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Transboundary Environmental Cooperation in the Western Balkans
– A Bridge over National and Ethnic Borders?
Environmental Peacemaking in Practice



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Abstract

We encounter predictions of ‘resource wars’, primarily ‘water wars’, more and more frequently in the media as well as in literature. Since the end of the Cold War, researchers have turned their attention to the evolving field of environmental security discussing threats to national security through the scarcity of resources. At the same time, the concept of peace parks seems to gain recognition. Those neutral buffer zones between countries with tenuous relations are the most well-known examples of Environmental Peacemaking. The extensively assessed field of environmental security focuses on the conflict dimensions of resource scarcity or abundance and environmental stress, while environment and its confidence-building and peace-making opportunities only recently became the point of attention in research. This thesis explores environmental cooperation as a platform for dialogue as well as an instrument for peace and stability in the Balkan countries – namely in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. The post-conflict situation in the Western Balkan is especially challenging, as society and trust must be rebuilt. A fragile peace must be cushioned, not to collapse under continuous ethnic tensions and hostilities. Taking up the approaches under the heading of environment, conflict and cooperation research, dangers in the sense of environmental insecurity and in particular possibilities for environmental peacemaking are explored. A case study on the Neretva River Delta, a cross-border project between Bosnia and Herzegovina in addition to a review of a regional environment conference in Belgrade illustrates two levels of environmental cooperation: national and local, and shed light on practical experience in situ. The environment - a bridge over national and ethnic borders? The findings draw a picture of a region after war on its way towards peace, stability and reconciliation.

Keywords

International Environmental Governance and Politics; Environment, Development and Peace; Sustainable Development; Environmental Conflict and Cooperation, Environmental Security, Environmental Peacemaking; Post-conflict Reconstruction and Reconciliation in the Balkan Countries.

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1 Introduction

Stari Most, the “Old Bridge” in Mostar is of great symbolic power. Since the times of the Ottoman Empire, Stari Most has symbolised a bridge between occident and orient. It became a symbol in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina again. During the war in 1993, the bridge was deliberately destroyed “by a senseless act of vandalism by Croat artillery”¹. Only with massive European help could Stari Most be rebuilt according to the original. A picture of the impressive footbridge was to be seen in the Western press this summer, when it was reopened again. The inauguration of the bridge was presented as the reconciliation between Moslem Bosniaks living at the Eastern shores of the river and Catholic Croats living in the West. But Mostar is far from reconciliation and integration. Once Mostar was the most multiethnic town in Yugoslavia, with the highest rate of mixed marriages – today it is a divided city. So, the bridge, Stari Most now merely symbolizes the aim of reconciling the parties and bridging between cultures and religions.

The river flowing underneath this famous and symbolic bridge is the Neretva River. Its clear turquoise water is more successful in bringing people back together than the bridge crossing it. The Neretva is a transnational waterway shared by Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia; a project to jointly manage and conserve the river and its delta gathers Moslems and Croats from Bosnia as well as Croatians from Croatia. Common grounds are found in nature and trust is built through common environmental cooperation. Can the environment bridge between states and people after war and conflict?

From an environmental point of view, environmental cooperation is indispensable for the sustainable management of shared natural resources. Moreover, it is assumed to offer peace-building opportunities to prevent and to overcome conflicts. Transboundary environmental cooperation is said to create mutual trust and to establish long-term horizons as well as to develop a habit of cooperation. Therefore, cross-border environmental cooperation could be a catalyst for reducing tensions, establishing trust, overcoming war legacies and promoting peace.

The research incentive standing behind the scholarly work under the banner of environmental peacemaking can be seen as a response to current theories predicting interstate conflicts, resource wars as well as environmental refugees and migrants. The field of environmental security has been the focus of environmental studies in recent years addressing threats to national security through scarcer resources. Countering this trend it is the fact that transboundary environmental issues bear a great potential for cooperation and peace is highlighted. As empirical research reveals, shared water resources have rarely led to violent conflicts, but often stimulated regional cooperation. Going one step further environmental cooperation is suggested as a way to re-establish and maintain peace. There has been research in the field of “environmental peacemaking”, but the research community seems relatively small. As the approach is in its infancy, little is known about environmental peacemaking in practice.

The Balkan Peninsula presents another testing field for environmental peacemaking. The Western Balkan is in a process of post-war reconstruction and still represents one of the ‘conflict prone’ regions in Europe. New national borders are drawn and within the new states, ethnic lines and enclaves are created and maintained. The environment, however, cannot be split apart along these national and ethnic boundaries. Directly after the wars, the environment was not a major concern; but awareness and need for action increased. On the one hand, environmental cooperation is necessary to conserve the great

natural heritage of the Balkans. Could environmental cooperation, on the other hand, help to promote peace and stability in the region?

Some experiences have been already made. On the level of the states, environmental issues offered a welcomed field to restart cooperation across borders after the wars. The Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme illustrates the potential of environment as a platform for dialogue and cooperation. In addition, three cross-border initiatives have been launched as pilot projects in South Eastern Europe. The Neretva Delta project is one of them and is located in a region of former war and existing ethnic partition: the border in the South of Bosnia between Croatia and Herzegovina.

Aim of the Thesis

The overall aim of the thesis is to explore whether environmental cooperation can serve as a platform for dialogue and confidence-building as well as an instrument for peace and stability in the Balkan countries – namely Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. The research seeks to understand the potential of environmental peacemaking in the multiethnic post-conflict Balkans illustrated by two cases on the interstate and on the local level, REReP and Neretva Delta. Two research questions have guided the study

- Are REReP and the Neretva Delta project tools to help overcome old conflicts, reduce tensions and rebuild trust between the states and their people?
- Does environmental peacemaking present an instrument for peace and stability in post-conflict Balkans, both at the interstate and at the local level?

Methods and Material

This Thesis is founded upon an integrated approach combining environmental, geographical, social and cultural aspects in order to analyse cross-border environmental cooperation and the peace process in the Balkans. In line with an interdisciplinary claim, a range of theories and perspectives are applied, comprising traditional theories of international relations and social science and more recently developed approaches to environmental governance and politics, such as new approaches in the emerging field of Environment, Conflict and Cooperation (ECC), Environmental Security and Environmental Peacemaking. In order to understand the circumstances in the Western Balkans – such as the war legacies and social constructions of the ethnic groups – reflections on history and the perception of various actors are included when needed. Taking account of regional dynamics, the historical development as well as the international framework, the case will be situated in a broader context. A survey of relevant literature forms the theoretical basis for the empirical research during a field study to South East Europe.²

A comprehensive study of the peace and reconciliation process in the Balkan countries would have to apply theories on anthropology, as well as peace and conflict studies. This paper is chiefly based on primary sources attained by empirical research in situ and secondary literature on approaches offered by the research field Environment, Conflict and Cooperation. It presents a very young research area offering variety of theoretical approaches as well as open questions for further elaboration and exploration. In particular, the approach of environmental peacemaking just recently appeared and urges for further development and testing. This survey will test the assumptions made by environmental

peacemaking proponents and extend their approach from an interstate level to an inner-state level of analysis.

The casual link between environment and peace is not yet satisfactorily explained. The question of how to measure the impact of environmental cooperation on peace is starting to be tackled. This study does not elaborate on the contributions of the environmental cooperation to the peace process under way in the Balkans. Instead it examines the feasibility of environmental cooperation as a peace instrument. Moreover, the strength of the thesis is not quantitative data, but first-hand empirical data derived from interviews and field studies in the Balkan region as well as primary sources such as reports, reviews and conference minutes.

A case study will open the way for integrated analysis of peace-building opportunities through environmental cooperation. More precisely, the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe (REReP) was looked at as a platform for dialogue and cooperation and the Neretva River Delta within Project of Management of Shared Natural Resources was explored as a tool for reconciliation and peace. Empirical research was therefore carried out in Hungary at the headquarters of REC in Szentendre as well as during the 7th REReP Task Force Meeting in Belgrade and in the REC country office Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in Sarajevo as well as the Project Offices in Mostar (BiH) and in Metkovic (Croatia) corresponding to the case study. The empirical data comprises around 10 interviews with representatives from the Balkan ranging from Environment Ministries to NGOs. The interviews were held with semi-structured and open-ended as an adequate method to approach such a complex and sensitive issue as peace and conflict. To complement the insider's perception, another set of interviews covers the point of views and judgment of international organisations and leading scholars in the field of ECC. The field study was limited to one case study, as a comparative study of one or more projects would have required cases with at least similar conditions – post-war, ethnic tensions, no environmental conflict, peace and stability as an aim. Instead the case study was conducted on two levels, at the interstate level (REReP) and at the local level (Neretva River Delta). This allows placing the findings into a broader context and therefore gives way for more comprehensive conclusions. Environmental peace-keeping can both be framed as inter-state as well as an intra-state issue. At the same time, the findings were circumscribed by the fact, that environmental cooperation in the Balkans is only half a decade old. However, as the case study shows, conclusions about environmental cooperation and its potential for trust - and peace-building could be drawn. The Balkan presents a specific situation, environmental peacemaking asks for specific prerequisites; nevertheless, the findings from this study can be generalized to a certain extent for other post-conflict situations elsewhere in the world.

2 Environmental Conflict and Cooperation in theory

2.1 Environmental Politics

Conventional and state-centric schools of thought in international relations

International environmental politics describes environmental conflict as well as environmental cooperation. The traditional theories of international relations try to explain both phenomena.

“Cooperation is not the absence of confrontation and conflict, but rather the reaction towards existing or potential conflicts.”³ Conflict and cooperation can be seen as the two sides of a coin. This dialectic is

at the core of debates in social science which typify the two major schools of thought – realism and liberalism. Explanations of cooperation in international politics follow two distinct lines of argument. For realists and neo-realists it is national sovereignty within the anarchic international system dictating the scope and form of international cooperation. They believe that environmental cooperation is determined by entrenched patterns of international anarchy. Here, states are the main actors in international politics thinking in terms of national security; even when negotiating environmental agreements the rational state is seeking the acquisition of power and control.⁴ In the decentralized, anarchic, state-focused self-help system of neo-realism cooperation is difficult to explain, as attention is paid to conflict and tragedy. Moving from the “static state centered” to a more “dynamic-process oriented” model of Keohane’s neo-liberal institutionalism, cooperation becomes easier (though not easy). Here, other actors than the state are recognized, while the state remains the key actor. Subsequently, liberals seek to interpret cooperation among sovereign states as the norm and elaborate on theories how to achieve cooperation.⁵ Neo-liberal institutionalism argues that states find mutually agreed compromises negotiated in international regimes. Conflict between nations is then explained as primarily a problem of compliance.⁶

The State at Stake

Whether structure or agent based, the “States” and the paradigm of national sovereignty stand at the core of traditional international relations theories. It is the states setting environmental policies and priorities; nevertheless its borders are not respected by transnational environmental issues. As the causes as well as the consequences cross political, national and ethnic borders, international cooperation is often crucial to combat shared environmental issues. Interdependence opens the way to cooperation; environmental problems obviously require coordination across borders. Transboundary environmental problems can ideally be dealt with in international environmental regimes where they are addressed through negotiation and joint action.⁷ Those regimes represent the power hierarchy between the involved countries, as the realist view suggests. The realist as well as the neo-liberal institutionalist’s approach keeps the state and its borders at its centre and thereby neglects “history, political economy, and, most importantly, social forces, many of which also ‘cross borders’”⁸.

