On the role of local government in promoting peace and political-environmental sustainability

Kim Noach[1*]

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The paper discusses the rising power of local government and its ability to independently create and/or advance foreign relations in order to promote peace and good neighbourly relations. One of the prominent areas in which local government engages and cooperates with others today is the environmental and climate field, notably in light of the foot-dragging of nation-states around these issues. Given this reality, the paper examines whether relationships and cooperation on the environment might be built between local authorities when their respective nation-states maintain no relations or only cold ones, or are in ongoing conflict. The paper analyses three theoretical axes: 1) the rising political power of local authorities vis-à-vis their nation-states, and as significant actors in global diplomacy; 2) growing local involvement with environmental problems; and 3) the promotion of environmental peacebuilding. The paper analyses the feasibility of joining these axes, and gives relevant examples, focussing on the Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian space. The main argument arising from the analysis is that local government has the tools and the effective opportunity to advance environmental cooperation as a stimulus to making peace; and further, that processes of this sort are particularly important when there is no political horizon. While Israel and its region are indeed the focus of this paper's examination of local government and its potential for building relationships, the general insights derived are applicable to other regions of conflict.

A. Introduction

On February 8, 2023 Ada Colau, until recently mayor of Barcelona,[2] announced the suspension of ties between Barcelona and Israeli institutions, foremost among them the city of Tel Aviv-Yafo, with whom a twinning agreement had been signed along with Gaza, in 1998.[3] In a letter sent to prime

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[*] *Kim Noach is a PhD student in the Department of Politics and Government at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. She researches the growing political power of the city in the global arena, and its impact on the city's relationship with the nation-state, particularly in advancing environmental and climate issues.*

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[2] Ada Colau was mayor of Barcelona from May 2015 until 2023.
[3] Ada Colau (2023, February 8), *A petición de más de 100 entidades y miles de vecinos y vecinas de* Barcelona [Facebook Post], Facebook, Accessed February 20, 2023,

minister Netanyahu, she explained that this was a response to the progressive deterioration of the human rights of Palestinians, and the failure of the State of Israel to observe UN resolutions. Spain, for its part, censured Barcelona's action and warned that nothing good would come of it.[4] Moreover, responding to the suspension of ties with Tel Aviv, Madrid's mayor, José Luis Martinez-Almeida, declared his wish to forge a twinning agreement with Tel Aviv.[5] Leaving aside any discussion of the rightness or wrongness of this step, we can be grateful to have been witness to the fascinating phenomenon of cities challenging their nation-states and adopting foreign policies driven by their outlooks and furthering their interests in the global sphere, independently of their national governments.

With that reality in mind, this paper discusses the rising political power of local governments and their ability to independently create and/or advance diplomatic relationships.[6] One of the primary areas around which cities connect and cooperate today, whether bilaterally or multilaterally, is that of the environment and climate action, which cities pursue particularly keenly, especially by comparison with the foot-dragging of national governments around these issues.[7] One may speculate in this connection whether one can forge environmental relationships and cooperation at the local level, both when at state level there is no relationship between the governments, and when ties are cold. This paper's central claim is that it is possible and even desirable for local authorities to advance environmental cooperation as a stimulus to strengthening regional (international) relationships. At this point it is important to emphasize that the paper doesn't argue that local government should replace government at national level in strengthening or creating diplomatic relations from nothing. The political power of local government is indeed growing, as we shall see in what follows, and this is for the good; but it is still limited because ultimately legitimate authority to carry out policies related to security, legislation, economy and more rests with the nation-state, and importantly so, for the sake of orderly governance. We need to be able to distinguish between situations where we "see like a city" and ones where we "see like a state."[8] Still, the paper proposes to broaden our political imagination and think how, in a conflictual and divided reality, local government be an important augmentary player which can help pave the way to action at the national level as well.

In support of my claim, I will pursue the analysis along three theoretical axes: (1) the emerging political and diplomatic powers of local authorities; (2) the growing local engagement with environmental issues; and (3) environmental peacebuilding. The paper will then examine the

https://www.facebook.com/ada.colau/posts/pfbid02tmcippqmR9d62CWXbBGD9bfoRBumHCR9EhCUDbmie7yGu2upvJzbEcknqGX2BQtkl.

[4] AFP and TOI staff, "Spanish FM Swipes at Barcelona for Cutting Ties With Israel," *The Times of Israel*, 2023.

[5] José Luis Martínez-Almeida [@AlmeidaPP_], (2023, February 9), *Frente al sectarismo, la apuesta por la democracia y la libertad de Madrid. Será un honor hermanarnos con Tel-Aviv* [Twitter Post], Twitter, Accessed February 20, 2023, https://twitter.com/AlmeidaPP_/status/1623653557185441796.

[6] Urban diplomacy is in recent years becoming a particularly researched phenomenon and a common term in the literature. See e.g., Raffaele Marchetti, *City Diplomacy: From City-States to Global Cities*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021.

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Michael Bloomberg, ex-mayor of New York, famously said: "While nations talk, but too often drag their heels—cities act." Michael R. Bloomberg, Speech at the Economic Cooperation and Development Conference, Organized by the C40 Cities Climate Leadership, March 2012, Accessed July 3, 2022, https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/087-12/mayor-bloomberg-launches-new-c40-global-networks-support-sustainable-policy-generate. See further a short article by Italian scholar Michele Acuto, who points out that the highest percentage of urban networks in the global domain (29% in 2016) is concerned with environmental and climate issues: Michele Acuto, "Give Cities a Seat at the Top Table," *Nature* 537 (7622), 2016: 611–13, https://doi.org/10.1038/537611a

[8] Nir Barak and Avner de Shalit, "Urbanizing Political Concepts for Analyzing Politics in the City," in *Research Handbook on International Law and Cities*, 2020.

feasibility of connecting the axes, and to this end I will give examples of environmental cooperation at the local level, mainly from past experience of local government in Israel with its neighbours. A discussion underlining the importance of, and opportunities available to, local authorities in Israel in pursuing regional cooperation around climate and environmental challenges will conclude the paper.

B. Theoretical basis: cities, the environment and environmental peacebuilding

The aim then is to examine the feasibility of local government for advancing environmental cooperation in a way that would also strengthen relations with neighbouring cities beyond the borders of the nation-state. This requires positing a theoretical framework relating to the growing power of local government, the centrality of the environment and climate to its functioning, and the place of the environmental issue in promoting peace and beneficial relationships.

First axis: The rise of cities as a national and global political force

In recent decades we have witnessed a resurgence of the political power of cities.[9] This power is in evidence nationally and, in matters of foreign policy and diplomacy, globally:

The rise in the political agency of local government in the national arena: Looking first at the national arena, we see the emerging political agency of the city in demonstrations of aspirations to greater urban autonomy from central government. Cities' closer ties to their inhabitants means that they are better placed to understand their needs and act accordingly. Such actions sometimes turn out not to be in harmony with the policy of central government, relating to, for example, laws on Shabbat trading, which in Israel vary from city to city.[10] This lack of fit between local and central government policy is a source of tensions, seen, for example, in the opposition of the head of local authorities in Israel to the agreement reached by the coalition transferring authority for education to the head of the Noam political party, Avi Maoz, in a way likely to amount to a head-on collision with the liberal values the local authorities, responsible to their inhabitants, seek to develop.[11] Even before the current political crisis, during COVID-19, and in light of the instability of central government, Israeli cities have been independently advancing innovative policies, sometimes involving an open challenge to the state's authority.[12] In various situations throughout the world, one can see that municipalities working autonomously have succeeded in influencing central government and even to set a benchmark with their policy-making.[13] So, for example, awareness of

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[9] This is a restoration of political power which obtained throughout much of history until the 18th century. Cities were thought of as centres of government and related to one another by means of economic and security treaties. But cities began to lose their centrality after the American and French Revolutions which speeded up the realisation of the idea of the modern state, and after the springtime of nations in the 19th century, which pushed states to the front of stage and put them in charge of security, economy and diplomacy. For more on this, see Rainer Bauböck, "Cities vs States: Should Urban Citizenship be Emancipated from Nationality?" In Bauböck, Rainer and Liav Orgad (eds.) *Cities vs States: Should Urban Citizenship be Emancipated from Nationality*. EUI RSCAS, Global Governance Programme-386, [Global Citizenship], GLOBALCIT, [Global Citizenship Governance] 2020. pp. 1-6.

