A “Syrious” game, hydromonopoly and local rural communities in the Occupied Golan Heights

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ABSTRACT

This paper is written within the framework of the Lund University project on “Hydropolitics in the Jordan River Basin”. The Jordan River Basin is likely the most stressed watershed on our planet both physically and politically. Domination and control over the waters of the Jordan River are central to the conflict between the riparian countries Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Israel (Jagerskog, 2003; Kramer, 2008; Zeitoun, 2008). The perpetual regional conflict has prevented effective cooperation on sustainable Transboundary Water Management (TWM) between the five different riparians (Jagerskog, 2003). Livelihoods of rural communities in all riparian countries are affected at regional level. The local level as a crucial component in TWM is often overlooked and the current empirical body of research into hydropolitics at local level is limited. An analysis is given how a history of inter-state conflicts about water management at discourse level is reflected in rural communities living near disputed national borders in the Jordan River Basin at local level. Furthermore the paper reflects on the feasibility of hydro-peacebuilding and sustainable transboundary water management using the methodology of serious gaming. An analytical framework of peace building, human ecosystem approaches, political ecology and resource management is critically assessed against the outcome of the first research results presented in this paper concerning the case study of the Occupied Golan Heights.

The local level case study that is discussed concerns Syrian Arab communities living at the Occupied Golan Heights, a heavily disputed territory between Israel, Lebanon and Syria. Since 1916, the borders between these three riparian states have not yet been completely defined and agreed upon. In 1967, Israel captured the Syrian Golan Heights which resulted in a regional hydro-hegemonic position (Zeitoun et al., 2012; Dajani, 2011; Kramer, 2008; Daoudy, 2008; Jagerskog, 2003; Amery, 1998). In

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1982, Israel annexed the area, a move that was considered illegal by the international community. The area of 20 square kilometers lies at the heart of the now deadlocked Israel-Syria peace negotiations (Dajani, 2011; Daoudy, 2008). The complexity of hydropolitics and its reflection at local level in the Jordan River Basin is exceptional. Concepts of citizenship, security and drought are used politically by all parties. Whilst holding strong onto their Syrian identity, Syrian Arab farmers at the Golan Heights have been building parallel governance systems which at points intertwine with the Israeli governance. The hypothesis of this paper states that the political uses of citizenship, identity, security and scarcity are resource driven and lead to severe power assymetry and consequently to unsustainable transboundary water management in the Jordan River Basin.

Next to the use of semi-structured interviews and participant observation through video, the methodology of serious gaming is employed to conduct research into identity and assessing the feasibility of hydropeace-building at community level. Serious gaming has been applied in various research contexts dealing with watershed management (Lankford & Watson, 2007). Prototypes of the Jordan River Basin boardgame called “hydromonopoly” have been implemented in various contexts, both within a classroom environment and at community level. The concept of serious gaming and methodological implications of the use of the hydromonopoly boardgame in this research will be discussed and assessed.
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1 Introduction

Why would a democratic country hold on to a piece of land it has occupied for more than 40 years? Control over land and water resources are often a plausible explanation to this question. In the case of the occupied Golan Heights, the capture of the Golan Heights by Israel resulted in their Hegemon position in the Jordan River Basin. More than 40% of Israel’s main natural water resources originates in the watershed of the Lake of Galilee and the Golan Heights\(^2\). Therefore the occupied Golan Heights are an important asset for Israel’s existence, access to water resources, security and growth as a nation state. Whilst the capture of the Golan Heights was important for Israel’s national interests, the water situation in the basin as a whole became unbalanced. The military action was detrimental to sustainable transboundary water management in the Jordan River Basin. It led to the construction of Israel’s National Water Carrier, siphoning off most of the water resources of the Jordan River. Combined with a diversion of the Jordan River’s water by Syria and its agricultural use by Jordan, the river basin has been severely impacted by human interventions that reduced the flow of the Jordan River. Consequently it has led to a rapid decline of water in the Dead Sea. You could call this type of phenomenon, environmental suicide.

The hypothesis of this paper states that political uses of citizenship, identity, security and scarcity are resource driven and can lead to power assymetry and consequently to unsustainable transboundary water management in the basin as a whole. In my argument I criticize rational choice theory whereby decisionmaking is based on the principle that if users of a common resource see economic benefit of cooperation they will work together. Often context, process and power dimensions are missed out in rational choice analysis. I argue that perception of the “other”, inflicted trauma, social, ideological and political history, trust and human relations are more important in situations of decisionmaking for cooperation on shared resources. This study focuses on case studies at local level in border areas between Syria, Israel and Lebanon as well as Palestine and Israel. In this paper investigates the role of community members, potentials for ecological peacebuilding and provides a critical analysis of liberal cooperative resource management based on rational choice versus political ecology, cognitive theory and the human ecosystem approach (HEA). This paper deals with the first case study; the Occupied Golan Heights in the Jordan River Basin.