Dalby remarks in an article, that “nation States, (...), are frequently not useful political entities for decision making about phenomena that flow across their borders”⁹. The traditional theories of international relations are clearly conditioned by a structure of anarchy and the prominence of national sovereignty. The lack of inclusion of the transnational component has been pointed out by scholars like Lipschutz and Weinthal. They stress the importance of “the transnationalization of civic politics and social power”¹⁰ and “inclusion of third-party or transnational actors”¹¹. Nonetheless, the neo-liberal institutionalism has reacted to and picked up some of the criticism, extending its realm and nowadays captures aspects of governance such as domestic and international factors as well as international institutions and civil society.¹² Neo-liberalism is not the end of environmental politics approaches, but it has certainly advanced to the dominant environmental philosophy. At the first glance, the neo-liberal institutionalist’s approach also seems to fit the case of recently emerged nation states in the Balkan region. Independent for merely a decade, they are amidst the process of state-building and gaining sovereignty. It can be assumed that the new states seek to maximize and guard their newly required sovereignty, instead of engaging in international cooperation. “In most post-communist cases, long-term horizons are absent and enforcement mechanisms are tenuous, which in turn encourage

sovereignty-enhancing positions rather than cooperative arrangement from emerging so soon”.¹³ What Erika Weinthal concludes for the Central Asian countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union can also be applied for the countries of the Balkan. The phase of transition from state socialism is accompanied by social, economic and political processes of change. But, to be able to understand dynamics and processes in post-war Western Balkan countries and to illustrate the dangers and opportunities of environmental conflict and cooperation neither realism, liberalism nor neo-liberal institutionalism will be enough. Environmental politics and philosophies need to go beyond the conventional approaches of international relations. The research field of Environment, Conflict and Cooperation offers an interesting set of contradicting and complementing theories for exploring environmental cooperation as peace-building opportunity in the Balkans.

2.2 Environment, Conflict and Cooperation – Three Linkages

The connections between environment, conflict and cooperation are multiple. Environmental cooperation as a necessary reaction to transboundary environmental phenomena is only one of many links between environment and conflict as well as environment and cooperation. The environmental impact and destruction through violent conflict and war is very relevant in the Western Balkans – as land mines in Bosnia and Herzegovina still stop any exploration of the beautiful natural surroundings and costs the lives of many people, especially children every year – but is beside the point of this paper. Environment as an instrument of conflict will be illustrated later through an example from the Kosovo. Further connections range from water wars to peace parks. While the former points out conflict over resource scarcity or resource control, the latter uses environment as an instrument of international peace-building – independently of prior environmental conflicts. These connections can be allocated to different approaches which could all be summarized under the research area of Environment, Conflict and Cooperation (ECC). The field of Environmental Security focuses on the conflict dimensions of resource abundance or scarcity and environmental stress. In contrast, environment and its confidence-building and peace-making opportunities only recently moved to the centre of attention in research. In between stands the recognition that cooperation is the only solution to conflict, like the initiative “From Potential Conflict to Co-operation Potential. Water for Peace” by UNESCO and Green Cross demonstrates.¹⁴

Countering and reacting to the continuous warnings of resource wars and ecological insecurity, transboundary environmental problems as a catalyst for cooperation instead of a trigger for violent war enjoys slowly increasing popularity. Going one step further, it can be argued that environmental cooperation across borders bears high potential for promoting peace and stability in conflict prone regions. However, Carius and Dabelko (2004) argue, that researcher and policymakers in the conflict community have not been convinced that the links between environment, conflict and cooperation offers opportunities beyond preventing an acute violent conflict over natural resources. “By concentrating on scarcity, abundance, and violence, ECC research has neglected opportunities to explore the environment as a pathway to cooperation, confidence, and peace.”¹⁵ Subsequently, environmental cooperation could be employed as an instrument of international peace-building independently of prior environmental conflicts.

For better understanding of the debate, three schools of thought – environmental security, environmental cooperation and environmental peacemaking – are presented in the following.

2.2.1 Environmental Security

A core question in the scholarly work on environmental security is what is to be secured, against what threats, by whom, and how. In the light of the war on terrorism, the call for redefining security to encompass environmental threats has become obsolete. Yet discussions about a new concept of security continue, philosophizing on the question if security is demilitarized and greened or environment is militarized and secured.¹⁶ The idea of a troop of “Green Helmets” fighting against environmental threats seems rather more polemic than feasible.

In popular media and professional literature “water is proclaimed to be the next global crisis”¹⁷. Terms like “water crisis” and “water war” appear more and more frequently in context of the global water situation. A growing number of countries are experiencing permanent water stress. Often fear is expressed that a competition over resources could become a major source of tension and conflict between states.¹⁸

While environmental security as a research field is divided in several schools of thought, many start by proposing environmental concerns, such as resource scarcity as initiator of violent conflicts, including interstate wars. A prominent representative of environmental security is Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, mastermind of the so-called Toronto school. In his work he argues that increasing “environmental scarcity” – driven by environmental change, population growth and the unequal distribution of resources – provokes interstate conflict and even resource wars.¹⁹ Environmental problems are seen as insecurity factors possibly causing migration and ethnic clashes as well as triggering social unrest, political instability, economic difficulties, threats to territorial security and diplomatic tensions.²⁰ Homer-Dixon asserts, however, that environmental scarcity is more likely to provoke conflicts within states than between states. Cases where resource scarcity observably contributes to political instability and cross-border clashes, such as the process of “resource capture” and “ecological marginalization” in Southern Africa shows²¹, support the argument of the indirect link between conflict and environmental scarcity held by the Toronto school. While theories of resource scarcities and worldwide population pressures can not longer uphold doomsday scenarios, local resource conflicts are still in the game.

“Much of the early ES (Environment and Security) work was based upon the assumption that scarce resources and environmental degradation either caused or enhanced the likelihood of violent conflict”²². By now, research has moved on and offers a wider range of far-reaching approaches.

Apart from the Toronto school with its neo-Malthusian tendencies, a variety of approaches has developed in the 1990s. For example Gunther Baechler’s Environment and Conflicts (encop) project suggesting the concept of environmental discrimination and the process of transformation (to market economy) as an explanation for environment related violence.²³

Turning the “environmental-scarcity-leading-to-conflict” – argument on its head the Peace Research Institute in Oslo suggests that conflict occurs as a result of fights over the control of abundant resources.²⁴ Relating to discussions in development economics about the difficulty of development in resource-rich countries in the South, “the resource curse’ theory links resource wealth to economic and political effects such as slow growth, poor governance, weak institutions, and political instability”, all of which are likely to induce violent conflicts.²⁵

Leaving states as categories aside, the programme “Global Environmental Change and Human Security” (GECHS) tried to broaden the traditional narrow definition of security. The programme

focuses on people and human development and stresses the “importance of understanding the complexity of both environmental and social processes (...)”. The approach towards a more comprehensive and human security understanding presents a very normative agenda. Nevertheless, there clearly exists a geography of environmental insecurity, as it is not the worried North that will be most and directly concerned by environmental change and resource scarcities, but the deprived parts of the South.

The Concept of Human Security

The interconnectedness between environment and conflict is indeed very complex.

The trend towards labeling the academic analysis and policy advice as “environmental change and human security” follows this observation and embarks on a normative agenda. With the same intention, UNDP proposed the concept of human security, which should aim at securing the human well-being.²⁶ Attempts to place the individuals and the ecosystems at the center of security are driven by good intentions, but difficult to translate into policies and reality.

The term Environment Security attempted to give environment a prominent place on the security agenda and to lift environmental concerns on the level of “high politics”. Environmental problems were pushed to advance to problems of national security after the end of the Cold War era, as if to fill a gap in security policy. The window between the end of the Cold War and 9/11 was too small and the war on terrorism drew more attention. Nevertheless, the environmental security debate goes beyond state centric and national security interpretations of environmental security and generates valuable approaches how to bring security to the people and to environment. “Environmental security as security of the environment, (...) is a crucial component of human security”.²⁷ In order to achieve this environmental security a preventive strategy, for once even a *preemptive* security strategy is desirable.

There is a rift between neo-Malthusians almost exclusively concerned with contribution of environmental stress to the outbreak of violent conflicts within and between States and those seeing environmental security as shifting the focus from state security to societal and individual well-being, as the proponents of human security.²⁸ In large, environmental security appears to be the result of the confluence of environmental discourse and international security literature.²⁹

Critics

The theory of environmental security is viewed with suspicion by the less-developed countries. “In the context of an already contentious North-South environmental dialogue, poor countries often view the concept of environmental security as a rich-country agenda serving rich-country interests to control natural resources and development strategies.”³⁰ These critics presumably address the early approaches, which are likewise attacked by most opponents.

While the initial alarmism – set off in 1994 when journalist Robert Kaplan published “The Coming Anarchy”³¹ – does not dominate the environment, conflict and security debate anymore, more moderate, comprehensive approaches are also under attack.

Counterpoints, such as Deudney, Matthew and Katrina S. Rogers argue how unlikely an interstate war is – caused by environmental scarcity and change – when considering the features of the contemporary world order.³² Deudney points out the high costs of conflict compared to the smaller costs of conflict mediation and solution finding as well as regional and global anti-aggression norms.³³ There seems to

be a growing consensus that, the outbreak of violent conflicts between states due to resource scarcity is unlikely. Further, the findings and ideas set out in the research surrounding environmental cooperation can be seen as directly critical of the environmental security approach.

2.2.2 Environmental Cooperation

Factors leading to conflicts are often too complex to connect them directly to resource scarcity, as political, economical and military tensions play a role as well. In addition, taking into account the large number of shared water resources, cases of “violent conflicts over scarce water are a very rare, nearly nonexistent phenomena”³⁴. Out of the 263 international water systems, there were 37 cases of violence, mostly between Israel and its neighbours. Talking about the Middle East it can be assumed that environmental change and scarcity can be a potential catalyst for conflict, as it is also understood in recent environmental security research. “So, while no “water wars” have occurred, there is ample evidence that the lack of clean freshwater has led to occasionally intense political instability and that, on a small scale, acute violence can result.”³⁵ Transboundary environmental conflicts can possibly accelerate or trigger violent conflicts given that tensions or conflicts – often along social, ethnic and religious rifts – already exist.

Water is an interesting environmental issue to illustrate the conflict potential and the cooperation opportunities, as water has been analysed largely regarding conflict as well as cooperation. Reacting to the many predictions about water wars, it was Aaron Wolff, who conducted a broad survey on *Conflict and Cooperation along International Waterways*.³⁶

Empirical work, especially Wolff’s work, has shown that environmental change and resource scarcity is unlikely to initiate large-scale warfare over resources. “Cooperation, rather than conflict, is the norm - even among sworn enemies.”³⁷ In the second part of the 20th century, for example, cooperative events around shared water bodies have by far outnumbered the occurrence of conflicts.³⁸ “Obviously, there are no guarantees that the future will look like the past; the worlds of water and conflict are undergoing slow but steady changes.”³⁹ However, “war over water is neither strategically rational, hydrographically effective, nor economically viable.”⁴⁰ At the same time the “vital nature of freshwater provides a powerful natural incentive for cooperation.”⁴¹ As cooperation does not simply mean the absence of conflict, it is wise to consider the ways in which environmental scarcities, above all water scarcities, have actually led to cooperation indicated by “a mutual will to resolve the conflict through communication and non-violent means”.⁴²

Moving from the dispute-oriented assets of environmental issues to its cooperation opportunities, Saleem Ali’s aim is “to explore ways in which resource scarcity and environmental protection of resources can in fact be catalysts for resolving otherwise intractable disputes.”⁴³ Using the language of game theory, he notionally develops “considerable potential to stimulate cooperation on the basis of environmental scarcity itself” by converting ‘dilemmas of common competing interests’ (the proto type *Prisoner’s Dilemma*), like Hardin’s *Tragedy of the Commons*, into ‘dilemmas of common aversion’. Using environmental concerns as a binding element in conflicts, cooperation “is likely to catalyze a more “sustainable consensus” – a robust contract between erstwhile adversaries.”⁴⁴ In the way that common interests encourage cooperation in order to serve these interests, such as the joint protection of shared natural resources; common conflicts ask for cooperation to find common solutions.

