. Moreover, the intensity of cooperation needs to be classified. We do not have any accepted methodology and thus I worked out my own scale.³ I differentiated four levels of intensity of cooperation: weak, moderate, high and full cooperation. The weak level rating is characterised by informal cooperation⁴ carried out by NGOs and research specialists from universities and natural parks. The state and its bodies are not directly included in the cooperation, while the government tacitly agrees with the transfer of issues on non-governmental actors. At this level no joint projects emerge. Actors mainly exchange information, consult particular

³ The following classification has been worked out on the base of Zbicz (1999) and Metcalf (1994).

⁴ Informal cooperation is emerging spontaneously and is not based on a written agreement. Formal cooperation exists on the basis of a written agreement.

procedures and meet at conferences. Political representatives of conflicting parties unilaterally make declarations about environmental cooperation and state agencies work on environmental protection independently from each other.

Moderate cooperation is the situation when the actors communicate regularly; at least twice a calendar year and governments participate formally or informally in negotiations. There arise joint governmental and non-governmental projects, joint NGOs, commissions and advisory groups with limited authority. The activities of those bodies include planning, advisement, monitoring, analyses and research of particular issues. Meetings of lower governmental representatives are organised, these meetings are non-binding.

The high level of cooperation has the formal style and is characterised by the institutionalisation of cooperation, the existence of bilateral and multilateral commissions and joint panels and committees with the authority to create norms and supervise their observance. The projects of particular conflict parties are coordinated; there emerge conflict resolution mechanisms, norms regulating mutual relations and agreements about costs of cooperation.

Full cooperation is a situation when there exists joint and fully integrated management of environmental resources and a joint executive body is created.

3 Case studies

3.1 Armenia and Azerbaijan

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan started before the collapse of the Soviet Union, when both parties started to lay claims to Nagorno Karabakh. Despite the international efforts to end the conflict, the previous attempts to broker a ceasefire or peace agreements were unsuccessful and relations between the two countries are very cold (ICG, 2012; Mikheilidze and Pirozzi, 2008).

Conservationist projects existed in South Caucasus already during the Soviet era, but they ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some natural parks and biotopes survived the end of Soviet rule, but trans-boundary ecosystems have been ignored (Gunja, Bausch, 2002). The first steps to environmental cooperation between newly independent states emerged after the end of the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 1994, when the intensity of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan transformed to a weaker level from a minor armed conflict (UCDP/PRIODataset, 2012). Before anything else the

environmental project instigated by Georgia and international organisations emerged. Bilateral Armenia-Azerbaijani projects started to emerge at the end of 1990s.

The first feasibility studies of joint trans-boundary ecosystems have been carried out and the first joint workshops about environmental protection in the area have been organised with international support (Gunja, Bausch, 2002; IUCN, 2013; Schuerholz, 2004; Wittich, Maas, 2009). In 2002, with the support of Germany and Liechtenstein a regional project involving Armenia and Azerbaijan was initiated, aiming at the implementation of the Alpine Convention and the protection of mountain ecosystems (Zazanshvili, 2006). The peak in environmental cooperation between Armenia and Azerbaijan for now presents the establishing of trans-boundary nature reserve. This project came into existence in autumn 2008 and has been instigated by Georgia and Germany (Carius, 2006). The reservation has a joint secretariat, which is managed by consortia of Austrian and German institutions and financed by a German development program. Each participating party is represented by its minister of environment and manages its own reservation on its own territory (REC CAUCASUS, [online]; Transboundary Joint Secretariat, [online]). Environmental cooperation between Armenia and Azerbaijan is for the time sporadic and is mainly the result of external pressures and support and in the past the termination of external support resulted in termination of the projects. Environmental cooperation did not develop even among local NGOs, which adopted a hostile stance similar to the political elites (ICG, 2009; Mikhelidze and Pirozzi, 2008; Head of an Azerbaijani environmental NGO, personal communication, October 5, 2013).

In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan we see that the hypothesis has been verified. Environmental cooperation started after the end of Nagorno-Karabakh war, when the intensity of the conflict had been lower than a minor armed conflict (H1). Despite years of cooperation and strong external support, the intensity of environmental cooperation remains weak (Q1).