\(^2\) interview Shimon Tal, 2009
1.1 A framework of war, peace building and the human ecosystem approach (HEA)

“All wars are civil, because we are one people, one planet, one humanity”

“Civil war” is an interesting oxymoron, as wars are not civil. Soldiers on the frontline who are driven and influenced by an ideology to “fight the enemy”, can kill another human being whilst it is in fact a completely unnatural thing to do for a civil human being. One doesn’t just kill someone, it’s a very difficult thing to do, unless you are able to switch off any feelings of empathy for the enemy and have convinced yourself that it is good for national security, revenge or a victory for “your people”. Only then, when for example enemy thinking, hate, revenge and “fear for the other” or self-defense has taken a stronghold in someone’s brain, people are able to kill others, whether they are combat soldiers, freedom fighters, terrorists, serial killers or policemen abiding the law. Inherently killing others is unnatural and an act of complete disrespect for human life. War propaganda thus is always geared towards dehumanizing the enemy so when there is enough disrespect towards the “other”, to go to war for “security and safety against an attack” can be justified. It is true that experiencing a combat situation induces many suicides among soldiers (Kuehn, 2009) as well as being the cause of serious post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) difficulties with veterans (Freeman & Garety, 2002). Psychologically not surprising because soldiers are also human beings and have feelings of empathy and can feel guilt towards killing other people. The book “Crime and Punishment” written in 1866 by Fyodor Dostoevski is an interesting psychological analysis of how a poor and depressed student called Raskolnikov can come to his awful deed of killing; the moment he dehumanizes his victim, his old landlady, by thinking of her as a “malicious vile rat”, he lost his feeling of empathy and was able to kill. After his crime, Raskolnikov is haunted by anguish, feelings of guilt and shame that translate themselves in denial and persecutory paranoia (Eliot, 2001). Those who are in denial of killing of others are either engulfed in enemy thinking, fear and often paranoia towards the other, whom they believe are their “enemies” of their own security and whom they should fight and control. To admit that you have killed someone, even it was in your view for a “good cause”, often brings psychological problems.

Paranoia or deep suspicion can be a form of reverse-psychology to not have to take responsibility for killing or crimes as well as not being able to forgive oneself when confronted with the grim reality of inflicted trauma and violence or a deep mistrust as the result of PTSD (Freeman & Garety, 2002). Evidence from small-scale studies show that in 30% of combat related PTSD, psychotic symptoms occur in patients (Freeman & Garety, 2002). Having fear for the enemy or an attack is a psychological response
for people to deal with past trauma and justification of violence, revenge and wars against the other or “enemy” who are seen as an existential threat. Killing others is not something to be naturally proud of. When someone does kill, the nationalism and political brainwashing, helps in justifying killing. Soldiers get decorated with medals, they are “heros of war”, they can proud to have saved the nation from harm, to have worked for national security. It makes a soldiers ego grow but this ego is just temporarily. After the decoration, normal life resumes. If feelings of empathy, the memories of trauma and reflection towards what happened in the wars they fought, come back to soldiers, this is when the post-traumatic stress syndrome can take hold and throw a veteran in the abyss of self-loathing and guilt feelings. When self-esteem and feelings of empathy towards self are rendered so low, it is enough for war-veterans to kill themselves, the ultimate act of aggression and violence towards self.

I remember an anecdote about violence told by my sister, who is a paramedic at an ambulance. When she was called to help someone who tried to commit suicide during her nightshift, she immediately came over to the tiny flat in a run-down neighbourhood in a city in the Netherlands. The man who had tried to kill himself with sleeping pills was lying on a couch, covered by a blanket. Her colleague stood in the doorway whilst my sister uncovered the blanket to see whether the man was still alive. The neighbour who had been assisting them, told her to be careful because the man often displayed violent behaviour. She stepped back to call police assistance and moved back towards the victim again to provide medical aid. He woke up dazed and looked her in the eyes. In a split second, he noticed her paramedic uniform and he became very violent. In an attempt to stop her from saving his life, he jumped over the couch and got a knife out of the kitchen to attack her. Luckily her colleague was in time to restrain the man and the police had arrived soon enough to contain the situation. Of course moments of horrible fear and anger went through my sisters’ mind towards this man. The man was moved towards hospital and survived. His violent reaction towards a paramedic who was trying to save his life, showed how he had lost the complete and utter disrespect for his own life and thus not able to show any empathy towards a paramedic. He had nothing to lose in life. He could kill himself. So he was able to attack my sister violently as he was afraid she would put him back into his (in his perception) miserable life. He did not see her as a mother with two children, for him she was a paramedic dressed in uniform who tried to stop him from taking his own life for which he already had lost all respect. Without past trauma, threat, mistrust, dehumanization and existential fear for the “enemy” I believe wars, hate, racism and violence cannot spontaneously happen out of the blue, there’s always a story behind it.