While environmental security research and policy focuses on resolving immediate disputes and ECC researchers propose environmental cooperation as the reaction to environmental conflict, some

researchers have started to analyse the process of cooperation solving larger conflicts. Also in development studies, international interaction is perceived as “fertile ground for a trust-creating and peace-creating process” – in a long-term perspective intensified interactions are likely to promote peace.⁴⁵

Water again presents a valuable example: “water acts as both an irritant and a unifier. As an irritant, water can make good relations bad and bad relations worse.”⁴⁶ As a unifier, water can be an effective pathway to build confidence, develop cooperation and prevent conflict.

2.2.3 The Concept of Environmental Peacemaking

Peace Parks in Southern Africa, the conservation zone in the Cordillera del Condor, the K-2-Sianchen-Peace Park and the Okavango River as a shared river management plan⁴⁷ are examples of initiatives employing cross-border environmental cooperation as an instrument to promote stability and trust among States, often situated in conflict prone regions. Despite an increasing number of initiatives, where nature and ecology are placed into service of peace promotion, little has been done in research to evaluate the possibility of peace-building through environmental cooperation. Ken Conca and Geoffrey Dalboko started to fill this gap with a volume (2002) examining several cases of potential environmental peacemaking around the globe, from the US – Mexico border to South Asia.⁴⁸

Ken Conca characterizes the efforts to link environmental degradation with large-scale violent conflict as “a highly polemic debate”, as it emerges almost exclusively in countries of the North reinforcing the ‘zero-sum logic of national security’ and actually hindering environmental cooperation where it is most needed.⁴⁹ In his view, the research around environmental conflict and security lacks a clear strategy of peace and misses the opportunity to resolve those conflict situations by analysing the potential of environmental cooperation. Turning the premises of environmental security on its head, Ken Conca’s and Geoffrey Dabelko’s aim is to pinpoint “cooperative triggers for peace that shared environmental problems might make available”⁵⁰ as an answer and alternative to research focused on environmental triggers of conflict and war. Can environmental cooperation be an effective general catalyst for reducing tensions, broadening cooperation, fostering demilitarization, and promoting peace? Conca begins by presenting a strong theoretical basis underlying the claim that environmental cooperation can have positive spin-offs for peace.⁵¹

Cooperation in general has long been known to bring about positive side effects. The ‘general conditions facilitating cooperation, the characteristics of environmental problems and the kinds of social relations that are caused by ecological interdependencies are the same conditions supporting peace.’⁵² Tangible cross-border interdependencies, such as the upstream/downstream dichotomies and shared natural resources relations can “create a stake in peaceful cooperation”.⁵³ Liberal internationalists strongly agree that “growing interdependence is a force for peace in world politics.”⁵⁴ But, unlike economic and financial interdependencies through global trade and investment, environmental interdependencies are less polarising and, ideally, less politicised. “As a peacemaking tool, the environment offers some useful, perhaps even unique qualities that lend themselves to building peace and transforming conflict: environmental challenges ignore political boundaries, require a long-term perspective, encourage local and nongovernmental participation, and extend community building beyond polarizing economic linkages.”⁵⁵ The very same properties making environmental cooperation a potential peace-building instrument render it observably difficult to achieve. Environmental cooperation does not occur automatically, nor does it automatically turn into

environmental peacemaking. “If properly designed, environmental initiatives can also reduce tensions and the likelihood of violent conflict between countries and communities.”⁵⁶

Conca proposed two paths to achieve environmental peacemaking. On the first path – named ‘changing the strategic climate’ – environmental cooperation is used to overcome mistrust, uncertainty and short-term horizons through supposedly either the recognition of mutual benefits or the growing habit of cooperation. It is described by the generation of improved intergovernmental relations through cross-border environmental initiatives. The second pathway seeks to strengthen so-called ‘post-Westphalian governance’, understanding peace not simply as stable interstate relations, but as transnational ties between the civil society movements and at the local level.⁵⁷ This path to peace is founded on cross-border societal linkages, which are developed during environmental cooperation and transboundary efforts and could even proceed to a “shared collective community”⁵⁸ As peace has to be achieved on both levels, the intergovernmental as well as on the inter-societal, the pathways do not constitute alternatives but two components of one goal – peace. Instead of relying on state-centric approaches like the related environmental security research, Conca’s environmental peacemaking includes civil society and regional communities as integral part of the peace strategy.

Three different forms of environmental peacemaking

Environmental peacemaking initiatives can roughly be distinguished in three categories: “efforts to prevent conflicts related directly to the environment, attempts to initiate and maintain dialogue between parties in conflict, and initiatives to create a sustainable basis for peace.”⁵⁹ The most direct and simplest – though not easiest – form of environmental peacemaking is the resolution of environmentally induced conflicts through cooperation. A second type is cooperative environmental efforts used to create more peaceful relations between parties in conflict not specifically linked to the environment. Here, environmental issues can break barriers to dialogue and cooperation or can maintain channel of communication during hostile time. “A third strand of environmental peacemaking recognizes that a robust peace will require a foundation in sustainability.”⁶⁰ This idea goes along with the work of Wangari Maatai, this year’s Nobel Peace Prize laureate, as she understands nature as a prerequisite for peace – ‘peace on earth depends on our ability to secure our living environment’.

A Regional Approach

In order to overcome various sources of insecurity – economic, social, and political – rather than just ecological insecurities, Conca’s approach emphasizes a regional approach to peace.

There are a variety of reasons for and benefits from regional cross-border cooperation. The *ecological* motives are probably the most obvious and multiple. Transboundary coordination and often cooperation is crucial to solve environmental problems, like the prominent example of the polluted river illustrates. In addition, cooperation can certainly improve the sustainable management of natural resources and increase its efficiency. *Economic* incentives for cross-border cooperation are the creation of joint economic opportunities, like tourism as well as increasing chances for economic prosperity of local communities.

On the *political* level, transboundary cooperation can clearly be motivated by improved transparency and accountability through the mutual exchange of information and in certain cases by increased border security.⁶¹ Shared environmental challenges can be one of the few topics to break the ice between

governance locked in dispute, mistrust and hostility. Ecological issues can bring them together to start dialogue and can then eventually increase confidence and stability in more politically charged areas. “Shared environmental challenges may be useful not only for initiating dialogue but also for actually transforming conflict-based relations by breaking down the barriers to cooperation—transforming mistrust, suspicion, and divergent interests into a shared knowledge base and shared goals.”⁶²

A *social* reason is certainly the creation of a platform for communication on different levels, which can reach from a joint park management to meetings on ministerial level. Cross-border environmental cooperation can generate shared regional identities around natural resources. In this context, Conca points out the potential development of – what he calls – “an imagined security community” rendering conflicts increasing unimaginable. The regional civil society plays a big role in environmental peacemaking. Esther Schroeder-Wildberg calls the adequate involvement of stakeholders at all levels the most important factor for successful peace promotion, while stressing the crucial role of local stakeholders to build up trust and partnerships.⁶³

On the various levels elaborated above, peace can be promoted through regional environmental management: more precisely through prevented environmental degradation, shared economic opportunities, through reduced political tensions and through developed trans-societal linkages.

The Role of Civil Society

Ecological interdependencies, often represented by transboundary environmental problems, clearly offer opportunities for mutual gains. Likewise, environmental issues support the engagement on the interstate level as well as on the trans-societal level.

“Environmental peacemaking strategies offer the chance to craft a positive, practical policy framework for cooperation that can engage a broad community of stakeholders by combining environment, development, and peace-related concerns.”⁶⁴ The involvement of society and the creation of shared regional identities and trans-societal linkages take a prominent place in Conca’s/ Dabelko’s research. The reason seems to be that “initiatives that improve trust and reciprocity among governments without promoting a broader, society-to-society foundation for peace run the risk of reinforcing the zero-sum, state-based logic of national security.” Environmental cooperation initiatives, exclusively set up between governments, bear the risk of resource exploitation, which in turn runs against the aims of sustainability and peace. The importance of the role and participation of civil society in environmental matters is increasingly at the centre of attention in environmental politics research. Ronnie Lipschutz, who represents a strong advocate of what he calls “civic politics”, suggests that “global environmental politics must be centered elsewhere than the state system”⁶⁵. He holds up *social power* against “realism”, defining social power as the arena of civil society – distinguishing between civic politics and social activism – which are neither part of the state nor part of the market.⁶⁶ “All environmental politics are local!” Lipschutz bases his claim on the “agent-structure problem” disconnecting the individualist orientation of capitalism from the structures of the capitalist political economy. The structural change, crucial for effective environmental politics, can not be achieved by the individuals, nor within national or international setting, but through collective action by agents in localised settings.⁶⁷

Another view sees *public concern* as the most important factor of effectiveness of environmental politics and regimes; as public pressure can alter behaviour and multiply the influence of international agreements.⁶⁸ At the same time, environmental concern is in endless competition with other public

concerns, which counts for affluent States in the West as well as for countries and their societies in transition and in the process of developing.

High-stakes questions

Environmental cooperation offers more than simple functional coordination of low politics between states. Conca underlines in his findings that environmental problems constitute “controversial, high stakes questions that can and do engage the state at the highest level” and is understood by all relevant actors as such.⁶⁹

In contrast, it is argued by Alexander Carius that - in order to realize environmental cooperation -, the concerned transboundary problems have to be perceived as low politics, as they otherwise tend to become concerns of national security, like it is assumed in environmental security research.⁷⁰ While, Conca and Dabelko are even going as far as to proclaim that “if environmental cooperation can lead to a more robust peace it is not because mundane, low-stakes environmental cooperation creates a slippery slope towards cooperation on the real issues of contention.”⁷¹ Declaring environment as high politics, they suggest that cooperation – once achieved – might create broader influence for change and perhaps a tradition of cooperation spilling over to other political areas – which could not be expected from lower-stakes functional cooperation. No matter if we are dealing with transboundary watercourses, ecosystems or regional biodiversity, it is probably right to say, that issues crossing borders could easily be perceived as “high politics”; which can be an obstacle as well as a stimulus to cooperation. At the same time, Conca can be criticized in his overall rejection of functional cooperation, as the starting point for successful cooperation can often lie at the rather functional, technical level.⁷²

The framing of the environmental peacemaking

A related question concerns the communication and perception of environmental projects for the promotion of peace. Alexander Carius warns against explicitly labelling projects, quoting an experience in Mongolia, where a nature protection zone in the Altai Mountains at the Chinese border labelled as a peacemaking project was entirely rejected by the people.⁷³

In general, local communities, social or ethnic groups, as well as states can refuse to accept environmental management and protection being exploited as measures of security policy and as “a priori and explicitly peace promoting and conflict preventing”.⁷⁴ The involved parties might simply object to being defined as conflict-prone. Particularly countries, just coming out of acute conflict or war “may not want to approach a problem through a conflict lens”.⁷⁵

In addition, the label given to a problem or project determines who will actively be involved in the solution or implementation. Framed as an issue of security, governmental institutions and security actors will feel addressed, while other stakeholders, such as scientists and civil society might be unintentionally excluded.

Obstacles and Criticism

Certainly, transboundary cooperation can be kept from its realization, as a range of potential obstacles suggests. As already mentioned, the high stakes in cross-border cooperation can evolve to cooperation barriers on the higher levels of government. National security and sovereignty concerns can block

cooperative behaviour. Another basic barrier is unclear or disputed borders. In addition, differences in capacity, commitment and institutional and legal frameworks can pose problems. As a variety of stakeholders are involved, interest conflicts over ecological, social, economic or political issues can arise.⁷⁶ Subsequently, “traditional hostilities”, tensions and war legacies can be the main obstacle to transboundary environmental cooperation. In Conca’s and Dabelko’s (2002) conclusions a set of conditions for successful realization of their concept of peace through environmental cooperation are asserted. Ironically, it is those prerequisites that were claimed to be the outcome of the process – “enhanced interstate trust, more dense transnational ties among non-state actors, and the emergence of a regional political community”⁷⁷.