[10] "Shabbat Trading 2021," *Urban Freedom Index*.

[11] Inbar Iwizer, "Heads of Likud Authorities Against Transfer of Authorities to Maoz, *N12*, November 4, 2022.

[12] Itai Beeri, Nufar Avni, Daniel Zaychik, Yonat Rein Sapir and Alex Altshuler, "Local Authorities in Israel Dealing with the Ongoing Corona Crisis," National Knowledge and Research Center for Emergency [in Hebrew]; Nir Barak and Nir Mualam, "Urban Autonomy: Changes in the Relationship Between City and State in Israel," *Regulation Studies* 7 [in Hebrew], 2023: 25-84.

same-sex marriage in the US, initially a local initiative of San Francisco municipality in 2004, caught on in other cities in the US, until a decade later, in 2015, the Supreme Court validated same-sex marriage in all fifty states. There are those who argue that this proves that local authorities are sometimes better able than central government to solve complex moral problems.[14]

The degree of municipal autonomy naturally depends on how centralized national government is, as well as on the strength of resources available to local government to oppose centralized power. Israel, thought of as a highly centralized state with weak local government,[15] allows less leeway to local government autonomy than, for example, the US, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden and other OECD countries.[16] Local governments in Israel which nevertheless succeed in demonstrating a degree of autonomy, like the cities of the Forum 15,[17] have managed to do so thanks to their considerable economic power. For there is certainly a positive correlation between the economic power of local government and its ability to successfully pursue its interests at the national level.[18] Local governments whose economic situation allows them a high degree of agency are generally leading great cities, called by scholar Saskia Sassen at the beginning of the 1990s "global cities", a concept she began identifying in the 1980s, as certain cities in the world such as New York, London and Tokyo became foci of the global economy in a way which allowed them to become international political actors independently of their countries.[19] In this context one can point out that according to most indices for global cities, only Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem within Israel qualify, with Tel Aviv ranking relatively high, while Haifa and Jerusalem only just meet the requirements.[20] But one should emphasize that in recent years middling-size and smaller cities have also shown growing political involvement.[21] Additionally, it seems that the more that major cities grow in size and economic importance and become more global, the more their desire for political influence drives them both to develop various forms of diplomatic action and foreign relations;[22] and this leads us to the second part of the discussion of this axis - the increasing power of local government in foreign affairs and diplomacy.

The rise in the political agency of local government in the global arena emerges particularly when local governments from different countries connect independently with one another around

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[13] Nir Barak and Nir Mualam, "How Do Cities Foster Autonomous Planning Practices despite Top-down Control?," *Cities* 123, April 2022: 103576, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103576.

[14] Richard C. Schragger, "Cities as Constitutional Actors: The Case of Same-Sex Marriage Democracy in Action: The Law & Politics of Local Governance," *Journal of Law & Politics*, 21, 2005: 147–186.

[15] Ariel Finklestein, "Local Government in Israel: General Background, Main Problems and Challenges," Center for Governence and the Economy, Israel Democracy Institute, 2020: 23-29 [in Hebrew]; Itai Beeri, "Lack of Reform in Israeli Local Government and Its Impact on Modern Developments in Public Management," *Public Management Review* 23 (10), 2021: 1423–35.

[16] Allain-Dupré, D., "Assigning Responsibilities across Levels of Government: Trends, Challenges and Guidelines for Policy-Makers," https://doi.org/10.1787/f0944eae-en; OECD, Subnational Governments in the OECD: Key Data (brochure and database), OECD, Paris, 2018.

[17] A forum of independent cities that don't receive grants from the government, today numbering 17 cities: Tel Aviv, Haifa, Ramat Gan, Givatayim, Petah Tikvah, Rishon Lezion, Raanana, Netanya, Rehovot, Kfar Saba, Holon, Herzliya, Ramat Hasharon, Ashdod, Beersheva, Ashkelon and Hadera.

[18] Alongside economic power, other factors have an influence on the leverage of local over central government, such as symbolic capital (Jerusalem, for example), geographical strategic location and even voting patterns.

[19] Saskia Sassen, The *Global City: New York, London*, Tokyo (2nd ed.). Princeton University Press, 2001.

[20] Globalization and World Cities Research Network (GaWC), Loughborough University, 2020, https://www.lboro.ac.uk/microsites/geography/gawc/world2020t.html.

[21] Barak and Mualam, "How Do Cities Foster Autonomous Planning Practices".

[22] Simon Curtis and Michele Acuto, "The Foreign Policy of Cities," *The RUSI Journal* 163 (6), 2018: 8–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2018.1562014.

the challenges of the moment, learning from one another ways of working to effectively advance policies relating to issues that national governments have failed to manage. This agency also comes to light when local government forms partnerships with global business concerns or charitable agencies abroad with the aim of furthering political programmes of one sort or another. One way or another, it transpires that the nation-state isn't the only actor on the diplomatic stage, since local government aspires to represent itself and its interests in relation to its equivalents in other countries, and in relation to other important global actors.[23] Researchers point out how one can no longer separate global challenges from a concern with local issues, meaning that cities and local authorities need commensurately greater political jurisdiction in meeting them.[24] Here too, it is clear that local governments' closeness to their inhabitants and their greater influence on everyday life allows them to work more effectively, and, some would say, more democratically and transparently.[25] The political philosopher Benjamin Barber goes out on a limb in arguing that because of this, cities and not states need to rule the world. This is, however, considered to be a very radical claim which many scholars reject.[26] In any case, it is evident that in recent decades local governments have attained new significance as they take on new roles in the global order, seen today as bearers of rights, responsibilities and authority internationally, with the capacity to enforce standards and create norms through their belonging to global networks.[27]

While cities were making twinning arrangements as early as the 1950s, scholars relate to these arrangements as just the first generation of urban diplomacy in which links didn't go beyond cultural and symbolic gestures. But from around the 1990s and subsequently the second generation of urban diplomacy got under way; city networks crossed boundaries in pursuit of more practical and political goals.[28] A prominent and leading example of this, one of the first to be established, is the UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments), an umbrella organization for cities and local authorities. Its brief is to represent and defend local interests in the global domain. Urban networks tackle global problems such as the environment, poverty, energy, peace, gender, health and more, and today there are more than 200 such networks.[29] The networks enable information to be shared and joint learning; they make it possible to encourage and advance practical action in fields where the nation-state's response has been insufficient. They are thus regarded in the global arena, by organizations such as the UN, as agents of global projects and normative entrepreneurs who share the same "global thinking."[30] The environment and the climate

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[23] J. Melissen and R. Van der Pluijm, "City Diplomacy: The Expanding Role of Cities in International Politics," The Hague: Cligendael – The Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2007.

[24] Kirstin Ljungkvist, "The Global City: From Strategic Site to Global Actor", in Simon Curtis (ed.), *The Power of Cities in International Relations*. New York: Routledge, 2014: 32-56.

[25] David J. Gordon and Kristin Ljungkvist, "Theorizing the Globally Engaged City in World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations* 28 (1), 2022: 58–82, https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661211064449. In this context it's important to emphasize that alongside the potential for cities to become more democratic, scholars also point to how cities are undemocratic and can become even more so. See e.g., Mark Purcell, "Urban Democracy and the Local Trap," Urban Studies 43 (11), 2006: 1921–41.