This brings me to a reflection of war, peacebuilding and cognitive theory. In cognitive theory, perception of “the other” plays an essential role in the analysis (Svedberg, 2000; Douglas, 2002; Uphoff, 1996). Conflict or violence between people happens based on the mental picture that two people have formed of each other in their relationship (Svedberg, 2000) on which they base their way of approaching
and communicating the other. Violent behaviour can be explained through the analysis of violent communication, identity and mental pictures that prevent the communicators to empathically listen without prejudices towards each others’ story, experience or narrative. The communication becomes aggressive and controlling once the communicators form negative mental pictures of each other based on past grief, perception and traumas that they experienced (Svedberg, 2000; Gorsevski, 1999). Peace building, gaining trust, healing and reconciliation relies and is based on breaking through those mental pictures, removing prejudices, identifying, empathizing with the other and seeing each other as human beings rather than enemies. When inflicted past trauma is not processed or reconciled, it will come back in negotiations, lead to asymmetrical communication therefore recognizing each others grief and trauma is important to build trust between parties (Gorsevski, 1999). From this basis, negotiations on a just peace agreement can start. The hostility in communication between the parties of the negotiations will then also be toned down. A peace brokers task is to break through the cycle of trauma and violence to be able mediate and guide this process. Whenever one of the parties involved feels the peace broker is not independent, it is very difficult to build real trust between parties.

![Figure 1: Trauma and cycle of violence](image)

Empathy for the “other” can only exist if you trust yourself and communicate openly with the other. Empathy for the world around you can also only be present if you trust this world. Empathy is a feeling whereby care for the other, for the environment and the use of peaceful means are more important than violence, jealousy, control, power or revenge. Often people who have empathy for others and their surroundings are in general peaceful people and quite happy. This is the basis of the principles of environmental peace building and the human ecosystem approach (HEA) (Dajani, 2011; Kramer, 2008; FoEME, 2008; Honari, 1989); environmental awareness and sustainable development for humanity increases the ability to empathize with others in sharing our common planet. Sharing an ecosystem, like a
river basin, creates a complex of interdependencies of parties and environmental challenges can form an incentive for cooperation across political and ethnic boundaries (Kramer, 2008). Conca and Dabelko (2002) argued that “environmental cooperation can be an effective catalyst for reducing tensions, broadening cooperation, fostering demilitarization and promoting peace” (Dajani, 2011; Conca & Dabelko, 2002). A neoliberal approach states that as long as people see economic benefit in cooperating on the management of common natural resources, they will work together towards a common and shared goal of sustainable development (Ostrom, 1990). Main criticism towards rational choice theory is that it often overlooks the psychological, cognitive and emotional dimensions of the process of working together and cooperating on common resource pools. Rational choice is a fairly static and technical analysis of a very human and emotional process. Power relations, perception, worldview, culture, religion, social and political history and context are important aspects when people like farmers make decisions to cooperate, even if the cooperation or collective action with others will bring economic benefits, the willingness to cooperate with others is based on a wider variety of dimensions than just economic benefit. These dimensions are missed and part of the flaws of rational choice theory. Identity and power are not concepts included in the neoliberal approach of cooperation and collective action, as well as the research units are often defined as homogenic rather then heterogenic communities. Therefore in order to analyse a process of cooperation, peacebuilding, decision making and willingness to cooperate, another approach, based on a more ecological process-oriented cognitive political theory is needed. This paper is an attempt to do so.

1.2 Video, interviews and serious gaming as methodology of research

The research methodology of this paper is based on a variety of methods to investigate a local case study and action research based on serious gaming. Starting with a literature review, official documents on various water agreements and peace negotiations as well as secondary data sets and spatial geographical analysis of our case study sites. We have conducted interviews with Israeli, Palestinian and Syrian water experts, water officials and NGO representatives to learn about different “water narratives”. Next to that, semi-structured interviews at community level on the occupied Golan Heights were conducted with water users and NGO representatives of the Syrian Arab villages, as well as participatory field observation and the use of video recordings in the field. Finally, a method of serious gaming was employed to investigate the importance of identity and environmental awareness of a human ecosystem in decisionmaking in hydropolitics.

Serious gaming has been employed within the water research and development sector to function as a dialogue tool for decision makers and water uses (Lankford & Watson, 2007). It stems from the development-oriented body of participatory methods like the use of role-play and visualization for
community empowerment and facilitation of natural resource management. Through the development and use of a contextualized boardgame called “hydromonopoly” we investigate the feasibility of common resource management of the Jordan River Basin and how players from various backgrounds react on certain political events in a specific context. Variables are drawn from the observation of the game being played. The tool appeared to be useful for various purposes, first by playing it with players from various ethnic, national, educational backgrounds and comparing the processes of the game whilst being played, it served its purpose to look how identity, experience, environmental awareness and perception informs or determines certain decision making on sustainable transboundary water management which could be correlated with reality at discourse level in the basin. Second, the game gave insight in how various players approach the dilemma of playing to win individually (national interests) or to win together (transboundary water management). The game was played in a classroom environment with Swedish and international students, as well as in an international environment at the World Water Forum in Marseille and finally at community level in the occupied Golan Heights. The sessions on the occupied Golan Heights and the World Water Forum were videotaped for in-depth analysis.

2 The Occupied Syrian Golan Heights

This paper describes and analyses the case of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. The occupied Syrian Golan Heights is a lush rocky volcanic plateau located between Israel and Syria. Famous for its natural beauty, many water streams, and resources moderate climate, apple trees and mountains, it is a favorite holiday destination for Israelis and foreigners visiting Israel.