“For the foreseeable future, then, the focus of “environmental peacemaking” should be making peace in environmental conflicts – a sufficiently ambitious goal in and of itself”, ends Robert Darst sarcastically his review.

Nature Conservation and Peace

Conservation and environmentally sustainable practices are handled as relatively low-cost peace-building strategies. “Building on scientific data, conservation can transcend ethnic social and political tensions.”⁷⁸ Nature conservation is suitable for cross-border cooperation for several reasons. It is internationally recognized as valuable goal and is considered to be sought without political predispositions. Nature conservation can not only prevent environmental degradation, but can even neutralize a source of conflict. “In this sense, a shared vital resource might provide an impetus for building bridges between parties who might otherwise not sit at the same table.”⁷⁹ In addition, it can build trust and a sense of shared fate. Under the heading *Post-Conflict Forge Collaboration Around Shared Environmental Concerns* Halle, Matthew and Switzer stress the important role taken up by conservationists, as initiators, facilitators and mediators. “The conservation community can be instrumental in identifying and brokering dialogue around these shared resources and spaces, helping forge slender ties between those groups within opposing camps that recognize the need to preserve something for the future.”⁸⁰

The claim that peace could be the much needed stimulus for environmental protection awakes fears that trade-offs between peace and environment would occur. Cases exist, where dialogue and cooperation are achieved over an environmental issue, but the environment does not improve significantly. In Central Asia a net of environmental cooperation links contributed largely to the stability of the region, while the environmental problems were not nearly solved, as pictures of the former Aral Sea show.⁸¹

In this context, it is often asserted that the environmental aim should clearly remain the priority of the initiatives, while peace promotion is to be seen more as a side effect.⁸²

But, despite all promising theories and plans, nature conservation can also create conflict. Recent research reveals that peace parks have led to conflicts over economic activities, biodiversity protection and user rights. Traditional user and access rights of local communities often collide with the protection interests or are not sufficiently recognized. Nancy Lee Peluso cautions us about “*Western conservation ideologies*” and “*global community’s environmental will*” weakening local resource claimants and instead strengthening the state’s control over the resources.⁸³ The integration of the local community and their livelihoods is a matter of successful stakeholder participation and responsible leadership in the negotiations.

The Concept of Peace Parks

Peace Parks, the practical example of nature conservation for peace, are probably the most known realisation of the concept of environmental peace-building. “Peace parks – more formally called transboundary conservation areas for peace and cooperation – use efforts to conserve the environment as a neutral way to build peace between neighbouring countries.”⁸⁴ The growing number of planned and existing Peace Parks reflects the success of these ‘neutral buffer zones’ in deepening ties and making peaceful co-existence possible.

Since the establishment of the first Peace Park in 1932 linking Canada’s Waterson Lake with The Glacier National Park in the USA, the concept has spread and gained considerable momentum in the last 20 years bringing the number of the so-called Transboundary Protected Areas (TBPA) to 169 by 2001.⁸⁵ The positive contribution of environmental cooperation to conflict prevention and peace promotion has been mainly discussed in regard to the Peace Parks developing in Southern Africa and Southern America.

Future Peace Parks are discussed at the borders between Pakistan and India and North Korea and South Korea. The ambitions do not go as far as to claim to reach peace through the magic of nature; but even small achievements like starting a dialogue or bigger ones like having the border controls appointed as park rangers are thought to redirect energies and dynamics. Post-conflict situations are especially challenging, as society and trust must be rebuilt and a fragile peace must be cushioned, not to collapse under re-emerging hostilities. This delicate challenge is faced by today’s world at numerous places, including the Balkans. One of the newest propositions is the *First Balkan Peace Park* which shall be established at the borders of Albania, Montenegro and the territory of Kosovo. So far it is not much more than an idea; however, the concerned governments have indicated interest.⁸⁶

3 Building Bridges: Peace for the Balkans

Situation and Political Landscape in the Balkans – with a focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Balkan in general

The term “Balkan” derives from times of the Ottoman Empire. Balkan is a Turkish word for “mountains” and was used for the peninsula between Adriatic Sea, the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea referring to the mountain range spreading across it.⁸⁷

The Balkan Peninsula comprises the countries of Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Rumania, Albania, Macedonia, Greece, and the European part of Turkey.⁸⁸ The focus of the study will look at the countries of what is called the Western Balkan: Serbia-Montenegro, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

To understand the situation of those countries, a glance at the history of the whole Balkan will be useful. The Balkan has often been marked as ‘Europe’s tinderbox’ and the term *Balkan* was left with a negative connotation, precipitated by the Balkan wars, by those at the beginning of the 20th century as well as by the recent ones at the end of the 20th century. More politically correct is the term *South Eastern Europe*. Since both Western media and most of the people living there refer to the “Balkan” when meaning “Western Balkan”, this thesis will use the term Balkan in the same sense.

In the 1920s, the notion *balkanisation*, developed and refers to the fragmentation of multiethnic states into single nation states. That is exactly what happened to the Balkan Peninsula in 1990s again. Soon after the Wall came down, the Republic of Yugoslavia fell apart into a variety of nation states.⁸⁹

Balkanisation of the Balkan

With the end of Soviet regime three tendencies within Yugoslavia became evident: Slovenia and Croatia, the richest sub-states, sought national independence; Serbia under Milosevic stood for a new Yugoslavia under Serbian supremacy; while Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina pushed for a maintained status quo. In 1991 Slovenia and Croatia declared independence. Soon thereafter the European Union recognized them as states. With it the war started and the end of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia commenced. Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Macedonia now faced the question of whether to stay within the shrunken and mainly Serbian Yugoslavia or to take the risk and fight for their own independence as well.⁹⁰ On April 6 1992 Bosnia and Herzegovina was recognized as a sovereign state by the European Union and the United Nations. The war in Bosnia started the very same day.

Three ethnic groups, Moslem Bosniaks, Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs, fought a disastrous war on Bosnian grounds. In 1995 – leaving 150 000 dead, over 2 million expelled from their homes, burnt and devastated villages and houses and several hundred deliberately blown up mosques and churches – the Dayton Agreement brought an end to the war and placed Bosnia and Herzegovina in a complex state structure of two entities, the centralized Republica Srpska (the Serbian Republic) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina divided in regional cantons. The Dayton Agreement was interpreted as a “blueprint for partition”; which became most evident in the cities, when tens of thousands of Serbs left Sarajevo and Mostar split in half.⁹¹ The diplomats from the West based their efforts on a misunderstanding of the origins of the war, as Malcolm puts it, and comprehended ethnic separation as the solution to the war.⁹² The consequences are mono-ethnic administration structures cutting through the multi-ethnic state.⁹³ The repartition of responsibilities between federal and cantonal level are often unclear. Thus, decision-making and policy processes are backbreaking and slow. An illustrating fact is that more than 60% of the state budget is eaten up by administration.⁹⁴ Nine years after the peace agreement Bosnia and Herzegovina is still not a sovereign state. A High Representative of the international community has the final say in the state and foreign troops are still omnipresent throughout the country. Bosnia is in a sensitive consolidation phase, including a difficult trust building process: the re-establishing of dialogue between the three ethnic groups – Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs – at the national as well as at the local level.⁹⁵

Post-conflict scenarios

After the end of the Cold War the transition from a communist regime to a liberal market society was severely disrupted by wars. After a decade of war, violent conflict, mass murder and subsequently one million refugees, the region had the double task of transition and reconstruction. The nation state building project has just recently started in the majority of Balkan states. The rules of the game are not clear yet. Unpredictable law changes, the arbitrariness of the courts as well as corruption, not only hinder desperately needed investment and economic development, but also hold back the building of a functioning state.

The newly drawn lines of state authority form borders of national states without real sovereignty and with infant democracies. The transition process is characterized by ethnic tensions and war legacies. In general, conflicts are – especially when talking to government officials such as the Ministers of the Environment – often pretended to be solved. Bosnia is separated in its ethnic groups, political tensions between Croatia and Serbia still exist, the Kosovo question remains and the status of Montenegro is not yet clear. Still, the countries cooperate – often under obligation from the international community.

At the times when the world was split in East and West, Yugoslavia and Tito was treated as the model student from the US. Since the “Yugowar” – how the non-Yugoslav Balkan calls the ‘Balkan wars’⁹⁶ –, Yugoslavia had become the problem child of Europe. Since the US commenced its war on terror, the focus has shifted to the Middle East. Just recently the Balkan appeared at the centre of attention in the European press. In the context of the discussion about Turkey’s possible integration into the EU, the question of an EU accession of the Balkan countries came up. The attention has fled, but the Balkan countries cling to the perspective of EU membership. Romania and Bulgaria already signed their accession agreements; Croatia is the next candidate at the doors of the European Union; Serbia and Bosnia left behind in uncertainty. Despite the varying stages on the EU accession ladder, the integration into the European Union is the unifying driving force within the Balkan region.

Security in the Balkans

South Eastern Europe is faced with a post-conflict scenario. The region is characterized by instability, unpredictability and is dependent on and subject to external factors. Namely the perspective of EU integration is driving the peace and stabilisation process. According to Gianluca Rampolla, “these dynamics are the strongest vehicle for stability”.⁹⁷

Security in general is a highly sensitive topic in the Balkans ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union and after the several Balkan wars. Even though the Balkan looks calm, apart from turmoil in Kosovo earlier this year, the situation in South Eastern Europe is still unstable. Predictions exist that as soon as the troops leave Bosnia and Herzegovina, violence and riots will break out again. Upon second inspection, peace still appears to be superficial in parts of South Eastern Europe.

Environmental security aspects

An unstable situation, weak states plus social tensions based on ethnicity; those are conditions that could allow environmental problems to trigger or aggravate violent conflict, as Homer-Dixon and also Conca suggests.⁹⁸

However, concerning environmental security the picture looks more promising. Having assessed the region in the face of environmental risks and pressures, the results of the Environment & Security Initiative asserts that there do not exist any urgent or acute issues. Nevertheless, environmental issues can become destabilizing factors. One major area has been adjudged to be a possible issue of concern in the long term: mining accidents with potential transboundary impacts. Transboundary natural resources, on the other hand, hardly bear any potential for conflict, but can be employed for confidence-building exercises, as Gianluca Rampolla puts it. In general, it has to be declared that the environment is more likely to be a destabilizing factor at the local than at the intergovernmental level.⁹⁹

Low politics

The discussion about environmental security leads us again to questions of where environmental issues stand. There is no universal rule on environment being low or high politics. To employ the terms high/low politics is not to imply the standing of environmental concerns on the priority list of the government, but rather: Is environment handled as an item on the agenda of high politics – amidst foreign affairs and national security – or is it dealt with on a rather technical level. Environmental issues per se are neither strictly high nor low politics. In the Balkan countries environmental concerns and even natural resources appear as low politics. This makes environment in the South Eastern Europe an instrument of peace, or at least one of confidence building. The achievement of cooperation across borders is rendered considerably easier, when only low politics are concerned. That even transboundary waterways crossing four national borders can lead to cooperation is demonstrated in the case of the Sava River. Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia and Montenegro have signed an agreement to establish an International Sava River Basin Commission. An interim Commission operating since June 2004 on the basis of a very comprehensive river basin management concept addresses the needs of navigation, sustainable water management, hydro-electricity and environmental protection.