[26] Benjamin R. Barber, *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities,* Yale University Press, 2013; Robert A. Beauregard, Cities in the Urban Age: A Dissent, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

[27] Yishai Blank, "Localism in the New Global Legal Order," *Harvard International Law Journal* 47:(1), 2006: 263-281.

[28] Anna Kosovac, Kris Hartley, Michele Acuto, and Darcy Gunning, "City Leaders Go Abroad: A Survey of City Diplomacy in 47 Cities," *Urban Policy and Research* 39 (2), 2021: 127–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/08111146.2021.1886071.

[29] Acuto, "Give Cities a Seat at the Top Table," *Nature* 537 (7622), 2016: 611–13, https://doi.org/10.1038/537611a.

[30] Noah J. Toly, "Transnational Municipal Networks in Climate Politics: From Global Governance to Global Politics," *Globalizations* 5(3), 2008: 341-356; Sofie Bouteligier, "A Networked Urban World: Empowering Cities to Tackle Environmental Challenges," in Curtis Simon (ed) *The Power of Cities in International Relations*. Routledge, New York, 2014: 57–68; Kirstin Ljungkvist, "The Global City: From Strategic Site to Global Actor," In Simon Curtis (ed.), *The Power of Cities in International Relations*. New York: Routledge, 2014: 32-56.

emergency, which I will consider below, are seen as the area that the urban networks have done most to address, and there is a growing awareness internationally that cities have a key role in relation to these issues.

Second axis: the growing involvement of cities in the environmental and climate crisis

Although cities have for many years been seen as responsible for causing the environmental and climate crisis, in the last three decades the understanding has taken root that they can be part of

correcting the injustices. In everything to do with environmental governance and climate action, local authorities are today defined as central actors by the global arena.[31] It was the Bruntland Report,[32] put out by the UN in 1987, that recognized cities as a key locus of sustainable development. One whole chapter of the report was devoted exclusively to cities and proposed that if local authorities were to become agents of sustainable development, their political, institutional and financial power would need to be enhanced.[33] The report prepared the ground for Agenda 21,[34] which was presented at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and called for – among other things – local authorities to take an active part and design a programme for local sustainable development (Local Agenda 21), based on dialogue between local authorities and their citizens and activists in the field. Behind this call was the sense that local government, as the level of governance closest to the people of a place, was the most essential in educating and enlisting the public if advancing sustainable development.[35]

During the 1990s and on, it became increasingly understood among local authorities that nation-states were not managing to give proper attention to environmental and climate challenges, and this was accompanied by a growing awareness that nation-states no longer have the monopoly on policy-making.[36] In addition, during the first decade of the 2000s the UN-Habitat organization declared that for the first time a majority of the world's population were living in urban areas,[37] and that the future of the human species was bound up with cities. This reality only strengthens recognition of the commitment cities and local authorities have to better planning and governance.[38] Cities are seen as the most densely populated spaces and therefore in environmental and climate contexts as needing to formulate plans for resilience to ensure their residents' safety. Because cities throughout the world face similar challenges, they have begun to

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[31] Bouteligier, "A Networked Urban World: Empowering Cities to Tackle Environmental Challenges," 2014; Harriet Bulkeley, "Climate Changed Urban Futures: Environmental Politics in the Anthropocene City," *Environmental Politics* 30 (1–2), 2021: 266–84; Nir Barak, "Civic Ecologism: Environmental Politics in Cities," *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 23 (1), 2020: 53–69; Benjamin R. Barber, *Cool Cities: Urban Sovereignty and the Fix for Global Warming,* Yale University Press, 2017.

[32] The Bruntland Report, in the name of the ex-prime minister of Norway, also called (Our Common Future), is the continuation of the Stockholm Committee (1972), bringing environmental problems into the field of formal political development.

[33] World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987: chapter 9.

[34] Agenda 21 is a UN action plan for sustainable development.

[35] Agenda 21, Programme of Action for Sustainable Development, Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Statement of Forest Principles: the final text of agreements negotiated by Governments at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/170126?ln=en (chapter 28).

[36] Harriet Bulkeley, Anna Davies, Bob Evans, David Gibbs, Kristine Kern, and Kate Theobald, "Environmental Governance and Transnational Municipal Networks in Europe," Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning 5 (3), 2003: 235–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908032000154179.

[37] The United Nations Human Settlements Program.

[38] Ljungkvist, "The Global City: From Strategic Site to Global Actor," 2014.

come together in urban networks transcending national boundaries to address environmental and climate problems, such as, for example, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (originally the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives), C40, 100 Resilient Cities and Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy.[39] These networks, as I mentioned, allow local authorities to cooperate at a global level, for the most part with greater flexibility than similar efforts made by national governments.[40]

The effectiveness, ability to cooperate and autonomy of urban networks vis-à-vis nation-states is continually growing, and in recent years they have taken centre stage in addressing environmental and climate issues. In Israel, for example, Jerusalem joined ICLEI and Tel Aviv joined C40, networks including regional neighbours such as Amman, Dubai and Jeddah. These networks enable peer learning and are a source of information for member cities. Furthermore, in exchange for membership in prestigious networks, members commit to a timetable for various projects, as was the case, for example, with C40's cities' climate action plan. This required its members to formulate plans to deal with the climate crisis (and supported them in this) within the frame of Deadline 2020, announced by the network after the Paris Summit of 2016.[41] The fact that in 2020 Tel Aviv kept to its goal set by the cities climate action plan allowed it to help other Israeli cities, outside the global network, to formulate their own climate action plans independently and using knowledge it had accumulated.

Third axis: developing environmental peacebuilding

Alongside the tendency to open the conversation on the environment in the global arena to local authorities during the 1990s, we see another tendency, somewhat at odds with the first, of "securitization" of environmental discourse. In order to refashion the matter into something of national importance, it was given a security inflexion with emphasis being put on security agencies and the conflicts liable to erupt around resources in climate crises.[42] This strategy helped get the subject to the centre of public discourse, and the conversation about the security implications of environmental crises bore fruit in the latter part of the 1990s.[43] Nevertheless, scholars soon also began to examine the opportunities in environmental hazards, and the discourse on security was changed at the beginning of the 2000s to one about peace.
Researchers aimed to challenge the fundamental notion of environmental insecurity by reversing its perspective. Instead of exploring whether environmental degradation might incite violence among groups, their focus shifted to investigating the potential of environmental collaboration as a catalyst for innovative peacebuilding approaches.[44] In this way, the development of environmental peacebuilding was presented as thinking outside the box. Environmental peacebuilding could be a

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[39] ICLEI: https://www.iclei.org/; C40: https://www.c40.org/cities; 100 Resilient Cities: https://resilientcitiesnetwork.org/; Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy: https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/.

[40] Bouteligier, "A Networked Urban World: Empowering Cities to Tackle Environmental Challenges," 2014; Bulkeley et. al., "Environmental Governance and Transnational Municipal Networks in Europe," 2003.

[41] C40knowledgehub, The C40 Guide to Climate Action Planning, https://resourcecentre.c40.org/resources/deadline-2020#:~:text=Deadline%202020%20identifies%20C40%20cities,tCO2e%20per%20capita%20by%202030

[42] The two tendencies are in tension because the securitization of the discourse turns environmental problems from being "low" to "high" politics, and in practice leads to nation states taking control of environmental discourse in a way that excludes local authorities. For more on this, see Michele Acuto, *Global Cities, Governance, and Diplomacy: The Urban Link*, Routledge: Abingdon, 2013, 28.

[43] See for example publications of the 1990s by Thomas Homer-Dixon, Wenche Iren Hauge, Tanja Ellingsen and Geoffrey D. Dabelko.