The area is referred to as the occupied Syrian Golan Heights by the United Nations (UN, 2009). For over 40 years, Israel has exercised military control of the area. Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The main cause leading up to this war was the so-called “Headwater Diversion Plan” by the Arab League, a plan to divert two of the three sources of the Jordan River before they reached the Sea of Galilee to thwart Israel’s plans for its National Water Carrier. To prevent the diversion, Israel started to conduct airstrikes in Syrian territory in the months leading up to the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war (Molony, Stuart and Tuohy, 2009). The UN condemned these territorial gains and issued Security Council resolution 242, which emphasized the “inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and stipulated that a just and lasting peace requires the “withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.” According to the UN human rights council, Israel, as the occupying power has consistently ignored all UN resolutions, which reiterate the illegality of the occupation, violating UN treaties and endangering international peace and security (UN, 2009)
During the Syrian-Lebanese French Mandate period (1920–1946), the Golan was a hotbed of resistance against the French colonial powers. In 1923, after intense lobbying of Britain and France by the Zionist Organisation, David Ben-Gurion, declared that: “we have continually asserted that Israel should include the southern bank of the Litani river and the Hauran region, South of Damascus.” Their primary concerns were the water resource security and economic prosperity for the Jewish homeland (Amery, 1997). The geographical area during the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 and the 1949 Armistice Agreements did not include the Syrian Golan Heights or the Hauran region, however it was stressed that the Armistice line was "not to be interpreted as having any relation whatsoever to ultimate territorial arrangements” (Article V). Ever since, the Israel-Lebanon-Syria area has been an enigmatic and disputed border area (Eshel, 2001; Amery, 1997) whereby the warring nation-states do not show much consideration for the local indigenous people living on the Golan.

Until 1967, a diverse Syrian population of Sunni Muslim, Christian, Circassian inhabited the Golan. As of June 1967, only 6,396 people (pre-dominantly Druze and Christian) of a pre-war Syrian population of 130,000 remained. After the Israeli-Arab wars, systematic destruction of Syrian villages and farms took place in the occupied Golan Heights. Out of two cities, 139 villages and 61 farms, only 5 Syrian villages still exist today on the occupied Golan Heights; Majdal Shams, Ein Quniya, Massada, Buqa’ata and Al Ghajar (Hajjar, 1993). Following the Israeli occupation in 1967, all of the lands owned by the people who had been expelled were declared “State Lands”. Israeli capture of the occupied Golan Heights from Syria came with benefits, because of its abundant water resources. To prevent Syrian refugees from returning, the Israeli military administration published a list of destroyed villages and cities to declare them closed military zones. In a single administrative act, Israel confiscated over 90% of the territory of the occupied Golan (amounting to 1050 square kilometers)\(^3\). The Israeli Authorities also confiscated 30 percent of the land owned by Syrians in the remaining five villages (30 square kilometers) (Hajjar, 1993).

In August 1967, the Arab States declared the three no’s: “no recognition, no peace, and no negotiations” with the State of Israel. Then on October 6, 1973, during a surprise attack led by Syria and Egypt, the so-called Yom Kippur war was started which lasted until October 25, whereby the United States secured a ceasefire between Syria and Israel after the USSR had threatened with military intervention. The Yom Kippur war is known to be one of the biggest tank battles in Middle-Eastern history and was an attempt of the Syrian to retake the Golan Heights. Although first caught off guard by the overwhelming Syrian military power, Israel had pushed back and regained much of the Golan Heights back from Syria. Finally a ceasefire line was agreed and Israel maintained part of the regained Syrian

\(^3\) Interview Salman Fakhr al-Din, Director Al-Marsad, Human Rights Organisation, Majdal Shams
The Agreement stressed that it is not a peace agreement but a step towards a just and durable peace on the basis of Security Council resolution 338 dated October 22nd, 1973. Ever since 1973, the ceasefire line border between Syria and Israel as observed by the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) has been relatively quiet. As of November 2011, the UNDOF forces comprise of 1043 troops. On the Syrian side, the city of Quneitra was kept as a monument of remembrance to the destruction done by Israeli soldiers. The Syrian Authorities have not allowed its original inhabitants to return and rebuild their houses and resettled them out of security concerns. The UNDOF Force commander maintains close contact with the military authorities on both sides who generally cooperate with the Force.

By the end of 1981, Israel annexed the area following the passing of the Golan Heights Law in the Knesset (IMFA, 2008). The UN Security Council declared the move illegal in its resolution 497 and not a single sovereign state has until now recognised the annexation. (Molony, Stewart and Tuohy, 2009; Hajjar, 1993) Building of Israeli settlements and Israeli confiscation of water resources started immediately after the end of the hostilities in 1967 and increased after the Israeli annexation in 1981. The annexation extended Israeli law and administration over the area (IMFA, 2008; Hajjar, 1993). In UN resolution 497 it is stated that: “the Israeli decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights is null and void without international legal effect”. Israel replied and asserted its right to keep the Golan according to Resolution 242 where a safe and recognized boundary should be secure.

2.1 How a tank battle site became an Israeli ski resort

As of 2010, there are 41 Israeli settlements and land use sites in the occupied Golan Heights. Of the overwhelmingly Druze Syrian population that remained in the occupied Golan Heights, approximately 10% have accepted Israeli citizenship whilst the remaining Syrians refuse to accept Israeli citizenship. Several Israeli Prime Ministers like Yitzhak Rabin, Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmer, have stated that the Golan can be exchanged for peace with Syria (Dajani, 2011; Daoudy, 2008).