The Environment and Security Initiative in the Balkans

A fairly recent partnership of international organizations is taking up concerns of environmental security and at the same time, interestingly enough, attempting to realize environmental peacemaking in praxis. “There is growing understanding that the fact of rising resource scarcity and degradation of natural systems, pose substantial threats to security for many countries, especially those facing transitions into market economies.”¹⁰⁰ The Environmental and Security Initiative launched by UNEP, UNDP and the OSCE builds upon the theory of environmental security. But they assert that “Environmental stress rarely leads directly to violent conflict; rather, it is one strand within a complex web of causality (...).”¹⁰¹ At the same time, the organization recognizes that environmental cooperation can strengthen mutual trust and be “a basis for deeper peace-building and sustainable human development”¹⁰². The approach of ENVSEC – “Transforming Risks into Cooperation” - shows how closely environmental security is linked to the environmental cooperation or even environmental peacemaking. Environmental cooperation theories do not only present the opposing theory or string of argument, but actually presents a solution the environmental security dilemma. The initiative is viewed as an important attempt to test environmental peacemaking in practice.¹⁰³ The Environment & Security Initiative seems not only to dare to make the leap from theory to praxis, but also chances to bridge the different strands of ECC theories: environmental security and environmental peacemaking.

Interestingly, the launching of the EnvSec Initiative shows symptoms of “label-refusal”. While some government officials demonstrate interest for it, others, especially those at the NGO and local level are very suspicious. Maps and talks of potential conflicts scare them; they do not want to be associated with past or future conflicts whether the source of conflict is ethnicity or hazardous waste.¹⁰⁴ Or maybe they simply fear to be left out. The name and framing of the EnvSec Initiative takes the notion “security” as absolute not as a norm – the aim is to foster environmental security and to prevent any threats to it.¹⁰⁵ Taking environmental risks to the security level implies turning them to high politics. “The challenge is to raise awareness for an environmental issue without politicising it. A balance has to be found”, explains Gianluca Rampolla, who is responsible for the EnvSec Initiative from the OSCE

side.¹⁰⁶ The future will show if the initiative grows to become a strong and effective partnership preventing environmental stress or conflict and successfully realising environmental peacemaking built upon existing programmes and activities in the region.

4 Environmental Cooperation Across National and Ethnic Borders

4.1 At the interstate Level: Environmental Cooperation and Beyond

State of Environment and of related Efforts in the Balkan

The developments and efforts in environmental politics and management are earmarked by the political, social and economic transition as well as through the last decade of violent conflicts.

The environmental management capacity is constantly increasing; once again with the perspective on European Union integration as a major incentive. For those who have signed the EU association agreements, preparation for membership is a key external factor shaping their environmental policy. New environmental units in ministries, agencies (often in response to international initiatives), and even a green civil society emerge. Cumulative openness and transparency allow more and more the participation of environmental interest groups. Slow but substantial change can be recognized.

“(Bosnia and Herzegovina) is now moving rapidly towards a sound institutional, legal and policy base for environmental protection and the management of natural resources”.¹⁰⁷ To bring together the environmental policies of the two entities a National Steering Committee for Environment and Sustainable Development was created in 2002.

The situation in Croatia regarding environmental efforts is similar, but less complicated. In fact, environment law and performance is one of the major challenges in regard to Croatia’s EU accession.

The Stability Pact and the environment

Emerging from a decade of separation and violent conflict, the countries of South Eastern Europe found themselves in a situation not only of destruction, personal loss and social disruption, but also of economic decline and environmental neglect.

In response, the European Union started the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) in 1999 with the aim to bring peace, democracy, the rule of law and economic development to the five concerned countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania. The promotion of regional cooperation and dialogue as well as a rapprochement towards the European Union lie at the core of this instrument.

The international community soon joined efforts to rebuild the region with a long-term conflict prevention strategy. The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe was launched in June 1999 and constitutes a truly international initiative comprising inter alia the European Union, Russia, USA, the UN, NATO, the IFIs; the Pact addressed the Western Balkan countries as well as the EU Accession states Bulgaria and Romania.¹⁰⁸

The task of the Pact is immense; the message of the Pact, however, was and still is quite simple: “You must come to terms with your neighbours in the region.” Similar to the objectives of the SAP, the

Stability Pact aims at preventing conflict and at setting the stage for democracy, market economy and regional cooperation. The Pact acts predominantly as a political frame, which holds together the initiatives in the region, and, more importantly, includes donor countries such as Switzerland, Norway and USA, which are not part of any EU strategy for the Balkan.¹⁰⁹

An international attempt to reunite Yugoslavia was initially suspected behind the Stability Pact; today the initiative provides the basis for regional cooperation. The environment as an objective can be found under the so-called Working Table II on Economic Reconstruction, Development and Cooperation. Nevertheless, environment appears not to be an integral part of the reconstruction strategy, given that it receives only a fraction of the funding. Instead the countries of the region took the initiative themselves.

REReP - The interstate environmental forum

“There can be neither peace nor stability without regional cooperation” declares Margot Wallström when talking about the importance of the *Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe*, a framework helping “the countries of South Eastern Europe to work towards common goals”.¹¹⁰

The Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South Eastern Europe (known as REReP) was developed in 1999 – by the countries of South Eastern Europe on the initiative of FYR Macedonia – as a direct response to environmental challenges facing the countries after years of environmental neglect and violent conflict. Until today its major strength is still that it was an initiative by the countries themselves. The Programme was launched under the auspices of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe; meaning that the Pact took the initiative under its wings. Furthermore this helps the REReP the countries to meet their obligations under the Stabilisation and Association process (SAP), in the sense that the REReP seems to develop into the vehicle for assisting the SEE countries in their efforts to approach the environmental *Aquis Communautaire* of the European Union. The involved countries have taken the lead in setting the programme’s priorities: institution building, support to environmental civil society, to environmental regional cooperation mechanisms and cross-border projects, reducing environmental health threats and loss of biodiversity. It is the countries themselves which are translating these goals into projects and activities as well as implementing and reporting them.

“The environment has proved to be an important platform for regional cooperation in the three years following the creation of the REReP to achieve stability and security in SEE.”¹¹¹ The initial idea behind REReP was to provide assistance in environmental cooperation and a mechanism for including the environmental component into the reconstruction activities. At the same time it was perceived as an opportunity to bring the countries back together around a negotiation table, to improve interstate relations and to develop regional development. “Before REReP there were almost no relations between the countries of the Balkan region”, reminds Gordana Kožuharova from the Macedonian Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning at the REReP Task Force Meeting, “Of all the Stability Pact fields, it was the environment that crossed the borders first.” The REReP is guided by a task force comprising the ministers of environment of the SEE countries and is chaired by the European Commission and the Stability Pact. The Task Force for Implementation of REReP meets once a year under the chair of the European Commission. This year’s meeting took place in Belgrade in late September. A meeting of the Senior Officials in the forefront of the formal Task Force meeting illustrates the important role of

REReP. The conference room assembled ‘the whole Balkan’; representatives of Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia-Montenegro (Republic Serbia and Republic Montenegro), Macedonia, Albania, Romania, Bulgaria and Kosovo (territory under UN interim government) were gathered around the table and discussed current environmental issues in the SEE countries.¹¹² It was more than that, it resembled a lively market place where commodities are exchanged. Here, the goods were information, experiences and ideas. They spoke the same language – metaphorically but often even literally – giving almost a picture of oneness, despite their recent conflicts and wars. Yet, quips and jokes were aimed at ‘Croatia’s egoism’, ‘Albania’s expansion drive’ and Montenegro uncertain status pointing out past and current problems in the Balkans. The merry atmosphere and this ‘harmony’ was only broken when attention was drawn to the question of Kosovo. There was initial hope to solve some political questions over the environmental topics, as representative from Kosovo for the very first time entered the Republic of Serbia with UN passports, instead of the strictly required Serbian passports. Any positive expectations regarding a rapprochement between Kosovo and Serbia were narrowed when the Kosovo Albanians were held at the airport for five hours and were shattered when the assistant of the Environment Minister of Serbia continuously attempted to get the assembly to dismiss Kosovo from the list of participants. Even if the chairman tried to keep anything other than environmental issues out of the room, the meeting was relatively political.

Environment as an Instrument for Conflict. Serbia-Montenegro and Kosovo

Kosovo stands out again, when recalling a case which dismisses the proposition that the environment is neutral and exposes a case of environment as means of conflict. An example is the accidental pollution case of the River Ibar, where Serbia blamed Kosovo for the acute pollution of the River Ibar which was providing their drinking water. Instead of seeking cooperation, UNMIK was accused to be incapable of managing a supposedly involved geothermal power plant and with it the territory of Kosovo. (The accusation turned out to be most probably wrong as a UNEP assessment later revealed.)¹¹³ As the incident followed a dispute between Belgrade and Pristina, the case could be read as an attempt of Serbia to (mis)use environment as an instrument to act politically.¹¹⁴

This example from Kosovo displays a case of highly politicised environmental issues. Yet, following an official from Kosovo, environment per se seems neutral, but is at the same time easy to be politicised, to be used as means of conflict or an instrument for peace.

The REReP – a platform for dialogue and cooperation beyond environment?

Apart from the abiding tensions between Serbia and Kosovo, which cannot be solved over environmental concerns, former lines of communication among the Balkan states could be re-established and on the environmental side, environmental management structures could be rebuilt; in addition formal and informal coordination mechanisms for the region’s environmental NGOs could be initiated.¹¹⁵

The REReP Task Force Meetings played and still play a major role in the post-war reconstruction of the Balkan going beyond *environmental* reconstruction. It provides a high-level platform for post-conflict dialogue and confidence-building between the countries. Independently from the conflicts, it could be expected, that the recently independent states want to guard their newly gained sovereignty. But as the case of the REReP shows joint projects and joint management take the place of independent decision-making. The success of REReP lies in the contribution to repairing interstate contacts and

cross-border dialogue and cooperation. Quoting an independent REReP review, “The REReP’s most significant impact to date is the process of reconciliation and cooperation that has been launched among the environmental officials from countries that were recently at conflict, in some cases for the first time.”¹¹⁶

The water management across borders of the rivers Sava, Drina and Danube as well as the Management of the Joint Natural Resources Stara Planina, Lake Skadar, Ohrid/Prespa Lakes are early examples of cross-border cooperation in environmental issues. Could these successful experiences suggest environment as a common denominator in the SEE countries? Is environment the foundation for regional cooperation and stability?

Much has changed during the first four years of REReP. The region is now more politically stable. The contribution of the REReP process is difficult to track, but the political tensions and difficulties at the beginning did not stop them from seeking to cooperate in environmental matters and from commencing environmental reconstruction in the region. The height of the REReP clearly lies in the fledging stages of the peace process when it initiated the first meeting of all countries in March 2000.¹¹⁷

The major unifying aim for the REReP appears to be the common goal of European integration. This is reflected in a variety of projects which intent to help the countries harmonize or catch up with the European Union and its standards.

Keeping in mind the cases of Kosovo, REReP can hardly bring about solutions for politically tenuous issues outside the environmental field. The programme does provide a forum gathering all countries of South Eastern Europe and thereby an institutionalized platform for communication. Discussions also leave the environmental frame, but that happens mainly outside the formal meetings. It is often the time in between sessions in the hallways or at dinner that offers the best opportunity to overcome mistrust and ignorance.¹¹⁸ The majority of participating officials have been involved in the process from the beginning. Having seen the often warm contact among officials, one could talk of “trans-bureaucratic relations” or even a “shared REReP identity”. According to the members of the REReP Task Force interstate relations also improved since the launch of REReP, thanks to a general process of normalization and thanks also to the REReP platform.