[44] Ken Conca, "The Case for Environmental Peacemaking," in Ken Conca and Geoffry D. Danelko (eds.), Environmental Peacemaking, Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002.

useful tool for making peace in tense regions, where efforts to forge links around this issue would resonate more widely, touching also the political, social and economic roots of insecurity, beyond the purely ecological malaise.[45]

Environmental peacebuilding, in the nature of the thing, is generally conducted as "close cooperation" at the regional level, between entities sharing common geographical boundaries and mutual ecological dependence. In our region, for example, there is the EcoPeace Middle East organization, which came into being at the beginning of the 1990s and built environmental cooperation between Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority.[46] But consonant with the abovementioned view of environmental peacebuilding as a potential tool for conflict resolution beyond the ecological, and in light of growing worldwide awareness of the ramifications of the climate crisis, a discourse has recently developed in our region about the possible uses of environmental cooperation to deepen diplomatic links even when this means a more "distant cooperation." So, for example, we are witness to a growing discourse from both formal and informal actors encouraging environmental cooperation between Israel, the Gulf States, and Morocco as a further means to deepen and/or establish diplomatic relations between these countries.[47]

Scholars of environmental peacebuilding argue that the field has changed and developed significantly in the last two decades. The first studies on the subject from the early 2000s tend to be viewed as a first wave of research on environmental peacebuilding, mostly concerned with the feasibility of environmental cooperation between nation-states. A second wave of environmental peacebuilding, they suggest, began to come together in 2009 in response to the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission in 2005, as well as to growing engagement by other UN bodies with the meaningful role the environment can play in making links in conflict situations. This wave was focused on the role of sub-state actors in contexts of conflict within countries and civil wars.[48] In recent years we are witnessing the formation of a third wave of research, characterized by, among other things, attention given to "bottom up" environmental peacebuilding approaches. That's to say while earlier waves related to the part played by the state and by the international community in encouraging environmental cooperation, the scholarly conversation today looks at the place of local communities in forging it. This is a conversation in large measure based on the arguments of Elinor Ostrom about local communities' ability to jointly manage shared resources (CPRs, or common pool resources).[49] Ostrom shows in her research that communities' autonomy

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[45] Ibid.

[46] For the site of the organization: https://ecopeaceme.org/he/home-he/

[47] An example of formal discourse on the subject is the work of the President's Climate Forum which came together about a year ago, one of whose clusters is concerned with delineating joint work on the environment with neighbouring and more distant states in the Middle East. The climate envoy in the foreign ministry, Mr Gideon Behar, writes frequently about this, see e.g.: Gideon Behar, Dov Heinin and Victor Weiss (eds.), *Environment, Climate and National Security: Israel's New Front* [in Hebrew], Institute for National Security Studies, 2021: 67-77. Similarly in the IDF, attention is given to these subjects, in the departments of strategy and planning. Examples of informal discourse can be found in the publications of academics and various research institutes: see, e.g. Dan Rabinowitz, The Power of Deserts: Climate Change, the Middle East, and the Promise of a Post-Oil Era, Stanford University Press, 2020; Kim Noach and Yoel Guzansky, "The Saudi Drive to Lead the Green Revolution in the Middle East," *INSS Insight* 1486, 2022; Moshe Terdiman, Ofir Winter et al, "From Tel Aviv to Sharm el-Sheikh: Obstacles and Keys to Environmental Peacebuilding between Israel and Egypt," *Strategic Assessment* 25 (3), 2022.

[48] Tobias Ide, Carl Bruch, Alexander Carius, Ken Conca, Geoffrey D Dabelko, Richard Matthew and Erika Weinthal,

"The Past and Future(s) of Environmental Peacebuilding," *International Affairs*, 97(1), 2021: 1–16,

https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa177.

in managing their natural resources in most cases turns out to be beneficial and sustainable. According to her, when people work at community level in mutual reliance, they tend to communicate well and cooperate in a way that leads to better outcomes.[50] This is a very interesting change, which can perhaps pave the way for new players.

C. Joining the axes: global and regional examples

The third wave of research of environmental peacebuilding focuses on the role of local communities in establishing environmental cooperation. This is the entry point for the discussion on the place of local authorities in such action, particularly given the growing autonomy of cities in political and diplomatic matters, and in light of the fact that many cities increasingly take on responsibility for environmental and climate action.

Before we discuss the feasibility of bringing the three axes together, and the opportunities for local authorities in Israel and the region to advance environmental cooperation, intentionally directed towards peacebuilding and/or strengthening diplomatic relations, we might pause to briefly consider the significance of past experiences. It should be emphasized that the examples below don't distinctly demonstrate the connection of all the axes: firstly, not all the examples show cooperation across international boundaries – some of them relate to work encouraging coexistence and a shared life in populations divided within a country – but delving into them is instructive in showing how local environmental peacebuilding is an excellent instrument in cases of internal conflict too;[51] secondly, in some initiatives, as frequently happens in the frame of environmental peacebuilding, building peace isn't necessarily evident as an aim of cooperation, inasmuch as the reasons for the joint work can be pragmatic, oriented towards finding solutions to common problems, some of which may even be educational. In these cases, where peace is made, or where some bridges are built between the sides, it is a secondary result. Moreover, in the first example, and in the three last examples, the environmental axis is almost completely absent, or if present, it is not the main thing. Still, these examples are proof that connecting the axes can indeed be done if local authorities want to, and we can learn from their successes and failures.

1. Cooperation between Greek and Turkish Nicosia

The hostility between the northern Turkish and southern Greek parts of Cyprus has a long history, beginning with Ottoman rule over the island in the second part of the seventeenth century. This is already more than 450 years of conflict between the two groups, and for some decades Cyprus has been known as "the graveyard of diplomats," given the recurrent failures of diplomatic contacts and various attempts at mediation. Both parties call Nicosia their capital, and since 1974, when the Turkish army took control of more than 37 percent of the island, there has been a buffer zone,

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[49] Ibid; Richard A. Matthew and Tobias Ide, "The Third Wave of Environmental Peacebuilding," Wilson Center: The New Security Beat, 2021, Accessed November 21, 2022.

[50] Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

[51] I do not mean to posit symmetry between conflict among populations of a country, or within a city, to conflicts and/or cold relations between sovereign or autonomous entities. Furthermore, research on peacebuilding within divided cities has developed greatly in recent years, with interesting and necessarily varied findings. See, e.g., Lior Lehrs, Noam Brenner, Nufar Avni, and Dan Miodownik, "Seeing Peace like a City: Local Visions and Diplomatic Proposals for Future Solutions," *Peacebuilding,* June 5, 2023: 1–21; Noam Brenner and Nufar Avni, "Building Peace in Jerusalem: Municipal Infrastructure as a Peace Infrastructure?" [in Hebrew], *Politika* 33, 2023: 185-211.

called the Green Line, under the control of a UN peacekeeping force. Over decades the border had become sealed to movement between the Turkish and Greek parts of the city, resulting in an almost total cessation of contact, until at the beginning of 2003 a number of crossing points in the buffer zone were opened, and inhabitants from both sides began to be exposed to one another. Over the years, with the help of these passages, joint civil initiatives came into being, bringing inhabitants closer, even though officially the conflict was still going on. In relation to the current discussion, it's interesting to see that even before civilian passage was allowed, the mayors from both sides – the Greek Lellos Demetriades and the Turkish Mustafa Akinci – independently advanced, in the first half of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, cooperation over subjects defined as "technical" and not "political." Their intention was to together rehabilitate and improve the physical condition of a city which had been badly damaged during the war years.[52] Two important and prominent projects were the repair of Nicosia's sewage system (a project with environmental aspects, even though the environment wasn't then seen as core to the project), and the upgrading of the Nicosia Master Plan which was undertaken with the support of the World Bank and UNDP.[53] The first of these (1978-1980) was meant to complete work on the sewage system that had been interrupted in 1974, and fix malfunctions which had developed in it during years of neglect and the demographic changes arising from population exchanges on the island. These had led to overcrowding in Nicosia and stress on the sewage system. The success of this project paved the way to a second one (1979-1986) aimed at revitalizing the city, and at the economic, social and cultural development of its historic centre. The two mayors met regularly in the buffer zone to keep the two programmes moving forward in such a way as would be appropriate to the possible future unification of Nicosia. But they also allowed for the possibility that it would remain divided, in the faith that, as the Turkish mayor put it, "when politics are not involved, there's no reason why we shouldn't agree about the city's problems,"[54] The success of these two projects proves that despite the divide, one can build bridges between the sides by means of joint work.[55]

