

A Comparative Study of Environmental, Social and Economic Cross-Border Cooperation in Post-Conflict Environments: The Israel-Jordan Border

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Abstract : Cross-border cooperation has long been hailed as a means for stabilizing and normalizing relations between former enemies. Cooperation in problem-solving and realizing of local interests in post-conflict environments can indeed serve as a basis for developing dialogue and meaningful relations between neighbors across borders. Hence the potential for formerly sealed borders to serve as a basis for generating local and national perceptions of interdependence and as a buffer against the resume of conflict. Central questions which arise for policy-makers and third parties are how to facilitate cross-border cooperation and which areas of cooperation best serve to normalize post-conflict border regions. The Israel-Jordan border functions as a post-conflict border, in that it is a peaceful border since the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty yet cross-border relations are defined but the highly securitized nature of the border region and the ongoing Arab-Israel regional conflict. This case study is based on long term qualitative research carried out in the border regions of both Israel and Jordan, which mapped and analyzed cross-border in a wide range of activities - social interactions sponsored by peace-facilitating NGOs, government sponsored agricultural cooperation, municipal initiated emergency planning in cross-border continuous urban settings, private cross-border business ventures and various environmental cooperative initiatives. These cooperative initiatives are evaluated through multiple interviews carried out with initiators and partners in cross-border cooperation as well as analysis of documentation, funding and media. These cooperative interactions are compared based on levels of cross-border local and official awareness and involvement as well as sustainability over time. This research identifies environmental cooperation as the most sustainable area of cross- border cooperation and as most conducive to generating perceptions of regional interdependence. This is a variation to the 'New Middle East' vision of business-based cooperation leading to conflict amelioration and regional stability. Environmental cooperation serving the public good rather than personal profit enjoys social legitimization even in the face of widespread anti-normalization sentiments common in the post-conflict environment. This insight is examined in light of philosophical and social aspects of the natural environment and its social perceptions. This research has theoretical implications for better understanding dynamics of cooperation and conflict, as well as practical ramifications for practitioners in border region policy and management.

Keywords : borders, cooperation, post-conflict, security

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