4.2 At the local level: Cooperation around the Neretva River

Case Study: Transboundary cooperation through the Management of Shared Natural Resources - Neretva Delta (Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina)

4.2.1 Cooperation for the environment

The project framework: Rationale and Objectives

In line with the understanding of the Stability Pact – that is to say the promotion of dialogue, cooperation and stability – the heart of the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme (REReP) is the promotion of regional cooperation. One of the so-called cross-border initiatives is the “Transboundary Cooperation through the Management of Shared Natural Resources”, which serves as a pilot project in South Eastern Europe.¹¹⁹ As a Swiss contribution to the Stability Pact and through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the project was launched within the framework of REReP under the title “Promotion of Networks and Exchanges in the Countries of South Eastern Europe”. The project comprises three cross-border pilot sites of high conservation significance:

Neretva Delta in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, Skadar Lake shared by Albania and the Republic of Montenegro/ Serbia and Montenegro and the West Stara Planina mountains at the border between Bulgaria and Serbia – Montenegro. The three chosen sites stand in a complex and sensitive context and are characterised by three elements: The involved countries had gone through an acute period of tensions and conflict following the spilt-up of Yugoslavia. The objective of the project is the protection of precious and coveted natural resources. The cross-border dimension of the project mandate corresponds to the natural entities which do not respect national borders and call for cooperation across them.¹²⁰

The overall goal is to enhance cooperation in South Eastern European countries through the management of shared natural resources. Cross-border networks and exchanges as well as technical cooperation are promoted through joint activities at different levels ranging from central and local governments to civil society.¹²¹ “Nature protection and management are themes particularly well adapted to the promotion of exchanges between SEE countries. They provide grounds for collaboration by bridging ethnic and religious differences and developing civil society.”¹²² To guarantee participation over ethnic and religious borders, dialogue and cooperation should ideally be facilitated by a neutral partner. This role is successfully played by the Regional Environmental Center (REC), which has a long tradition in the region with an incredible network of contacts and experience in environmental programmes and consultancy regardless of any borders.

The Neretva Delta and its environmental issues and potential conflicts

The Neretva River became famous through Stari Most, the Old Bridge crossing its floods in the city of Mostar. Today the Neretva is splitting Mostar in a Moslem and a Croat part. According to the rumours, its water was seen red from the blood shed during the war. Now, clear turquoise water is flowing through Mostar again.

The Neretva River is a transboundary waterway shared by Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. On its 225 km towards the Adriatic Sea the Neretva runs wildly through various canyons passing Bosnia’s mountains and green woodlands; karst hills and fertile valleys dominate the scene in the South. It flows 203 km through Bosnia and Herzegovina and 22 km through Croatia, having the character of a rapid mountain river in upper part while becoming slow downstream from Mostar where it flows through an alluvial riverbed into the fertile Delta opening towards the Adriatic Sea.¹²³

The Neretva Delta is rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage. The delta holds the largest remains of Mediterranean wetland in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and is a site listed in the *Ramsar Convention of Wetlands* as well as in the programme of *Important Bird Areas* of the International Council for Bird Preservation since 1995.¹²⁴ The protection efforts in the Lower Neretva Valley attempt to correspond to its international environmental importance, as the varied habitats give home to a great diversity of animal and plant species.

The Bosnian part of the Delta has long been a legally protected nature park, the Hutovo Blato Park, representing with approximately 8000 ha one of the largest protected wetlands.¹²⁵ Although an integrated park management is missing, the nature park presents an important habitat for migratory and stationary birds as well as for wild horses; an environmental education trail has been put up and the NGOs help to raise awareness among the local people.

The large Delta area (app. 12000 ha) on the Croatian side does not have the status of a national park. It includes five further lateral wetlands of major ornithological importance; they are designated as protected (1620 ha) and two sites have been proposed.¹²⁶ (The most ambitious plan proposes a bilateral nature park, which has stalled at parliamentary level in Croatia for the time being.) Far less protected, the Croatian side is exposed to human and economic activities; such as settlement expansion, traffic, industries, agriculture and tourism.¹²⁷

Neretva's water is very clear; it does not contain heavy metals due to the breakdown in Bosnian industry.¹²⁸ On its way to the Adria the water of the Neretva flows through six hydropower stations on the Bosnian side providing an important source for electricity in Bosnia and Herzegovina and thereby dominating and disturbing the water flow regime. Croatia benefits from the fertile Delta, where most of income is earned through the production of citrus fruits. This intensive agriculture has a strong impact on the water regime: pesticides and chemicals are used and the diversion of Neretva's flows through drainage and pumping has led to the intrusion of salt water endangering the wetlands.

Incompatible administration and management structures between the countries and a confusing repetition of responsibilities within the countries are the main reason for a still unclear protection status of the Delta. Mechanisms and structures for transboundary water management do still not exist. In addition, land ownership - mainly on the Croatian part - is undefined. Subsequently, there is weak enforcement of rules, standards and restrictions, where they exist at all.¹²⁹

In addition, the region is poor, making it even more difficult to enforce the prohibition of hunting and fishing, the importance of which seems to increase due to lack of other income sources.¹³⁰ The acceptance of restrictions in order to set up protection zones and to achieve sustainable management of the delta is limited. The big problems of poaching, bird hunting and unsustainable and intensive agriculture practices in the area illustrate the need not only for awareness raising but also for capacity building for sustainable management of the shared resource.

The project and its settings

The natural site of the Neretva Delta sits in a complicated and difficult political and administrative situation. Problems occurred less between but rather within the countries.¹³¹ Bosnia and Herzegovina is restrained by the complex state structure established through the Dayton Agreement. The often unclear distribution of duties and responsibilities between the entities as well as between cantonal, federal or state level makes any interstate negotiations time-consuming and often difficult.

On the other hand, the Republic of Croatia has loaded itself with a less complex administrative structure, but the region of the Neretva Delta lies at the far end of Croatia's long coast line and thus is not always seems to be on top of the priority list of the Zagreb administration.¹³²

Regarding the interstate cooperation one of the major problems is "the lack of corresponding administrative structures of the two countries preventing the authorities to proclaim equal structures of protected areas", as it is formulated in an external mid-term evaluation report.¹³³

In addition both countries are concerned with economic issues. While Croatia is busy getting ready for EU accession, Bosnia and Herzegovina is struggling to restart the economy, still repairing their infrastructure and trying not to fall back further.

The Neretva Delta project – like the other cross-border sites – was opened by a “Get Everyone Involved” meeting (GEIM) in 2001. The intention was to allow an open and transparent discussion on the situation, the problems and activities needed to protect the site and its biodiversity involving local stakeholders and relevant central government agencies, as well as scientific institutions and NGOs.

The activities mostly initiated and run by the local stakeholders and NGOs include joint surveys and research activities, capacity building events, such as workshops and trainings as well as cultural events bringing together local communities. The four main guidelines aim (1) at the development of sustainable tourism, (2) at environmental education to promote the understanding of natural and cultural values, (3) the introduction of environmentally friendly agriculture practices to enhance organic food production and (4) at supporting integrated water management to solve the conflicting issues of water use.¹³⁴

All activities have a strong transboundary element: trainings and workshops are attended from both sides, information and reports are jointly elaborated and regular contacts between institutions on each side exist. Even though the levels of awareness are still considerably low, the activities managed to raise awareness in the region.

The Neretva River project succeeded in initiating multi-stakeholder dialogues as well as the development of civil society. The Neretva Delta Forum represents an informal transboundary Project Steering Committee and gathers the main stakeholders approximately three times a year. Their mission is to “reflect the attitudes and needs of the local communities in defining common approaches for effective management” of the Neretva Delta and it serves as a platform for the exchange of information, experiences and ideas.

While the REC Headquarters in Szentendre, Hungary is mandated to implement the project, coordination offices have been set up in Mostar for Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Metkovic for Croatia to run the project in situ.

4.2.2 Cross-border cooperation for Peace

– Incentives for cooperation and barriers to cooperation

National and ethnic borders in a post-war region

The state border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia is relatively new.¹³⁵ It cuts the Lower Neretva Delta into two unequal parts. The upper part still holds intact alluvial fans and riparian zones including the important and first protected wetland area Hutovo Blato, while in the lower part lies the delta and further lateral wetlands as well as reclaimed agricultural wetlands. “The cross-sectional borderline is in sharp contradiction to the longitudinal functionality of the river and the delta system.”¹³⁶

Therefore there is a strong need for joint efforts to establish a management mechanism overcoming borders in order to achieve a “balanced regional development in correspondence with the natural functionality of the river and delta system”.¹³⁷ The countries were willing to cooperate in issues concerning the Neretva, as Croatia was concerned about the water amount and quality and Bosnia and Herzegovina about salt water intrusion from the Adriatic Sea.¹³⁸ “[T]he cross-border cooperation is politically necessary and, from the environmental point of view, unavoidable”¹³⁹. If the main incentive

for cooperation was the political and environmental necessity or rather the REReP initiative and the subsequent funding is hard to distinguish, but the driving force of the REC certainly played a big role.

Barriers to cooperation

The claimed barriers to cooperation or obstacles during the project implementation vary depending to whom one talks: bureaucratic hurdles, the large diversity of interest concerning the Delta or the post-war legacies and resentments are mentioned.

It has to be pointed out that on the side of organisation and administration, the allocation of responsibilities within Croatia and the state structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina posed considerable obstacles slowing down the process of the establishment of natural parks, for example. The major problem is the lack of corresponding administrative structures of the two countries and vague allocation of responsibilities and duties within the countries. Working with Bosnia and Herzegovina means consulting and integrating the two entities, the centralised Republica Sprska and the Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina on cantonal as well as on federal level.

In the case of Croatia the decision makers are all gathered in Zagreb, but, for example, it is the Ministry of Culture – not Environment – that is in charge of issues like nature parks! Thus the cross-border difficulties were more related to administrative structures than to the people. Nevertheless border issues, such as different laws and responsibilities were not a real obstacle in the case of the Neretva Delta.¹⁴⁰ As these administrative complexities do not entirely prevent the needed actions from happening but simply cause the process to become slow and strenuous.

Regardless of nationality and ethnicity conflicts of interest naturally occur concerning water management and especially agriculture, as the biggest point of dispute. Conflicting and often contradicting interests between economic development and nature conservation are unavoidable. To circumvent too many pressures from too many stakeholders, the coordination of interests and activities is important. Pleasing all the various interest groups is impossible, but bringing them together for joint goals and actions for sustainable development is seen as the challenge of the project.¹⁴¹

The last mentioned obstacle is the post-war situation in the Balkans and is at the centre of this paper. The political instability and the mistrust among the people involved in the war present difficulties primarily within the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina. “The biggest challenge was to get the people to cooperate within Bosnia and Herzegovina”, confirms Zoran Mateljak.¹⁴²

Ethnic borders, mistrust and war legacies

Mira Mileva, the project manager recalls the initial difficulties of Bosniaks and Croats when the Neretva project started in 2000 in Mostar. “At the beginning they refused to talk to each-other. There was no cooperation at all.” Difficulties arose, which were mostly connected with the three ethnic groups on the Bosnian side and especially within the city of Mostar. Once the city with most mixed marriages in Yugoslavia, Mostar is now a divided city.

When the Neretva project started in 2000, Mostar had two different currencies, different time-zones, different holidays and it was even dangerous to leave one’s ethnically pure part of the city. In the meanwhile the city is approaching normality, finally being administered as one municipality. However, live still runs separately. Everybody can walk, eat and go out on either side of the river, but almost nobody does.

Crossing this invisible line – physically and mentally – and overcoming resentments from the recent war were the major challenges in the very beginning of the project. Finding a neutral place for the project office as well as a neutral project coordinator, accepted by all entities and at all levels, was a difficult task. Resentment existing on the local level could be found on cantonal and national level as well. Popular accusations of polluting the river are made by all entities and people.