But giving the Golan Heights back to Syria in a peace agreement has proven not be such an easy undertaking (Dajani, 2011; Daoudy, 2008). The area of 1200 square kilometers is one of the most hotly contested real estate sites in the world. Today, the Golan Heights are a favorite holiday destination for Israelis and tourists visiting Israel. It brings it good tourism revenue for Israel. Gradually since 1973, with the increase of the Israeli settler population and decrease of the Syrian population, the image of the

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4 Israel-Syria: Agreement on disengagement, Geneva, June 5, 1974, UNSC, S/11302/Add. 1
5 Annex A, art. H
6 UNSC: Report to the Secretary-General on the UNDOF for period 1 July-31 December 2011, S/2011/748
occupied Golan Heights has been framed into a favorite Israeli holiday destination. In fact most Israelis, after the annexation in 1981, do not consider the Golan Syrian but Israeli. The area is, for them, integral part of Israel and as such it is presented to the many tourists that visit Israel. They are simply unaware of the Golans’ Syrian history (Levy, 2012). I call it the “Golan road bias”. The Israeli infrastructure of roads that is build on top of the pre-war road system, leading to the settlements, is planned around the main tourist sites, as well as the Israeli settlements, wineries, holiday resorts and natural parks. Israeli tourist maps do not mention the pre-war Syrian villages. The names of the Syrian Arab villages are written down on roadsigns in Arabic and English but none of the names of the erased Syrian villages are left. The Syrians who live there are usually referred to as Druze or Arab instead of Syrian (Levy, 2012). The pre-war Syrian road system is difficult to track when driving on the Israeli roads using an Israeli tourist map. Once you do visit the remains of the pre-war erased villages, the roads leading toward the sites are difficult to access due to the old tank tracks that are left from the 1973 Yom Kippur war. Most sites of the pre-war Syrian Arab villages are used as exercise space for the Israeli Defense Forces.

Other Syrian sites are erased and Israeli settlements were built on top of the Syrian villages. For example, one of the main Israeli tourist attractions of the Golan Heights is a popular ski-resort with 25 km of ski-runs operated by a settlement near Mount Hermon (2,814 m above sea-level) called Neve Ativ (Levy, 2012). Cherished by many Israeli’s, Neve Ativ is a small moshav founded in 1972, considered illegal under international law. The name is an acronym of four fallen Israeli soldiers of the Egoz Reconnaissance Unit killed in action in the October 1967 war with Syria. The Egoz Reconnaissance Unit is a battalion of the Northern Command Golani Brigade, specializing in guerilla and anti-guerilla warfare. Around 37 families live in Neve Ativ and its main industry is tourism with a ski-season running from December until March. In 2000, the ski-resort re-opened after two years of closure and the Jerusalem Post reported 11.000 visitors in one weekend (Rudge, 2000). Not long after that, during the on-going peace negotiations between Israel and Syria, the leaders of Neve Ativ expressed an interest for economic cooperation with the Syrians in the Israeli Media: “The leaders of Moshav Neve Ativ in the Golan, and the director general of the Mount Hermon ski resort, Menahem Baruch, hope to turn the resort into a joint Israeli-Syrian venture. A letter expressing their desire to open the ski resort on both the Israeli and Syrian sides(…)” - Israeli Wire, January 20th, 2000

The above statement caused some angry resentment with the Syrian Arab villagers who have refused Israeli citizenship as the moshav of Neve Ativ is built on top of the razed pre-war Syrian village of Jubata ez-Zeit, a pre-war village which had a Syrian population of around 2000 people. When the area was declared a closed military zone towards the end of the war in 1967, half of its Syrian residents fled the fighting and the remaining residents were evicted after the war (Murphy & Declan, 2008). The resorts’ parking lot and restaurant is built on top of the cemetery of the pre-war Syrian village. According
to Syrian residents of the occupied Golan, one of the first actions done by the Israelis in 1973 was securing most of the Syrian water resources for the settlements. An example of this is the main well of Neve Ativ, which is located on the original spring of the pre-war Syrian village.

2.2 Impacts of military conflict and hydropolitical basin discourse at local level

With a population of approximately 40,000 people of which 20,000 are Syrians and 20,000 are Israeli Jewish settlers (Dajani, 2011) the occupied Golan Heights lie in the centre of the Jordan River Basin. The Jordan River has an average flow of approximately 1400 million cubic meters per year with three spring-fed streams; the Hasbani in Lebanon, the Banias in Syria and the Dan in Israel. The Jordan River Basin is shared between Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Israel. Apart from the unresolved peace agreements between Israel and its neighbours where the water is not addressed, there are hydropolitical tensions between Jordan and Syria, potential tensions between Syria and Lebanon and between Jordan and Palestine\(^7\) (Aggestam and Sundell, 2012). In the following paragraph I will give a short overview of the various current views from water experts from each of the respective riparian countries to give a brief context of the basin level and how it impacts at local level.