2. The Energy Wise project

Energy Wise project was an energy efficiency initiative for the cities of Kfar Saba, Tira, Kfar Qasim, Qalansawa, Jaljulia, and Kfa Bara, in collaboration with the union of the cities for the quality of the environment in the Southern Triangle,[56] and supported by the European Union. The project was aimed at educating the Arab and Jewish school students of the area to save electricity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by implementing energy management systems in Arab and Jewish schools and by joint learning between the pupils. To this end, the authorities worked together to develop a policy to reduce electricity demand and greenhouse gas emissions. The project began in 2015 and was funded by the European Union for a period of three years, until 2018.[57] The project had clear goals and a well-organized work programme, and this made for good results. Initially nine schools from Kfar Saba joined the programme, and another nine from the Southern Triangle (including primary, middle and high schools); after six months the project expanded within Kfar Saba to include all primary schools (22 in all). The funding arrangement with the EU, as mentioned above, ended in 2018 and the project continued after that for another year in a slightly different format. Despite the subsequent break, it's significant that Energy-Wise paved the way to a new

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[52] Marik Shtern, Sertac Sonan, and Ourania Papasozomenou, "City Profile: Nicosia," *Cities* 130, 2022.

[53] Ibid. See also the plan to rehabilitate the sewage system on the UNDP website: https://www.undp.org/cyprus/projects/new-nicosia-wastewater-treatment-plant

[54] Shtern, Sonan, and Papasozomeno "City Profile: Nicosia," 4.

[55] Ibid.

[56] The union was founded in 1995 with the aim of raising awareness of the environment and nature protection in cities of the Southern Triangle.

[57] About the Energy Wise Project, from the website of Kfar Saba Municipality.

Arab-Jewish project involving Kfar Saba and cities of the Southern Triangle, in which roof-gardens are established on public buildings, funded by USAID and the Peres Peace Center.[58]

3. Continuing cooperation between the Tamar and (Jordanian) Ghor Al-Safi local councils

The Tamar local council, located south of the Dead Sea, brings together six Negev settlements. In 2006 the EcoPeace organization offered to engage the council in water projects and good neighbour schemes with the Jordanians. Initially the council's committee for environmental protection supported local residents getting involved but emphasized that participation needed to be independent and not under the auspices of the council.[59] But a fly nuisance originating from Jordan prompted the council members to seek a joint solution to the problem with Jordanian farmers. In 2010 council members made a first attempt to visit Jordan, and a Jordanian delegation visited the council. The delegation decided that cooperation was needed around the problem of flies and making agricultural improvements.[60] In 2011 an international conference was held at Ein Gedi on the subject of cooperation over water, sewage, and the environment, and during it a forum sponsored by the University of Oxford was set up bringing together Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian researchers.[61] In 2013, Tamar local council, together with EcoPeace initiated the cooperative Model Farm project in Jordan, which allowed farmers from both sides of the border to learn from one another, and indirectly also to press for education in agricultural methods which would help with the fly problem. This project gained support from Israel's Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Foreign Ministry, and even a promise of funding from the Ministry of Regional Cooperation.[62] The two sides signed a memorandum of understanding in 2014 at Tamar regional council.[63] In practice, the council alone bore the costs, since for political reasons the Ministry for Regional Cooperation withdrew their economic support from the project. In the summer of 2016, the mayor of Ghor Al-Safi made his first visit to Tamar Regional Council to discuss the condition of the Dead Sea and the dropping of the water level, and to establish a joint thinking process about it. Opportunities to develop the area were also on the agenda.[64] This cooperation has not continued into the present, and in recent years things have even regressed. Although there are many reasons for this, the main one was the 2018 dismissal of Dov Litvinoff as head of the council. Litvinoff had been a leading player in promoting links with the Jordanian counterpart.[65] Neither did the COVID-19 crisis and tensions at state level between Israel and Jordan help advance relations.

4. Partial cooperation between Emek HaMayaanot Regional Council and villages in Jordan

Emek HaMayaanot Regional Council's master plan for 2009 contains frequent references to a desire to promote coexistence and cross-border relations with Jordan, and to the potential benefits of taking such a direction.[66] And indeed, in the last fifteen years, especially at the urging of council head Yoram Karin, who has been in the role since 2009, the council has maintained links with authorities in Jordan. Of all the initiatives begun and abandoned in recent years, environmental-

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[58] Based on a conversation with Ms Shlomit Kitaro, manager of the Municipal Department of Sustainability and Preparation for Climate Change, Kfar Saba Municipality, March 8, 2023.

[59] Minutes of the Council for Protection of the Environment, Tamar Regional Council, Council session 2/06, June 27, 2006.

[60] Minutes of the Council for Protection of the Environment, Tamar Regional Council, October 7, 2010.

[61] Minutes of the Council for Protection of the Environment, Tamar Regional Council, September 22, 2011.

[62] Minutes of the Council for Protection of the Environment, Tamar Regional Council, History of the Council's activities 2004-2014 [in Hebrew].

[63] EcoPeace Middle East, News & Current Affairs, June 25, 2014.

[64] Israel Peri, "The Vision of Peace: Cooperation between Council Heads in Jordan and Israel" [in Hebrew], *Kol Hai*, July 2016.

[65] Based on a conversation with Mr Neri Ariel, head of the Council for Protection of the Environment, Tamar Regional Council, March 26, 2023.

[66] Master Plan for Emek HaMayaanot [in Hebrew], March 2009, see e.g. pp 75-79.

farming cooperation has been the most stable and continuous, and at the time of writing continues to take shape. These cooperative actions are led by Havat Eden, a centre of agricultural research and development in Emek HaMayaanot council. It's important to say that the partner on the Jordanian side, someone who has from the beginning turned to the council to get cooperative work off the ground, is Retired General Mansour Abu Rashid and not the regional councils or village mayors. General Mansour is considered close to the Jordanian royal family and for some years has been a central figure in the Amman Centre for Peace and Development, managing diverse connections with various agencies and individuals in Israel. Today the Emek HaMayaanot council, together with General Mansour, are cooperating in three areas: first, dealing with the red palm weevil, a species of beetle which damages palm trees, thus harming the date harvests of both Israeli and Jordanian farmers. Joint action around this problem had proceeded for close to a decade when Havat Eden and General Mansour set up a professional commission of Israeli and Jordanian farmers to send research teams to Israel and Jordan and share information on a weekly basis. The second area of cooperation in recent years has been water. Israeli farmers have been teaching their Jordanian counterparts efficient methods of irrigation, mostly to do with matching water quality with types of crop. The third area of cooperation is agricultural education for Jordanian and Israeli school pupils. Five years ago a delegation of Jordanian school students visited Emek HaMayaanot Regional Council and met with local pupils. Although there have been attempts to continue the relationship, the Israeli Education Ministry did not approve trips to Jordan by Israeli school students, citing fears for their safety. One sees that because of dependence on a government ministry for a venture of this sort, the story of agricultural education for Jordanian and Israeli school students has been less successful than the other two cases.[67]

The following examples are of initiatives that have partially succeeded, or failed entirely, and where the environmental axis is either absent, or at least is not the main focus. Nevertheless, these examples concern local initiatives which took as their goal to further neighbourly and cooperative relations, and they help us derive further insight into the possibilities of connecting local government, concern for the environment and furthering peace.