The very first aim was to build trust among the people and this took time.¹⁴³ Due to complaints and protests the office was moved from the East part of town to the frontline on the West of the Neretva River. The project coordinator today, Zoran Mateljak – managing the project from the Bosnian side – is Croatian. He succeeded in gaining the trust from all sides. Even for him the first reason to cross the Neretva since the war was his job; he had to meet the cantonal Minister of the Environment, at that time a Moslem. After a first period of suspicion, the project manager from REC’s headquarters, Mira Mileva from Bulgaria was well accepted and appreciated.

In a search for politically inactive actors, the first workshops and “ice-breaking events” were held with local teachers. This turned out to be a good approach – until today environmental education and activities in schools present a strong pillar of the project.

“The project focuses almost exclusively on issues relating to the restoration of lines of communication, coordination and dialogue between partners [...]”¹⁴⁴ While the city of Mostar, like other regions and municipalities still remains an ethnical divided, the project has brought together people regardless of their backgrounds. Today, they communicate and cooperate in all aspects of the Neretva project.

The success has been the process of moving from closed doors and closed minds to open doors and open minds, as picked up in the slogan of the project.

5 Environmental Cooperation around the Neretva River Delta as an Instrument for Peace and Reconciliation

5.1 Environmental Peacemaking in Practice

Dialogue, cooperation and reconciliation

According to the goals set out within the REReP framework, the promotion of regional cooperation is at the heart of it all. Further on, it is stated that nature protection and management is well suited, providing grounds for cooperation “by bridging ethnic and religious differences”¹⁴⁵. Nature and with it nature protection does offer common ground for bringing people together regardless of their backgrounds and prior conflicts. Nature, as such an apolitical theme, is said to present an opportunity to take up cooperation after war and conflict.

The Neretva project does bring together people regardless of their nationality and ethnic background: the Moslem Bosniaks, Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatians from Croatia and to a smaller extent, Bosnian Serbs from the Republica Srpska. It contributes to the process of normalisation which has slowly gained momentum in the last couple of years. Even if Bosniaks stay east of the River and Croats on the West, there is no more fear to cross the line and meetings and trainings can be attended regardless of the location. The process could be seen in the meetings; Zoran Mateljak describes it as a natural process, as there is a definite need to cooperate in all sorts of daily life aspects.

And “nature conservation is a start.”¹⁴⁶ As a neutral topic it provides tools and mechanisms to promote this process of consolidation.¹⁴⁷ First of all, “the interest for the environment is shared by all.” Without provoking war and conflict legacies, common ground can be found in nature. “It is nature, not environment”, which is too complex and complicated; like Mira Mileva expresses it: “nature is not only neutral but understandable”¹⁴⁸. The close cooperation on the local level makes the process easier. They meet each other, lose their fears and work together.

The project – the first of its kind in the Balkans – faced specific conditions and challenges. “In order to reply to this potentially difficult (post-war situation), complex (management of common natural resources) and tense (cross border dimension) context, the project approach was flexible, creative and adaptive.”¹⁴⁹ As a result the Neretva Delta project could help to open up a positive dialogue and could possibly have laid a foundation for future cooperation. It “started opening doors and opening minds at all levels – political, administrative, private partners, NGOs and schools.”¹⁵⁰

Even if the Neretva project brought together Croats and Moslems on all levels – from Ministerial level down to the level of NGOs – the ethnic struggles within Bosnia and Herzegovina did not stand at the centre of REC’s approach in the first place.¹⁵¹ They dealt with the circumstances in a pragmatic way, designing the project and its meetings sensibly to prevent any ethnic tensions. With this approach REC took over the crucial role of strong third-party mediation.

“It is rather obvious that environment can enhance cooperation”, states Zoran Mateljak: Environment is a neutral platform for cooperation and it is better than culture. “People should not be reminded of their nationality or of the conflict”. That is also the reason for not framing the initiative as a peace-building project. Peace cannot be imposed and being the object of an imposed peace process runs contrary to the intention to built ownership of the project. Even if ‘cooperation’ and the ‘overcoming of tensions’ (...) is mentioned in some of the project descriptions and brochures, the Neretva Delta project is not labelled as a peace-building initiative.¹⁵² Against this background, the establishment of a platform and the identification of common goals is as much as can be done from outside.

In an interview with a representative of one of the NGOs the incentive for involvement in the Neretva Delta project became evident. Dražan Rosić lays out the many environmental activities of his NGO “Bura”, an environmental NGO from Mostar’s West. It is no secret that cooperation can have positive spin-offs for peace, but the participants seem hardly aware of it – the attention is paid to the environment in the Delta. Besides “taking care of nature” an even more important incentive is, in fact, the job opportunity. In a country with 44% unemployment voluntary commitment can neither be afforded nor be expected.¹⁵³

The fact that only around 100 individuals are involved in the project limits the impact of the project in the region and therefore its supposed contribution to peace and stability. It is hard to say, to what extent the activities of the Neretva Delta project contributed to the process of rapprochement. As only 20% of the project participants are Moslems – simply due to the Croatian majority in the delta – the process was certainly not initiated through the project.

The project often went parallel to the normalization process. However, the cooperation in the Neretva Delta proved more stable, as political events between the ethnic groups did not necessarily disrupt the process within the project. The teachers’ workshop continued in Mostar and Capiljina despite a political conflict in Mostar, when Croat bank accounts were closed and the following uproar was responded to by military.¹⁵⁴

In short, dialogue between the parties and ethnic groups – initial refusals notwithstanding – could take place. Mutually reinforcing cooperation rebuilt confidence and increasing confidence strengthened and advanced cooperation. At the same time, the separation between Croats and Moslems continues to split the region, and most of Herzegovina. Reconciliation is a big word and requires more than joint activities. But projects like the one in the Neretva Delta might be a little step towards reconciliation.

Multi-Stakeholder Approach. Local Participation and Ownership

One of the biggest successes of the project is the initiation of a multi-stakeholder dialogue. From the beginning, stakeholder participation and ownership of the process presented key characteristics in the project and is of great value for the further development of the region.

The wind of change pushing NGO development elsewhere did not reach Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia as they were in war. NGO development and civil society is still in its infancy.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, there are 10 active NGOs in the Neretva Delta. They have developed on a local base and are open to cooperate with each other, seeing a chance in cooperation.

The project was initiated from above and is now driven and owned by the local people.¹⁵⁶ By guaranteeing the implementation through locals, ownership of the project is built.¹⁵⁷ The wide range of stakeholders – government agencies, NGOs, local tourist organisation, the local communities and economic actors – develops their ideas and activities during workshops and priority-setting meetings; enriched through the diversity of the participants (the only interest group not represented among the stakeholders is the community of hunters.¹⁵⁸) “The action of the project has undeniably contributed to re-enforcing and structuring a still often embryonic civil society”.¹⁵⁹ Even though the development of civil society is still in the fledgling stages, the project around Neretva Delta pushed and helped this development and has established a well functioning trans-boundary stakeholder network.¹⁶⁰ With the Neretva Delta Forum the stakeholder and with them civil society has an informal but great platform for dialogue. Although the involvement of various interest groups brings along the need for time, patience and tenacity, the Neretva Delta is not experiencing “stakeholder fatigue”, a newly emerged phenomena lately discussed in theory.

The dialogue initiated within the Neretva framework “re-established transboundary contacts between stakeholders, which would have not been possible without the project”.¹⁶¹

‘Changing the strategic climate’ and strengthening ‘post-Westphalian governance’?

Following Ken Conca’s and Geoffrey Dabelko’s approach of environmental peacemaking, a look at the two proposed pathways shall be interesting. The first path was “changing the strategic climate”; meaning improved interstate relations through environmental cooperation. The fact that the Neretva Project is running and advancing, suggests that mutual interests have been recognised and that longer-term horizons could be established. It is hard to draw any conclusions on aspects like ‘growing habit of cooperation’ and spill-over of cooperative behaviour to other issues. Interstate relations are far too complex to allow a direct causal link between environmental cooperation and other forms of cooperation. Roland Gajšak from the Croatian Ministry of Environment simply denies any conflicts and initial problems while holding up very good relations and cooperation in many fields.¹⁶² Considering his role as a government representative, his words will be left uncommented.

In any case, it can be assumed that trans-bureaucratic relations developed and improved given the complex state and responsibility structures of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. At this inter-ministerial level mistrust and uncertainty could be overcome and cooperation resulted despite the administrative discrepancies.

The second pathway is named ‘the strengthening of post-Westphalian governance’ being targeted on the development of trans-societal linkages. The stakeholder dialogue – informal but institutionalised in the shape of the Neretva Delta Forum –, the joint research projects and the environmental efforts has clearly establish transboundary stakeholder networks.¹⁶³ The various interest groups from each side of the border could be brought together (besides the hunters). It has to be re-emphasized, however, that the border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia divides colleagues, friends, neighbours and families when talking about the Croatian people. To make any conclusion on the even more ambitious proposition of the development of a ‘shared collective community’ or ‘regional identity’, in-depth studies and years in situ to observe the project and the people in the Delta would be required. For a short-term observer, the river Neretva seems to have a powerful meaning for the people living in the Delta, as traditions and culture reveals.

All in all, the second path appears to be more successful, as the project is build upon, driven and owned by the local community. Talking about “post-Westphalian governance” would be exaggerated, as civil society is just developing and often the job and the money are the main incentives for engaging in NGO activities.

5.2 Environmental Cooperation as an Instrument for Peace in the Western Balkans

High expectations and cruel reality

Environmental cooperation is often regarded as a tool for confidence-building and peace promotion based on the assumption that the environmental is apolitical. I agree that the environment per se is not political; nevertheless environmental issues can become contentious and even highly politicised. In the former case, environmental assets and resources find themselves at the centre of conflicts of interests. As argued above, disputes over scarce or abundant resources do seldom lead to the outbreak of violent conflicts, but rather generate necessary cooperative behaviour. Examples are the various water basins that have generated cross-border cooperation and international agreements over the years. With the notion ‘politicisation’ I mean the exploitation of environmental issues as instruments of politics. In this case, the environment does not constitute an extremely contentious issue, but is placed in a political context and/or employed for pursuing own interests. The mentioned case where Serbia uses accidental pollution for political means and Turkey’s fashion of exerting political pressure on its neighbours through the management of the Euphrates are examples.

The Neretva River was neither a contentious river nor a politicised environmental issue. There were some minor issues, such as salinization and the management water quantity that gained the attention on higher political levels and indicated the need for increasing cooperation in the future. Here again, the fact that environment is dealt with as low politics helped to achieve cooperation. Low politics do not exclude high political levels from being involved in the project. Some of the main obstacles in the Neretva project were posed in the capitals by changing responsibilities among the ministries and the lack of corresponding administrative structure between the two countries.

The building of peace is a long-term process and project intending to promote this process can not be expected to have quick outcomes. Nevertheless, conclusions could be drawn despite the short existence of the project. While REC regrets that cross-border projects take 3-4 years to show any results¹⁶⁴, one might be surprised to arrive at conclusions concerning the potential of environmental cooperation for the promotion of peace and reconciliation.

Environment, the management of the Neretva River and the protection of the Nerevta Delta, is a neutral platform for cooperation. “Environment is the easiest platform to create”¹⁶⁵, as Zoran has put it. For him the Neretva Project is not about the environment “it is about cooperation”. But the initial supposition that environment could be the first issue to stimulate cooperation across borders was rigorously rejected. Agreements on trade are even easier to realize; “trade always comes first!” (after unofficial issues such as smuggling, crime and drugs).¹⁶⁶

Limitations and Constraints

The success of the Neretva Delta project as a peace-building initiative is reduced by a number of constraints, mostly of practical nature.