As a riparian of the Jordan River Basin, Lebanon is rich in water compared to the others but experiences challenges of water pollution, distribution and climate change (Zeitoun et al., 2012; Krogerus, 2010). The position of Lebanon towards cooperation and transboundary water management is ambiguous. As they have enough resources, no Lebanese claim is made on Israeli or Syrian resources. However, the springs of the Jordan River originate in Lebanon with the Litani and Hasbani being its most important rivers (Zeitoun et al., 2012; Krogerus, 2010; Amery, H. 1998) and any efforts by the Lebanese to build a dam, is met with Israeli hostility. Although Lebanon is officially in a state of war with Israel, Lebanese water experts and officials state that the only way to move forward in the Jordan River Basin is on the basis of cooperation.\(^8\)

Officially in a state of war with Israel, Syria’s official hydrological position has been one of conditions. In terms of peace with Israel, the return of the Golan Heights has been the main condition for the Syrians, whilst Israel wants a guaranteed security and access to the Sea of Galilee. In 2008, a peace deal had almost been reached for 85% of the negotiations, however it fell apart and it turned out to be a missed chance for peace (Dajani, 2011; Daoudy, 2008). An American plan for a shared ecological nature reserve has been shelved until further notice (Dajani, 2011). Syrian water experts have unofficially

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\(^7\) pers. comms Tony Allan
\(^8\) Interview Fadi Comeir, Director General, Ministry of Energy and Water, Lebanon 2009
declared that if the political problems in the basins are solved, there is no objection to cooperate with Israel.9

Following the Oslo peace accords in 1994, Jordan has been cooperating with Israel on water resources to ensure allocation of the Jordan Rivers water resources through a joint committee. They have recently been involved in a feasibility study for a major joint Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian plan to desalinize the water from the Red Sea and use it to replenish the Dead Sea (Worldbank, forthcoming). The main purpose of Jordan’s share of the Jordan river water is irrigated agriculture. Between Syria and Jordan are continuous tensions due to Syria’s diversion of the Yarmouk River, a tributary of the Jordan river that forms the border between Jordan and Syria.

The water file between Israel and the Palestinian Authority will be negotiated in final stage negotiations following the interim water agreement of the Oslo peace agreements in 1994. Currently the political approach is a two-state solution, this presumes the establishment of a viable Palestinian State. However the peace negotiations are stalled. The Palestinian position has been to reach a solvable and equitable solution on water. According to the Palestinians, this position leads to a win-win scenario where there is a positive-sum outcome that is completely in line with International Water Law.10 Currently the Palestinians only have access to their water resources through an laborious administrative process working with a Joint Water Committee (JWC). According to the Palestinians, the process through the JWC is dysfunctional, there is not enough sharing of data and the interim agreement is stalling Palestine’s development as an independent state and its rightful access to water. The situation has led to a severe power asymmetry between the parties (Zeitoun, 2008). Jan Selby has called it “domination dressed up as cooperation” (Selby, 2003). The Palestinians are unclear in what Israel’s approach to resolving the water conflict officially is.12

Israel employs a Malthusian attitude towards water management with its main focus on producing new water and water supply rather than demand management. The demographic argument is also important for Israel. According to the former head of the Israeli Water Authority, the effect of a growing population has more impact on the demand than climate change which is according to official Israeli water experts negligible.13 Israeli officials and water engineers frame the water problems in a concept of scarcity which can be solved by providing new water and cooperation. Most Israelis do not believe the problem of water would be solved with redistribution of the water in the Jordan River basin because “on the natural resources there will be the disputes because it is only a redistribution of the water, it is not a

10 Speech Fuad Bateh, Palestinian Water Authority, 30 November 2010, Jerusalem
11 Pers. comms Dr. Shaddad Al Attili, Head of Palestinian Water Authority, Ramallah
12 Speech Fuad Bateh, Palestinian Water Authority, 30 November 2010, Jerusalem
13 Interview former Head of mekorot (Israeli Water Authority) Shimon Tal, 2009, Tel Aviv
solution (....) I can assure you, that Israel never, never, used water as a weapon against the Palestinians. In my time, I had a daily connection with the head of the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) even in the worst days of the intifada when there were bombs in the street, people from Mekorot used to supply water and solve the problems. But we are acting according to some temporary framework that was established during the Oslo peace agreements and this framework must be changed to be able to supply water to Palestinians for the next coming 50 years...at least” - Israeli Water Expert, former head of Mekorot

Water, conflict and politics at basin level have their reflection in disputed border areas at local level such as the occupied Golan Heights. At local level, Majdal Shams is the main Syrian Arab village at the Golan and also the administrative centre for Syrian residents of the occupied Golan who have refused Israeli citizenship. The local NGO Jawlan is set up by Syrian Golani residents refusing Israeli citizenship and who are providing a social support system for Syrian residents in parallel to the Israeli government system. The UNDOF monitored ceasefire line between Israel and Syria where Majdal Shams is located, has been a very quiet border since the war in 1973. The Charlie gate near the city of Quneitra, on the Syrian (Bravo) side, is guarded by UN observers and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). On 3 main occasions, the border between Syria and Israel is opened for Syrian Golani individuals to pass to Syria (Bravo) from the Israeli occupied (Alpha) side; a wedding, Golani students and pilgrims who are allowed to visit and study in Damascus and export of Golani apple produce¹⁴. Apart from minor incidents, the ceasefire line has not been violated by either side since 1973.