5. The Gilboa-Jenin model

Beginning in the latter 1990s contacts were made between Gilboa Regional Council (which includes a number of kibbutzim, moshavim, and Arab communities), and the city of Jenin in the Palestinian Authority. The relationship which developed rested on personal relationships between the then head of the council, Danny Atar, and the governors of Jenin, initially Zohir Manasra and then the late Kadoura Moussa, with whom Atar's connection was particularly close. Deputy head of the Gilboa council, Eid Salim, who is considered a senior figure in the Arab society in Israel, was a powerful support in advancing the discussions with Jenin, as was the ECF (the Economic Cooperation Foundation), which in those years was developing its outlook of bottom-up cooperation and people-to-people strategy aimed at a sustainable peace, through, among other channels, cooperation at municipal level.[68] The background to these contacts was the withdrawal of central government, during Netanyahu's first period in office, from the plan to establish an industrial zone on the outskirts of Jenin, something that had been mooted during the Rabin government as part of the Oslo discussions.[69] At the suggestion of the ECF, the Jenin governor requested a

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[67] Based on a conversation with Mr Zion Deco, manager of agricultural R&D, Havat Eden, June 21, 2023.
[68] Yair Hirschfeld and Sharon Roling, "The Oslo Process and the People-to-People Strategy," in *Development, Community and Conflict*, 43(3), 2000: 23-28; The Society of International Development, London; Sharon Roling, "'Cooperation North': A Model of Cross-Border Partnership," in *Palestine-Israel Journal* 7(1), 2000.

[69] Roling, "'Cooperation North': A Model of Cross-Border Partnership".

meeting with Atar in Israel to see how, despite the setback of government withdrawal, financially beneficial cooperation could proceed. The two met at Gilboa's Herb Farm Restaurant and tried to see together if contacts could be made that would be to the benefit of both sides, including with Arab-Israeli residents of the Gilboa Regional Council. According to Atar, the relationship between the two men was very good and they tried to think together how local leaders could work to change reality.[70] This meeting initiated a broader process which took place under the auspices of the ECF, taking in, apart from Gilboa and Jenin, the city of Haifa, Emek Hamayaanot Regional Council and the city of Beit She'an. In February 1999 the sides signed the Cooperation North agreement, in the hope of creating a model of cross-border cooperation, the first of its kind in the region, aimed at fostering healthy coexistence between the Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis and Palestinians in the area.[71] In the framework of this process a joint delegation of council heads went on a tour of Germany, France, and Switzerland with the aim of learning from the model of cooperation that grew in the tri-border area after the Second World War.[72] The period in which contacts developed was very challenging, because shortly after the signing of the agreement the Second Intifada and Operation Defensive Shield began. Nevertheless, relations were maintained, and the Israeli council heads even helped get food and clothing donations to women and children in Jenin.[73] After 2005, Atar asked the new governor of Jenin, Kadoura, to push for contacts "while more or less completely ignoring the overall atmosphere between the governments," and from a sense that "meeting and talking didn't have to be between leaders alone, but had to take place at the level of the ordinary citizen," as Atar put it.[74] Still, the new personal relationship between Atar and Kadoura brought about the Gilboa-Jenin model. The project sought to kick-start and advance initiatives in tourism and business,[75] but also in the environmental and agriculture worlds, such as the rehabilitation of the Kishon River, partnership in conserving ground water and the joint establishment by Jenin and Gilboa of an ecological park.[76] In 2009 these cooperative endeavours were recognized by the then minister of defence, Ehud Barak,[77] and later also received economic support from the German government.[78] But at the end of the day most of these initiatives didn't get off the ground due to the difficulties placed in their way by the Israeli and Palestinian central governments. But despite this, a number of cooperative agricultural endeavours did succeed, such as, for example, a beautiful initiative to transfer water from the regional council lands to Palestinian farmers, in exchange for cucumber plants which were moved to the factory at Kibbutz Beit Hashita within the council area. The Gilboa-Jenin model existed in an almost impossible reality, as the central governments of both sides set conditions and restrictions that impede the initiatives. The strength, as well as to a great extent the weakness, of the model was in its particular reliance on the close personal relationship that developed between the two council leaders. Governor Kadoura died in 2012,[79] which led to a decrease in the intensity of the relations between Gilboa and Jenin,

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[70] Based on a conversation with Danny Atar, formerly head of Gilboa Regional Council, June 25, 2023.

[71] Roling. "'Cooperation North': A Model of Cross-Border Partnership".

[72] Based on a conversation with Danny Atar, formerly head of Gilboa Regional Council, June 25, 2023.

[73] Based on correspondence with Dr Yair Hirschfeld, one of the founders of the ECF, June 26, 2023.

[74] "Local Story" [in Hebrew] (You Tube page), interview with then leader of Gilboa Council, Danny Atar, on the Gilboa model.

[75] Israel Moshkovitch, "New Deal: Overnight in Gilboa, Shopping in Jenin" [in Hebrew], *Ynet*, September 9, 2009.

[76] Elad Rubenstein, "The Kishon Vision: An Ecological Park Shared by Gilboa and Jenin" [in Hebrew], *Ynet*, December 24, 2011.

[77] Moshkovitch, "New Deal."

[78] Irit Rosenblum, "Germany to Give 100 Thousand Euros for Tourist Initiative in Gilboa-Jenin" [in Hebrew], *TheMarker*, March 1, 2011.

[79] Nir Yahav, "The Governer of Jenin, Kadoura Moussa, Dies Aged Sixty of a Heart Attack" [in Hebrew], *Walla*, May 2, 2012.

and in 2015, after two decades in the role, Atar concluded his tenure as head of the council, resulting in the project being cut off completely.[80]

6. MAP – The Municipal Alliance for Peace

The Municipal Alliance for Peace in the Middle East was an initiative of the Israeli Centre for Local Government and its parallel Palestinian organization APLA, with considerable involvement of international organizations (who also sat on the management committee), among them UNDP (UN Development Programme), UCLG (the United Cities and Local Governments umbrella organization), VNG (the Dutch association of local authorities), FCM (Federation of Canadian Municipalities), ELPME (European Network of Local Authorities for Peace in the Middle East - which no longer exists), and the cities of Rome, Barcelona, Athens and The Hague. The alliance was officially established in 2005 after years of exploratory contacts and the advances and setbacks in the peace agreements between Israel and the Palestinians of that time. The alliance operated from an office in Jerusalem shared by the representatives of Israel and Palestinian, but it is noteworthy that after some years it faded away without significant trace.[81] It should be said, though, that while the alliance itself failed, it inspired new, focused cooperative endeavours around specific problems, including culture and youth, economic development, municipal management and the environment. In the environmental field MAP joined the Dutch LOGO SOUTH program (which also no longer exists today) with the goal of jointly addressing environmental issues. The partnership between MAP and LOGO SOUTH sought to promote the establishment of local information systems for environmental management and joint community development in Israeli and Palestinian towns and cities.[82] With the demise of the organization, the initiatives also withered. There seem to have been a number of reasons for this failure. First of all, the process that led to the alliance's creation wasn't led by Israeli and Palestinian towns and cities, but by the international participants. Secondly, the international participants saw the pursuit of peace talks and keeping to UN decisions at the national level as conditions for giving financial support to the initiative. Moreover, a decline in relations at the national level dampened the desire of local authorities to sustain the partnership.[83]

7. Twinning arrangements between Barcelona, Tel Aviv-Yafo and Gaza

In September 1998, on the initiative of the city of Barcelona, a twinning agreement was signed between Barcelona, Tel Aviv-Yafo and Gaza. In the agreement, it was decided that through funding from Barcelona and the European Union, Tel Aviv and Gaza will conduct joint dialogues between chambers of commerce, academic centres, and civil associations; strengthen cooperation in cultural, social, and economic matters; and initiate joint projects for development and improving living conditions in Gaza.[84] The agreement was made at a time of cautious optimism in the international arena at the progress made in contacts between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which brought about a spate of peacebuilding initiatives. In the framework of the agreement the deputy mayor of Tel Aviv succeeded in meeting representatives from Gaza, before links were

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[80] Based on a discussion with Mr Danny Atar, former head of Gilboa Council, June 25, 2023.
[81] Chris van Hemert, "A Case Study in City Diplomacy: The Municipal Alliance for Peace in the Middle East," in Arne Much et al. (eds.), *City Diplomacy,* The Hague: VNG International, 2008, 165-188.