The relatively small number of Neretva participants as well as the small percentage of Moslems living in the Delta and being involved in the project demonstrates the limited scope of the initiative. The considerably low level of environmental awareness adds to this, as the project does not enjoy much attention in the region and thereby can hardly reach people living outside of the Delta. Not only the work across ethnic divisions but also the engagement in environmental matters has to be encouraged strongly. In the words of Rudolf Schoch from the Swiss Development Agency (SDC), “the people are no environmental enthusiasts. For that reason, environment is not the peace instrument to overcome Mostar’s apartheid”¹⁶⁷.

Civil society is weak and inexperienced and will need some time to strengthen and to understand that they are political actors and not just random organisations applying for grants.

The experiences made in the Neretva Delta and the way the Neretva project is set up gives the impression that the assumptions on “non-labelling” laid out earlier in the text were right. Hardly anybody would participate in a project that reminds them of the recent war and their ethnic backgrounds. The great disadvantage of not framing environmental cooperation as peacemaking projects is, that the peace progress is more difficult to monitor. The advantage is that environmental efforts are not jeopardized by peace-building aims.

Without the evident frame of peace-building, the Neretva Delta demonstrated that environment can bring back together nations and people split over war and conflict. Positive dialogue could be established between Croats and Moslems against a process of normalization fixing the mere coexistence of the ethnic groups. The economic condition, the constellation of participants and the relatively small scope of the project cannot lead to great changes outside the Delta. Therefore, the limited scope denies the attribute *instrument of peace*. Nevertheless, as one factor among many, the cooperation in the Delta contributes to the amelioration of the situation between and within the countries, but mainly on a local scale. The cross-border cooperation in the Neretva Delta strengthens the dialogue between the countries and their ethnic groups in the short term. In the medium and long term, the development of transboundary environmental cooperation is politically necessary and from an environmental point of view, it is inescapable.

6 Conclusions – Environmental Cooperation a Bridge across National and Ethnic Borders

What scholars have proposed and researchers have concluded regarding other parts of the world is also valid for the Balkan Peninsula: environmental cooperation, be it joint river management or nature conservation, can not solve long-standing conflicts. At the same time, it is argued that cooperative environmental protection and resource management can play an important role in preventing and reducing conflict and in enhancing the peace process. Environment can be a very effective tool for trust and peace-building between nations and ethnicities, given that the political conflicts are settled. The promotion of communication and cooperation – established in the environmental context – is the first step towards any peace. More precisely, environmental cooperation is anticipated to initiate trust building processes and the creation of – what Conca calls – consensual knowledge¹⁶⁸ and to promote long-term horizon thinking, the identification of mutual gains or even a growing cooperation routine, all of which are then expected to enhance peace and stability.

As the theoretical discussion has shown, the question – if the environment is politically neutral or apolitical – stands at the core of the environmental peacemaking debate. This thesis argues that environment by itself is a neutral ground, but it can and is repeatedly politicized, and used as an instrument of politics. It is the discursive politics of the environment rather than the objective physical state of the environment, that is decisive. As some cases from Kosovo show, environmental issues can be used both as instruments of conflict and as means for cooperation.

Central Asia holds an example for highly political environmental issues. In order to achieve cooperation, awareness has not to be raised to higher political level, but has to be lowered to almost a technical level. The world offers a range of different examples. Representing the opposite case, environmental concerns and natural resources are perceived as low politics in South Eastern Europe. The Balkan states treat the environment as low politics. This can be illustrated with Bosnia's highest natural asset, namely: water. The fact that water management shares a ministry with agriculture and forestry is symptomatic of this mindset (low politics). This might be unsafe for the environment in Bosnia, but is convenient if one wants to achieve environmental cooperation, or even environmental peacemaking, e.g. when technical cooperation evolves to political cooperation.

The Danube, the Drina and the Sava, all of which are rivers crossing or even demarcating borders of the Balkan countries are subject to regional environmental cooperation. Water often stands for the most contentious issue between states. The SEE countries pragmatically and practically faced the challenges of joint water management, with comprehensive regional water management agreements as a result.

Balkan

Five years after the Kosovo war and nine years after the Dayton Peace Agreement South Eastern Europe is still in the reconstruction process. Whole countries and their societies have to be rebuilt or built. Post-conflict situation often goes hand in hand with low peace quality, meaning in the case of the Balkans that the fresh peace is threatened by ethnic rivalries or simply state failure. Ethnic tensions could be a fierce barrier to environmental peacemaking as set out in the theory. On the other hand, the Balkan countries fulfil the practical condition of perceiving environment as low politics making cooperation attainable in the first place.

Despite this fragile peace, stability and peace are increasingly present in the Balkans. Some pessimists call it simply process of normalization and adaptation. Whether called peace or normalization process, it is likely that environmental cooperation – having crossed the borders early in the process – did contribute to it. But it is difficult to isolate the contribution of environmental cooperation, as complementary processes and interdependences grow on all levels. This research abandoned the idea that environmental cooperation could stand isolated itself without any impact on interstate relations or on the peace process, as environmental issues cut across subjects and levels. Environmental cooperation addresses multiple levels of governance, which ideally comprise the interstate level (bi- or multilateral), inter-bureaucratic level, sub-national referring to the regional and local level, the scientific and technical level, civil society and often also the private sector. Nevertheless or as a result, it is difficult to track the impact of environmental cooperation on the peace and stabilisation process.

REReP Findings

Some slightly more concrete steps towards peace can be identified as results of the REReP process. While building regional structures and mechanisms for environmental management, lines of communication between the countries of South Eastern Europe could be re-established and interstate dialogue as well as cross-border dialogue could be repaired. The institutionalized REReP Task Force meetings offer less a tool for peace-building but rather a platform for dialogue. The REReP and with it, regional environmental cooperation in general played its most important role in the beginning phase of the post-conflict situation. The environment is not part of Balkan ideologies and not politicized. Hence, it was an ideal political starting point for regional cooperation.

Even though interstate relations have improved greatly by far since the start of the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme, the environmental meetings still offers the unique opportunity for the Balkan states to gather without carrying heavy luggage of political contentious or economically sensitive issues. Independently of its environmental success and efficiency, REReP provides chances for dialogue and cooperation beyond environmental reconstruction. The terms “offers a platform” and “provides the chance” indicate that political will is an essential ingredient for any progress in interstate relations and cooperation. The fact that environment is perceived as low politics allowed starting the REReP process as a trust-building exercise. Now the challenge is to lift environmental matters to a higher political level to spur efforts in the Balkan countries.¹⁶⁹

Inner-state Conflicts – Extending the theory

Environmental peacemaking defined by Conca and Dabelko, primarily concerns environmental cooperation between States. Applying the same approach to the inside of the state, where borders are defined by religion and ethnic background, might ask for considerable adjustment of the theory. I deliberately extended the environmental peacemaking approaches to encompass conflicts within states, by understanding *transboundary* as well as *cross-border* as the crossing of national and ethnical lines. The social boundary between Bosnia’s Moslems and Croats seems far deeper entrenched than the physical border between Bosnia and Croatia. Therefore more attention was paid to the former in the case study of the Neretva River. The cross-national-border aspect was only marginally examined while the ethnic tensions within Bosnia and Herzegovina became the focus of this study having posed the greatest challenge for the project.

Yet, the same assumptions and propositions can be applied to either kind of borders. The environment has the same attributes as on the interstate level: it itself is impartial and neutral and can present common grounds regardless of ethnic or religious background. Environmental cooperation should help

overcome war legacies and mistrust and promote confidence-building and peace through the same mechanisms on state as on the regional or domestic level.

Neretva

The environment in Neretva River Delta provided common grounds and shared goals for different groups independent of national or ethnic backgrounds. Despite major hurdles in the beginning of the project a dialogue could be initiated between Croatians and Bosnians, or more importantly between Croats (Croatians from Bosnia) and Bosniaks (Moslems from Bosnia). Though the Neretva Delta project succeeded in bringing together the different ethnic groups, the success is limited by the scope of the project. We cannot speak of truly regional peace and understanding if it is limited to a group of environmentalists extending each other their hands – once again. The positive impacts could well extend to the whole Delta but already stops at the city of Mostar, home to the Bosnian project office. Leaving the Delta and taking a look at the divided city of Mostar and at the country as a whole, any such efforts to promote peace and reconciliation seem insignificant and almost trivial.

Bosnia specifics

The conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina are complex and the scars run deep. Mostar, the multiethnic city of Yugoslavian times, was the scene of a terrible war, in which neighbours, friends and brothers shot at each other. Now, the city is divided along ethnic lines. It will take a generation or two, one might say. But hopes projected on the coming generations are destroyed, when it becomes clear that children are raised separately according to their background in Catholic, Orthodox or Moslem schools often run by extreme religious leaders.

The sensitive post-conflict situation and the depressing state of the economy continuously call for international presence. Indeed a large variety of international organisations are present in Bosnia and Herzegovina; their initiatives often require the participation of all three ethnic groups. These reconciliation efforts paradoxically emphasize their ethnic backgrounds which are to overcome. “The ethnic separation is reproduced by Western reconciliation terror”.¹⁷⁰ Reconciliation cannot come from outside or from the environment. Yet again, environmental cooperation offers a platform for dialogue and an opportunity to bring together at least a handful of environmental conscious people from all three ethnic groups (without stressing the different ethnic backgrounds). Not the environment, but “jobs and justice” could possibly move the split country towards reconciliation and sustainable peace.¹⁷¹

The post-war and transition situation seems far too complex to be solved by such a simple tool as transboundary environmental cooperation.

The question if environmental cooperation can bridge boundaries between states and people cannot be answered with a straight yes or no. The importance of the environment as a peace-building instrument lies primarily in the initial phase of the peace process right after the wars. As a non politicized topic, environment is an adequate tool for bringing the Balkan states and their people together and for building trust among them. Both the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme (REReP) and the Neretva Delta project present a platform for communication and cooperation; the former mainly on an interstate level and the latter on a local level. It was the environment that first brought back together the Balkan states after the war. Today, cooperative behaviour seems to have become a habit among the states. The fact, that environment is perceived as low politics accelerated this process. Despite the

success in promoting dialogue and cooperation, the environmental efforts often seem minimal and environmental awareness is still low. In order to dedicate more resources for environmental protection and management, environmental matters have to be moved to a level of high politics. The REReP still represents the regional environmental forum and remains the political backbone for environmental activities. However, it has relativised itself with regards to the reconstruction process of the Balkans. In line with Conca's reasoning, environment at the level of low politics does not have a greater impact on the peace and stabilisation process nor any visible cooperative spill-offs to other issue areas. Environmental protection and management does not reach far enough to achieve long-lasting peace between the people beyond the mere intergovernmental cooperation. Environmental cooperation can therefore not be an instrument of peace for the Balkans; it is perceived as low politics on the state level and as environmental awareness is too low to achieve a peace-building dynamic on the local level. Nevertheless, environmental cooperation does present a tool for trust building and offers a platform for dialogue among the countries of the Western Balkan. In sum, on the way to reconciliation and high quality peace, the environment is only one tool among many. Environmental cooperation is a platform for dialogue, but far from an instrument for peace. In general, environmental cooperation should be an integral part of any peace and development strategy. Most environmental problems are transboundary by nature and force countries to adapt a regional cooperative approach. The necessity of environmental cooperation coupled with a good will for peaceful relations can help the countries to put aside historical memories and recent war legacies.

Furthermore, it is anticipated that the cooperation in environmental protection and the joint management of natural resources will induce a healthier and safer environment, which in turn will then contribute to stability in the Balkans in the long term. Wangari Maathai would probably agree with that view stressing that only a secured living environment can ensure peace. Environmental cooperation is therefore one of the stones needed to build a bridge over national and ethnic borders.



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Appendix I



Figure 1: South Eastern Europe

Source: World Bank

Appendix II

Figure 2:
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Source: CIA



Figure 3: The Neretva Delta

Source: REC