3.2 China and Taiwan

The relations between China and Taiwan are very complicated, despite the improvement in the last years and despite the fact that contemporary relations in the Taiwan Strait are probably the best since 1949. The first contact across the Strait concerning environmental cooperation started after the termination of

Martial Law in Taiwan in 1987. The end of the 1980s was a period when there were no violent clashes between Taiwan and China and the intensity of the conflict has been lower than a minor armed conflict (UCDP/PRIODataset, 2012). The pioneers of environmental cooperation have been Chinese and Taiwanese universities, which at the end of 1987 organised a series of conferences concerning environmental protection of the Taiwan Strait (Wikileaks, 2009).

The intensity of environmental cooperation across the Taiwan Strait has been growing since the beginning of the new Millennium, influenced among other reasons by the Chinese preparations for the Olympic Games in 2008 and agreements concerning economic cooperation across the Taiwan Strait (so called ECFA) (Focus Taiwan, 2010; National Council for Sustainable Development ROC, 2003; State Environmental Protection Administration PRC, 2006). The environmental cooperation across the Taiwan Strait includes periodical academic workshops, courses, and summer schools for university student, conferences and joint campaigns of NGOs. The projects relate to protection of soil and water resources, environmental friendly construction, environmental education, conservation of the seacoast and coral reefs, and environmental journalism (ISWC, [online]; Gao, 2009; Wilson Center, [online]). The peak of environmental cooperation between Taiwan and China was represented by the establishment of a joint maritime nature park (established by Chinese and Taiwanese conservationists with the support of local authorities) and a joint system of early warning in the case of an ecological accident in the Taiwan Strait (established by Chinese and Taiwanese civilian coastal guard) (Focus Taiwan, 2012; The China Post, 2012). Despite Beijing and Taipei have declared the necessity to include environmental issues in the ECFA agreements, there is no progress on this issue (Wu, 2012). Environmental cooperation between NGOs is slowed down by the particular position of environmental organisations in the Chinese political system and the fear of Taiwanese organisations about the connection between Chinese green groups to the Communist Party and State authorities (Tang and Zhan, 2008; Tang and Tang, 1997; Yang, 2005).

In the case of Taiwan and China H1 has been verified; environmental cooperation between China and Taiwan has emerged in the time of low intensity conflict. Concerning the intensity of environmental cooperation, after 15 years it is moderate and remains strictly informal (Q1).

3.3 Israel and Palestinian Authority

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a confusing one concerning its actors – on the Palestinian side there appear actors such as Hamas, Fatah or the Palestinian Authority. For our research of Israeli-Palestinian environmental cooperation we understand the central dyad for the conflict to be the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority (former Palestine Liberation Organisation).

Environmental politics and the law in Israel and in the Palestinian Territories lag behind the real need to protect the environment and despite more intensive support of environmental protection the situation improves rather slowly. Israeli-Palestinian environmental cooperation firstly emerged at the end of the 1980s, at a time when the intensity of the conflict had been lower than that of a minor armed conflict (UCDP/PRIODataset, 2012). In 1988, with the support of the United States, the Netherlands, Germany and international foundations a joint think tank, the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information was established⁵, which among others led negotiations about environmental conservation in the area (IPCRI, 2013). In 1992, with the assistance of the Italian and German governments, local authorities of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Beit Yala signed the agreement to interconnect the sewage systems of the cities and jointly solve the problem of waste water treatment (Fischhendler, Dinar, Katz, 2011).

The milestone to open up wider environmental cooperation has been the Israeli-Palestine peace negotiation. The Oslo Accords from 1995 sought to regulate the water issues and set up inter-governmental bodies for environmental cooperation, particularly the Joint Water Committee (JWC) and the Joint Environmental Experts Committee (JEEC). Both bodies have been intended to work as a discussion forum and to supervise the water projects and water supply to the Israeli and Palestinian territories. JWC also supervised the implementation of those parts of the Oslo Accords dealing with water issues. Both parties have had the veto right in the committee. After the Oslo Accords the water cooperation started very slowly and only under intense international pressure and support (Fischhendler, Dinar, Katz, 2011). In the years after the Oslo Accords the non-governmental Israeli-Palestinian Databank for the Quality of Water Resources and the platform for local environmental NGOs called

⁵ The Center was renamed in 2013 and today it works under the name Israel-Palestine: Creative Regional Initiatives (IPCRI, 2013).

“Friends of Earth – Middle East” were set up (both established in 1994) (Friends of Earth, Middle East [online]). In 1995, the first meeting of the Israeli and Palestinian ornithologists was organised, which later changed into regular meetings between Israeli and Palestinian ecological organisations (Executive Action Team, [online]; 25th JOC, 2010). During next month dozens of protectionist and conservationist projects between research teams, NGOs, cities, schools and universities has been opened up.