[82] Based on an internal MAP working paper of September 2006, given me through the generosity of Ms Idit Hod, an advisor on the environment and sustainability. Ms Hod was the environmental advisor of the Centre for Local Government in Israel and in practice integrated this work with her role as the Israeli advisor to the UN on the MAP project.
[83] Van Hemert, "A Case Study in City Diplomacy."

[84] Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, minutes of the full council session no. 73 of February 10, 2008; Moran Sharir, "The Arguing Twins," *Haaretz*, 2022.

severed when the Second Intifada began.[85] When representatives of Barcelona visited Tel Aviv in 2001, it was already clear to the Tel Aviv team that with relations between Israel and the Palestinians being so volatile, the activities decided on in the agreement were not going to happen.[86] Worsening of relations at the national level meant that the agreement wasn't put into effect, and in 2005 the mayor of Tel Aviv asked the Spanish ambassador to Israel to help make the agreement with Barcelona bilateral. The agreement was already by then de facto frozen, but it took a council vote in 2008 to make this de jure; it was not, however, annulled, "to signal that there was still a hope of peace."[87]

D. Discussion: opportunities for local authorities in Israel to be leaders in environmental cooperation

This paper argues that local authorities in Israel and the region need to promote local environmental cooperation as a stimulus to stronger relations, and to deal better with the consequences of the climate crisis and the degradation of the environment. Various processes, including the rising political and diplomatic power of local authorities worldwide, their growing involvement in environmental and climate issues, and the fact that advancing environmental peacebuilding has in recent years tended to be bottom up, point to the time being ripe for local governments to take the reins and initiate political and diplomatic activity which can help advance environmental and climate actions, and through them, support the formation of closer and deeper links between citizens across national borders. On the basis of the examples given here, a number of points need attention when we talk about the power of local authorities to promote environmental cooperation between Israel and its neighbours:

1. **Symmetry in the agency of local authorities** – it is important to address the lack of symmetry in the level of agency of Israeli local authorities compared to those of its neighbours, especially the nearest. Even though Israel is highly centralized and local government is weak by the standards of the OECD, local authorities in Israel still enjoy more agency than those of neighbouring Arab countries, and consequently have more autonomy in carrying out policies. This is most evident in the example of Tamar Regional Council's cooperation with Ghor Al-Safi in Jordan. While Tamar council led the process by itself, with the support and encouragement of EcoPeace, the Jordanian partner relied mainly on EcoPeace and local farmers and associations (such as, for example the water company), and lacked any definitive institutional support. The Jordanians' lack of support from their local authority made cooperation difficult in the first years. Processes within Jordan over the years clarified the role of the head of the Ghor Al-Safi council, and this eased the communication channel, leading to his official visit to Tamar Regional Council. This example underlines just how necessary official channels of communication between local institutions are, for it is they that underwrite and stabilize cooperative ventures as potentially enduring. When the continuity of the work between the Tamar and Ghor Al-Safi councils was interrupted, it was in part because of a policy of distancing pursued at the national level. It should be noted that in the Palestinian case there may be more potential for agency at the local council level. The Palestinian Authority is very dispersed geographically, lacking territorial continuity, and so it is precisely local government that is politically significant, with considerable power relative to central government. This could be seen during the COVID-19 period, when some Palestinian local authorities led the struggle against the pandemic and the public information campaign.[88] Perhaps, then, in issues relating

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[85] Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, minutes of the full council session no. 17, October 17, 2004.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, minutes of full session of council (73), February 10, 2008.
[88] Abdallah Anati, "The Resiliency of Palestine During COVID-19," *ICMA,* October 2020.

to environmental and climate crisis as well, Palestinian local authorities have the potential to be a central player with whom Israeli local authorities can promote collaborations.

2. **Meaningful external contribution, nationally and internationally** – Diplomatic incidents and violent events, embittering relations between countries, inevitably make it harder to promote environmental cooperation between the different sides' local authorities. This kind of cooperation can bear fruit in periods characterized by national-level rapprochement, or at least in situations of stability and/or maintenance of a status quo. Hence, despite the potential of local authorities to advance environmental cooperation and peace processes at the local level, such actions are more practicable in the context of supportive national policies, or at the very least, tacit agreement from the central government. Local authorities, like the organizations of civil society, can be seen as enablers of cooperative activities, of peace processes and of mutual recognition, but projects of this kind will be difficult to get off the ground in hostile circumstances. The withdrawal of Tamar Regional Council and the Ghor Al-Safi council from relationship, the failure of MAP (The Municipal Alliance for Peace), and the freezing of the twinning treaty between Tel Aviv and Gaza are prominent examples of how without a basic national infrastructure, it is difficult for local authorities to independently promote cross-border cooperation. Nevertheless, in times of stability, even when there is no noticeable progress or rapprochement at the national level, but also no hostility and regression in relations, states can certainly allow local authorities to promote processes that can lead to closer ties at the local level, in the hope that this will help expand relations at the national level as well. Still, it needs to be said that the examples above were not rooted in a shared existential need. Perhaps a future climate and environmental catastrophe will make for local cooperation less sensitive and less dependent on the state of relations between countries, and more attentive to immediate existential-strategic needs.

Apart from central government, there are other external agents whose involvement has an influence on the possibility of relationships at the local government level. It emerges from the examples above that contacts which were not initiated and conducted by local actors, but rather orchestrated externally by international entities, did not succeed and did not show themselves resilient to political crises and challenges. External actors can provide motivation, encouragement and of course financial and other forms of support, such as, for example, sharing knowledge, methods and guidance, but they are relatively powerless when it comes to pushing for cooperation when the parties concerned aren't interested. Success in initiatives of this sort depends more on the willingness of the parties and on shared, concrete problems that need to be solved together. Moreover, one has to remember that international or regional urban networks have the potential to lead cooperative projects among cities whose states don't even have diplomatic ties, or whose ties are cold. A network of Middle Eastern cities, including cities in Morocco and the Gulf States, could lead to cooperation between Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian cities that would emerge from it.

3. **The importance of resources** – It seems that lack of resources is a main obstacle to the promotion and continuity of local projects. Energy-Wise project of Kfar Saba and the Triangle cities was declared successful, had demand for continuation, and it is likely that it could have evolved and adapted to the changing technological reality. But it came to an end because European Union funding had been set to last for three years only. This led to the environmental education and growing relationships among the children of the cities to be abandoned. Tamar Regional Council was forced to bear many of the costs of establishing a model farm in Jordan, and these cut into other important budgets. This harmed the motivation of council members to begin similar projects in the foreseeable future. Given that environmental projects of this sort often have value at the national level too, inasmuch as they have the potential to bring about a

deepening of diplomatic relations, it might be worth considering allocations of national budgets for diplomatic activities of local authorities, alongside what is raised independently at the local level. A step of this sort is required in a reality in which local governments are beginning to independently develop diplomatic relationships and action on the environment, whether bilaterally or through global urban networks which leap over the national level. In its efforts to promote environmental action and diplomatic links, the state can see local government as a back-up player which can support and strengthen the national level, and not as a force undermining the state. Making a budget available for local diplomatic initiatives, as well as for training and imparting of skills, top down, from the national to the local level, can help to ensure that actions of this sort will proceed in a holistic, institutionalized way, complementary to the workings of the state and not behind its back, which sometimes does harm in ways not seen at the local level.[89]   Furthermore, support given by central government for diplomacy and cooperation at the local level gives weak and impoverished local authorities budgets, opportunities to develop local foreign policies, and thus to serve people living locally. It is, however, important to make sure that central government support is given in the context of continuous dialogue and with minimal impingement on local government autonomy. The latter is necessary for the emergence of bottom-up processes, which aren't always in line with the outlook of central government.