However in 2011, during the Syrian popular uprise, two major incidents resulting in civilian casualties happened on 15th May and 05 June near the so-called “shouting hill” close to Majdal Shams, as anti-government demonstrations in the Syrian Republic spread to several villages on the Syrian (Bravo) side ¹⁵.¹⁶. On May 15th a group of approximately 4000 civilians gathered at the Bravo side of the “shouting hill” near Majdal Shams. The group was supervised by Syrian security forces and Authorities. UNDOF had not been notified. About a hundred Syrians and Palestinians from Syria crossed the fence and unmarked minefields that demarcate the 1974 ceasefire-line and ended up in the centre of the village of Majdal al Shams. Israeli soldiers started shooting and killed 5 people (2 on the Alpha side and 3 at the Bravo side)¹⁷. Whilst the group was present in Majdal Shams, the Israeli army prepared for an attack on the village. This was prevented by intervention of the Druze representatives of the village who knew the Syrians were just unarmed civilians. Mediation was done by the UNDOF commander and a Syrian NGO from Majdal Shams who also treated the wounded at their clinic. They managed to stop the Israeli attack and negotiated a safe passage for the Palestinian Syrians. Consequently they convinced the Palestinian

¹⁴ In 2011 a total of 1758 individuals and 12000 tonnes of apple produce crossed Charlie gate (UNDOF S/2011/748/359*)
¹⁵ UNSC: Report of the Secretary-general on the UNDOF for the period from 1 January-30 June 2011, S/2011/359*
¹⁶ UNSC: Report of the Secretary-general on the UNDOF for the period from 1 July-31 December 2011, S/2011/748
¹⁷ Interview Tayseer Maray, Director Al Jawlan
Syrians that it was better to return to Syria (Bravo). On 5th of June, demonstrators, mostly young unarmed Palestinian Syrians gathered again near Majdal Shams and Quneitra near Charlie Gate. The IDF used tear gas, smoke grenades and live ammunition to deter protesters. Israeli soldiers were on high alert and every individual crossing the ceasefire line was shot and killed. About 30 people were killed and 300 wounded. According to a Syrian representative in Majdal Shams “they didn’t risk the lives of any of the Israeli soldiers, as they were 300 meters away from them, even if they want to throw stones, they couldn’t reach the Israelis. There are many fences and minefields in between (....) they were killing them just for the sake of killing. But because they tried to cross, the Israeli soldiers killed them”.

The situation that resulted from the 1967-973 military hostilities between Israel and Syria had a major impact on the livelihoods of the local population as well as their local water management situation. Lake Ram, one of the major Syrian water resources in the occupied Golan was confiscated by Israeli forces already in the seventies. “After the occupation from 1967 until 1977, the Israeli occupied and captured Lake Ram for the Israeli settlers. They didn’t give us access. When we started to drill our own wells and construct our own reservoirs for rainwater, the Israelis destroyed the infrastructure. They were taking people to court and fine them and impose taxes. The punishment was economically. When they started to give irrigation water from Lake Ram, the Israeli settlers now receives 800m3 per dunum and the Syrian farmers receive 45m3 per dunum. So when we asked the Israeli court about the difference, there is no explanation. This is just their answer, either you pay us or you do not get water” – resident Syrian Arab Village

2.3 Politics of water, citizenship, identity and security

From the interviews with Syrian Arab Residents of the occupied Golan Heights it seems the policy of Israel in the occupied Golan Heights is to use Israeli citizenship as a means to pressure the remaining Syrian Arab residents into the Israeli national system. If citizenship is refused, it has repercussions in terms of Israeli social services and water supply. There is a discrepancy between the economic benefits and subsidies available for the Israeli apple farmers compared to the Syrian apple farmers. As one Syrian resident stated: “We use 30,5 m3. We pay for drinking water 1 m3 = 4 shekels for Arabs and 1 m3 = 0.5 shekels for Israeli. If you use less than 5m 3 you pay 4 shekel per 1 m3. If you use more than 5 m3 you pay 9 shekels per 1 m3. Domestic use for Israeli settlers is 10x more than us. If they use more than 5 m3 they pay double the price: 1 shekel”.

Before 1982, farmers had a spring in Majdal Shams. They had 3 springs irrigating about 200 Ha of land. Local springs were under the control of the people and still under the control. In the winter all the water from the springs flows to Banias. Another spring is in Ain Qiniyya of which they have ownership.
The four Syrian villages had about 5000 Ha before 1967. East from the village of Majdal Shams there is around 2000 Ha inside Syria, in the Demilitarized Zone, non-occupied territory. After 1967, there was 3000 Ha left of which 200 Ha is irrigated. The rest was rainfed. The landuse was wheat, barley, figs, lentils and grapes as main agriculture. In the ‘90s, the farmers started apple tree orchards. So the Syrian farmers started to build water collection reservoirs collecting rainwater in winter. They built dams in the wadis. There is about 1200 mm rainfall every year in the territory. The farmers started to use the reservoirs in summer to irrigate the trees and it brought a higher quality to the apples. There are about 600 tanks each of 700 m3. Apart from that, the farmers drilled holes of 5-6 m diameter and 5-6 meters deep. In 1982-1989 there were many problems with the Israeli Defense Forces. The soldiers tried to demolish the reservoirs. A Syrian farmer who had a reservoir was called to the Israeli court because the tanks were built without a license. The rainwater belonged to the Israeli state so they had to pay a fine and requested people to put meters on the tanks. But in 1989, the Israeli Authorities started to tolerate and only requested the farmers to apply for a building license. But the license is necessary from the office of the Ministry of Interior. The permission also has to be granted by the Israeli Defense Forces. Syrian farmers can drill until 12 meters and they do not have access to geological maps. There is no access to Israeli water and geological data for the Syrian farmers.