Most of environmental projects slowed down during 1997 when the relations between both parties worsened and stopped after the Intifada of 2000 began. During the Intifada the existing formal bodies and joint committees ceased to work and the cooperation between universities became limited (The Knesset, 2011; UNEP, 2003). Apart from the case of the JWC and JEEC which from time to time met un-officially, but their real work had been paralysed (Baskin, 2011; Fischhendler, Dinar, Katz, 2011). After the end of the Second Intifada no other body such as joint committees was established and the environmental cooperation remained on a non-governmental level, i.e. between local authorities, research bodies, schools, NGOs and conservationists (Arava Institute, [online]; Haaretz, 2008; Haaretz, 2012; The Knesset, 2011; Rubinstein, 2012).

In case of Israel and Palestine the hypothesis has been verified. Environmental cooperation between both parties started, when the intensity of violence had been low and the conflict was not at the intensity of a minor armed conflict (H1). Concerning the intensity of environmental cooperation, despite the peace agreements, official environmental cooperation has not been developed, joint bodies do not work and their members, if they meet, then do so un-officially. Both parties keep in joint bodies with the right to veto. The existing environmental cooperation has developed overwhelmingly between non-governmental bodies. The intensity of the environmental cooperation is weak to moderate (Q1).

3.4 North Korea and South Korea

The conflict on the Korean peninsula broke out after the Second World War. Despite the fact that the conflict has been going since 1953 and it has been never higher than a minor armed conflict (UCDP/PRIODataset, 2012), the relations between both Koreas have always remained tense with occasional military clashes worsened by North Korean nuclear tests. The first suggestion of

environmental cooperation between both Koreas emerged in the 1960s. But these suggestions originated from external actors and not one of the Koreas paid attention to the issue (Hocknell, 1996). The milestone for the environmental cooperation on the Korean peninsula was in the beginning of the 1990s. In 1991 both parties ratified Inter-Korean Basic Agreement and the North Korea joined the UN. In 1992 both Koreas took part in the Earth Summit. During the Summit both countries separately came up with a proposal, which they presented to the UN Secretary General and the UNEP director, to set up a nature reserve in the demilitarised zone (DMZ)⁶ (Hayes and Cavazos, 2013; Hocknell, 1996; Westing, 2001; Westing, 2010).

Concurrently, international organisations and groups started to show an interest in creating and conserving DMZ region into a natural park. In 1992 UNEP and IUCN called for the establishment of an international nature park in the DMZ, but North Korea did not react (Park, 2013). Since 1993 both countries have been participating in regular regional meetings with higher environmental officials (NPEC, [online]). In 1994 South Korea closed agreement with the UN to discuss the establishment of a UNESCO bio reserve in the area of DMZ. Seoul tried to continue the negotiations in 1998 under its “Sunshine Policy” but Pyongyang repeatedly refused any negotiations (Park, 2013; Westing, 2010). Progress was made in 2000 when both Koreas agreed to cooperate in fisheries and North Korea responded positively to the project of the trans-boundary nature reserve in the DMZ (Hayes, 2010). In 2005, both countries agreed to establish the joint Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation Committee, which had on its agenda, among other things, environmental cooperation. In 2006, North Korea accepted the set of laws for environmental protection which respected Seoul’s requirements and framed the inter-Korean cooperation in the Kaesong economic zone (Ministry of Unification, 2007a). During the same year both countries, under strong international support, returned to the negotiations about the trans-boundary peace park in the DMZ and started negotiations about the joint marine peace park (Brady, 2012).

In 2007, Seoul and Pyongyang settled on an agreement to establish a joint fishery zone in the area of a disputed border area on the west maritime border and to establish a Special Peace and Cooperative Zone under special

⁶ Academic research on the DMZ region started in South Korea in 1965. In the conjunction with the Smithsonian Institute of the US the Korean Association for Conservation and Nature conducted a research on the soil, habitats, animals and plants in the DMZ area (Park, 2013).

environmental protection in the West Sea (Nam, Yook, Lee, Kim, 2007). They also created the joint committee for public health, medicine and environmental protection in Kaesong (Ministry of Unification, 2007b). Despite all the negotiations, the maritime peace park and the nature reserve in the DMZ have not been established yet, and discussions of utilisation of the DMZ in a different way compared to previous discourse have been started in South Korea (Park, 2013).