4. **The mutual dependence of local authorities sharing geographical space** – Environmental cooperation has great potential as they best reflect the mutual dependence of neighbouring geographical spaces, and the organic need to create systems of mutual support and encouragement. Accordingly, it's clear that the resilience of one authority is vital for the well-being of the neighbouring authority, and this makes cooperation into something that isn't driven purely by altruism but embodies the distinct interests of all parties to work together and help one another. So, for example, with the fly nuisance in the Tamar and Ghor Al-Safi regional councils: the need for joint action came out of having to deal with a problem that was making everyday life difficult for the inhabitants of both places. Although today the relationship has dwindled, the fly problem persists, and seems likely at some later date to push the sides to renew the relationship and their attempts at joint work. One has to remember that ultimately environmental cooperation between neighbours – whether across international borders or with the aim of furthering coexistence within a country – contains the promise of conservation and development of natural resources, so that it can also contribute to strengthening the political stability of a whole region. In this regard, it's important to say that given the growing awareness of the consequences of the climate crisis, cooperation between areas which are similar but not necessarily close becomes more relevant, especially when it involves sharing of knowledge about urban management and learning from each other about successes and failures.

5. **Local leadership and the importance of institutionalizing relations** – the head of a local authority or council is central to realising the potential of environmental cooperation and strengthening diplomatic relations with neighbouring authorities across a border. Action of this sort falls outside of the classic "services" provided by local government and indicates thinking outside of the box on the part of local leadership. However positive the decision of some leaders to pursue processes of this kind, one can't avoid the fact that such a cooperation will

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[89] See e.g. Assaf Orion's article on cooperation between the cities of Ashdod and Wuhan, which went ahead despite its incongruence with Israel's foreign and national security policy and which consequently had the potential to do strategic harm: Assaf Orion, "Non-Twinned Cities: The Local Government's Foreign Policy" , *INSS Special publication, May 2022*. ; see also Highlights of the 2002 Report of the State Comptroller, which criticizes the independent foreign policies of local authorities in Israel, arguing that on occasion the lack of coordination and responsibility creates more harm than benefit: Globus, "Twin Cities: Journeys Abroad with Little to Show for It; Unilateral Severing of Ties Causing Harm to the State's Image," *Globus*, 2002.

not endure if it relies solely on the good will of local leaders. As mentioned above, Tamar Regional Council's joint action with the Jordanians, or the cooperative work between Gilboa and Jenin, came to an end when the council heads or mayors left their positions. Until today those projects are absent from those councils' agendas. Just as relationships with countries continue even after changes in national leadership, through the joint efforts of the foreign ministry and other government departments striving to strengthen diplomatic relationships, efforts must be made to establish local mechanisms that will ensure the continuity of diplomatic policy towards neighbouring local authorities, even when those local governments change. In order to create such mechanisms, it is desirable to enlarge the circle of participants within the relevant branches of the local authority; this will help ensure that diplomatic relations become institutionalized in a way that doesn't depend only on the local leaderships. Likewise, it is advisable to encourage the active participation of residents in cooperative environmental projects, so as to awaken the expectation that these will continue even when governments change.

6. **The importance of links to organizations of civil society** – As a direct corollary of the argument that it is important for ordinary residents to be involved, it's appropriate to discuss the important link between local government and the organizations of civil society, a link which should be encouraged and strengthened. In the example of cooperation between Tamar and the Jordanian villages, one sees that the EcoPeace organization did much to promote the joint work and making connections on the Jordanian side. Similarly, in the example of the Gilboa-Jenin model, the ECF organization had a meaningful role in mediating with external actors concerning the joint work, and this helped greatly in raising funds. It's important that local authorities recognize the potential of aid from bodies in civil society, as loci of expertise that can be of significant use, as having an important role in identifying opportunities for cooperation, and as having the ability to accompany activities in a way which can underwrite their continuity even through governmental change. Additionally, civil society organizations often have connections abroad that can be of use to local authorities in promoting processes with foreign entities. Given NGOs' familiarity with resource development, they can help local authorities connect with relevant parties as well as helping directly in this field. Moreover, it's also important for NGOs to recognize the potential of connecting with local authorities. In most cases, civil society organizations tend to focus their activity on central government. But in a reality where local government is proving to be a growing political force, it makes sense to see it as a suitable partner, no less than central government.

E. Conclusion

This paper presents three axes of action and examines the feasibility of combining them. The first axis concerns the rising political power of local authorities vis-à-vis their nation-states and their aspiration for more urban autonomy, as well as the transformation of local authorities into global actors who promote diplomatic policy independently of their nation-states, whether bilaterally or multilaterally through transnational urban networks. The second axis concerns the growing local involvement of local authorities in environmental and climate issues, faced by the failure of nation-states to bring about significant progress in line with their international obligations and in light of the growing awareness that local government has a key role in mending environmental injustices, and bears responsibility towards its residents to address them. The third axis concerns the development of environmental peacebuilding, representing the most recent wave of research, where the emphasis is on the ability to pursue bottom-up environmental peacebuilding. The paper proposes combining these three axes and calls on local authorities to play a central role in advancing environmental peacebuilding with neighbouring authorities – both across borders, with the aim of furthering diplomatic ties which will help bring the parties closer, and also among divided

communities within the state's borders, with the goal of strengthening shared life in its territory. The central argument of the paper is that local authorities hold great potential to promote environmental collaborations as a lever for advancing cross-border peace relations and promoting shared life within the state's borders – processes of this sort are particularly important at times when there isn't a political horizon. The paper, as abovementioned, doesn't claim that local government should replace nation-states in dealing with quarrels between states, but gives examples of cases where local authorities succeeded, sometimes more, sometimes less, in bringing about environmental cooperation as a stimulus to building relationships. Based on these examples, it is suggested that local government can be a significant player in advancing political processes. Finally, and based on the limited number of examples of such activity, one can indicate some main insights: the importance of pursuing cooperation with parallel institutions, and the challenge of gaps in the degree of agency of different local authorities; the importance of central government support for locally based cooperation; the need to secure resources and training for local diplomatic activities from central government without sacrificing autonomy; the importance of environmental cooperation for regional resilience, and the interests of all parties in promoting it; and the importance of establishing local diplomatic mechanisms to allow continuity of cooperative endeavours and to advance them with relevant organizations in civil society. There are naturally more perspectives one could name, but in the scope of this paper not all angles and subjects can be touched on, and it's reasonable to assume that further global and regional examples would yield important additional insights. The aim of the paper is to suggest that there is significant potential in bringing together the three axes, both with regard to peacebuilding and for better coping with the climate crisis and various environmental challenges. The examples given in the paper point to the need to continue working in these directions, to research them in more depth, and to learn how similar initiatives can best be put into practice.

Finally, if we go back to the story about Barcelona with which I began this paper, and reexamine it somewhat critically, we can point to a further conclusion: the political power of local authorities has to allow them to abandon national paradigms and make use of their growing agency, so as to promote unifying rather than divisive activities. Barcelona can certainly express opposition to the policies of the State of Israel, but the decision to cut ties with the city of Tel Aviv, a city marching under the banner of liberalism and which often expresses its dissatisfaction with national policy, seems unfortunate. Perhaps it would be better to consider how Barcelona can stand beside Tel Aviv and help it advance policies capable of minimizing, at least at the local level, policies which Barcelona perceives as problematic at the national level: inasmuch as the true power of cities is in their ability to push for change from below, and perhaps thus, to succeed in influencing the direction taken by the state, and to change it.