

Border Zones and Perceptions of Environmental Issues and Environmental Futures in Israel

Tally Katz-Gerro

Description of Subject and Goals

The objective of this research is to elucidate perceptions of Israelis in different social locations with regard to the effects of border zones between Israel and Palestine on a variety of environmental issues in the context of possible future peace scenarios.

This research will explore public environmental perceptions on different issues pertaining to present and future borders between Israel and Palestine with three emphases:

1. The environmental problems people perceive and the possibilities for the future.
2. The contours of a structured understanding of the environment that is influenced by social location in terms of religiosity, political inclination, and place attachment.
3. The way individuals plan to act that is relevant to a redefinition of the environment and how it is experienced in possible future scenarios.

Between Israel and Palestine lie environmental and ecological resources which are cut across by political boundaries. Borders impact social and natural systems and the interactions between them. Therefore, my research objective is to understand how Israelis, on the national and sub-national levels perceive environmental concerns vis-à-vis border zones, what agency they perceive themselves to possess, and how certain perceptions of the environment lead to action. The emphasis here is on perception as the perspective of individuals who live in and experience their environments.

Research Hypotheses and Definitions of Variables

The proposed research aims at studying perceptions to plausible border scenarios for Israel and Palestine that consider a range of social and environmental variables in order to project the aggregate impacts of plausible scenarios on the local and regional environment and the communities involved.

I hypothesize that environmental perceptions will be shaped by individuals' social location both in terms of their physical proximity to border zones and in terms of their location within the social system. This draws on the assumption that environmental perceptions, like other interpretations of situations, are a step in the formulation of intentional behavior.

The main independent variables are proximity to border zones and social location. Proximity to border zones is operationalized as place of residence. Social location will focus on three aspects: religiosity (secular, traditional, religious, orthodox, ultra orthodox), political inclination (indicated by political party identification), and place attachment (strength of emotional attachment to one's place of residence). In addition, the models will include various control variables such as age, education, gender, ethnicity, and religion.

The dependent variables, environmental perceptions, will refer to a range of issues based on research that identified several environmental threats in the context of border zones: increasing human population pressure on natural systems from high population growth and the long-lasting refugee crisis; rapid growth of Israeli settlements and supporting roads in areas where land is scarce; restrictions on communications, movement and access, limiting implementation of environmental management measures; construction of separation fence that cuts natural ecological corridors and has repercussions for wildlife movement; and threats from solid waste and wastewater pollution.

In sum, the research will address the following broad research questions:

1. What is the social location (e.g., religiosity, political inclination, place attachment) of different groups holding different environmental perceptions?
2. What are the implications of perceptions for taking action?
3. Is there a conflict between different perceptions about the same environment?
4. What are the implications for success or failure of future geopolitical scenarios?

Methodology

Instrument

Work will commence by establishing a systematic review of border typology that will include plausible future scenarios that consider social and environmental factors. Questions regarding border types and environmental scenarios will be incorporated within a survey questionnaire administered to a representative sample of Israeli population. Existing survey questionnaire instruments will be merged to gain an understanding of how different Israeli publics relate to and think about their physical environment.

Questions will cover a range of environmental issues: water quality and scarcity, types of environmental contamination, rapid urbanization, threats to wildlife, public health issues, air quality, noise level, dirt and garbage, congestion, sewage, habitat loss and fragmentation, challenges presented by the construction of impermeable barriers including new highways and the “separation fence,” sustainability, protection of nature, conservation of resources, pollution control, and impacts of environmentally friendly initiatives.

Additional research questions will relate to the following issues:

1. How do individuals understand environmental change, how it happens, and what its reasons are?
2. In which social political contexts are environmental issues anchored?
3. Environmental awareness: how are people becoming aware of environmental issues and problems, what is the level of knowledge?
4. What are the attitudes regarding responsibility of different agents (government, society, corporations, NGOs, individuals, municipalities)?
5. How do individuals construct their identity using the place where they live; how does the environment affect their way of life? What is the history of the place?
6. What role does the environment play in the Arab Israeli conflict?

Sample

A representative random stratified sample of Israeli population will be drawn to include around 800 respondents. Certain groups in the population will be over represented in the sample to allow comparison of specific communities according to their proximity to future borders. The over represented groups will be determined following the initial stage of research where border zones will be reviewed.