Not only is environmental cooperation between both governments a given, but there are also projects on the non-governmental or semi-governmental level. The joint projects refer to environmental protection, reforestation or birds' migration, and connect South Korean NGOs and research institutes with North Korean universities and state bodies (Brady, 2012; Nam, Yook, Lee, Kim, 2007; Soh, 2000). The environmental cooperation with the participation of non-governmental actors, however, is complicated by administrative, judicial and political barriers (Oknim, 2003). To get over these barriers South Korean NGOs cooperate with third parties (mainly international NGOs); they finance the joint-Korean projects through third parties or they use international NGOs as guarantors of joint-Korean projects (Kudláčová, 2015).

In the Korean case the hypothesis has been verified. Environmental cooperation was set up in the time when there were no violent clashes between both Koreas and the intensity of the conflict has been lower than a minor armed conflict (H1). Despite the existence of inter-Korean joint committees there is no real joint environmental management and committees work as executive bodies dependent on the decision of the highest political representatives. Environmental cooperation between non-governmental actors is slowly underway, but continues to be limited by political and security barriers. Thus, environmental cooperation between both Koreas can be described as weak (Q1).

Chart: Summary of the case studies

	H1	Q1
Armenia/Azerbaijan	Verified	Weak
China/Taiwan	Verified	Moderate
Israel/Palestine	Verified	Weak to moderate
North/South Korea	Verified	Weak

Conclusion

The idea that environmental cooperation in conflict-affected areas can build a bridge between conflict communities and assist with conflict transformation was born more than a decade ago. This idea resulted in projects which have been implemented in the last years in conflict-affected regions. Despite the popularity of the idea and a number of existing projects, knowledge about the emergence and operation of environmental cooperation in conflict-prone areas is very low. To fill the gap one hypothesis was tested and an answer for one question was looked for.

The hypothesis (*Environmental cooperation starts in the time when the intensity of the conflict is low*) has been confirmed in all cases. The results of the case studies show that political conflict and environmental cooperation can coexist, but in distinctive conditions. Environmental cooperation has begun in all the cases in the time when no violent clashes between conflict parties took place and the number of victims was relatively low (less than 25 battle related deaths). The case studies also obliquely showed that environmental cooperation is sensitive to the rise in the intensity of the violence; if the relationship between the conflict parties has worsened and the conflict intensity increased, the environmental cooperation was stopped. Some of the cases (South Korea – North Korea, Israel – Palestine) demonstrated that non-political environmentally engaged actors such as ecological NGOs, groups of environmental experts, conservationists and agencies for environmental protection are less sensitive to the change in conflict intensity than the political agents, and they have been trying to maintain communication during the period of worsened political relations. In two cases (Israel – Palestine and South Korea – North Korea) non-political agents even had gotten over the difficult security situation and administrative-judicial barriers through meeting outside of the region. The case studies have indicated that the decline in conflict intensity is not the result of environmental cooperation. However, they also have indicated that if the environmental cooperation once started, it can resist the political conflict.

The hypothesis has been completed by a question about the intensity of environmental cooperation in conflict-prone areas. We have seen that environmental cooperation in areas of political conflicts has, despite the duration of the cooperation and the intensity of external support, remained weak to moderate; weak between the official parties and governmental bodies, a

moderate level has been reached in cooperation between non-governmental actors. The barrier for the growth of the intensity of environmental cooperation seems to be the distrust between conflict parties, non-stable political and security environment and administrative-judicial measures limiting communication. In cases of Armenia and Azerbaijan and both Koreas environmental cooperation remained weak because environmental issues have been low among the preferences of the conflict parties; in case of Israel – Palestine and China – Taiwan environmental cooperation remained weak because environmental issues became part of the high politics and strategic concerns.

As at least case of Israel – Palestine and China – Taiwan showed, the potential role of spill-over as classical vehicle for enmeshment as envisaged by neo-functionalism has certain limitations. Where high politics is heavily dominant (such as the case of the Israel – Palestine and China – Taiwan) this has a profound impact on low-politics issues. Conversely, any attempt to generate political spill-over from environmental cooperation in this environment will meet opposition in the high-politics arena.

This indicates that to use environmental cooperation as an instrument of transformation and resolution of political conflict, which once experienced violence, is possible but the positive effects emerged rather among non-governmental and non-political agents and it is not clear which mechanism could help to spread the positive experience from environmental cooperation to politics. The case studies show that environmental cooperation can grow in areas of political conflicts but is highly sensitive to the outbreak of violence and can be effectively limited by mental, political, administrative and security barriers. Thus, its transformative and peacebuilding potential remains limited.

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