The Israeli political approach to the occupied Golan Heights seems a conscious policy of “pushing the Syrian farmers” out of the Israeli markets which has a direct impact on the livelihoods of those Syrians who refuse Israeli citizenship. In fact, the majority of the young Syrian population does not want to work in agriculture anymore but prefers service oriented professions such as law or medicine.

Israeli identity is framed based on a democratic Jewish State whereby all different ethnic and religious groups living in the State of Israel have equal rights and personal liberties. Hence Israeli non-Jewish citizens can form a valuable member of Israeli society and the nation state with full rights and social services. The Israeli Druze population serves the purpose well by being active members in the Israeli Defense Forces and well respected by Israeli Jews (Levy, 2012). As well because Druze not only populate the occupied Golan Heights, the majority of Israeli Druze live in the Galilee and other areas of Israel proper. Tensions between Israeli Druze and Syrian Druze are not outright but there is definitely a form of despise from those who have refused Israeli citizenship towards the very active and often nationalistic hawkish Israeli Druze citizens.

In terms of language, the Syrian Druze identity has transformed into a hybrid. Most Syrian Druze speak fluent Hebrew, often better than Israelis themselves, are highly educated and have networks of Jewish and Arab friends in Israel proper in places like Haifa or Eilat where they often work for some time or were educated. Therefore a mix of secular Israeli and Syrian identity exists within the Druze community. The members of Syrian NGOs and Syrian Human Rights organizations that work towards
conserving the Syrian identity and rejecting Israeli citizenship explain that this is the only way for them to function normally in the current situation. The Syrian NGO manages a parallel social services system and a community center in Majdal Shams where Syrian culture is kept alive. The centre consists of a 24-hour health clinic, a community theatre for Syrian cultural events and Syrian theatre plays, a guesthouse, a library and a 24-hour nursery and day-care centre for young families. Their aim is to conserve and protect Syrian identity in the occupied Golan Heights. Specifically the newly established theatre attracts a wide audience, which each new play they receive at least 2000 to 3000 visitors from the occupied Golan Heights and beyond. They tour with the plays in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in cities like Ramallah, Jerusalem, Nazareth and in Israel in Haifa performing for the Arab sector. Young generation Syrians are faced with a dilemma. Having grown up and educated in the Israeli society they have a dual identity, speaking Hebrew and Arabic. Many of the young generation that have studied in Damascus and once they have been to Syria have difficulties to decide whether to stay in Syria or return to Israel where they would have more possibilities in their professional career, individual liberties and education.

"After 1967, this area was military area. They gave us an id-card because we refused Israeli citizenship. It is stated that our citizenship is "unknown nationality". We are a small population with low education. There is a power asymmetry. People were forced to take Israeli citizenship. We were a closed area. In 1982, they besieged every house here and told us we can’t make use of services if we don’t take Israeli citizenship. So some people took it but when they wanted to give it back, the authorities refused. They told us, go out for 5 years and then you’ll lose it. But of course that is not possible as then in that time, our houses will be confiscated. In 1982, the Lebanon war started. In contrast, in East Jerusalem people are not given citizenship. If you pay taxes you can have an ID-card. If you don’t pay taxes, you will be evicted from your house and not given an ID-card. In the Golan they wanted to push us in and in East-Jerusalem they want to push the Arabs out. But all is under the same law. The citizenship is used politically and for taxes" – resident Syrian Arab Village

Whilst the border between Syria and Israel has been virtually without major incidents since the end of the Yom Kippur war, one of the main reasons for holding onto the Golan Heights according to Israel is the issue of security. Israel bases its legality of the annexation in 1981 on UN resolution 242 whereby a safe and secure border should be guaranteed. Despite the tense quietness of the border, no major additional security arrangements have been needed and the occupied Golan Heights has developed into a lush resort for tourists. Safety and security is however still a main priority however it remains doubtful as the only reason for the annexation. Considering the fact that the water resources are vital for Israel’s economy and sustainability of the Israeli state, it is questioned whether security is a main drive behind the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights. However the fear for an attack from Syria though is very high and Israeli soldiers are vigilant when they sense an enemy approach as in the events of May and
June 2011. It explains the violent reaction and killing of unarmed protestors that crossed the cease-fire line. The fact is, the Syrian occupied Golan is safe and has been secure since 1973.

The only reason for a real existential threat to “state security” is when the natural water resources are not accessible anymore to Israel and the state will lose its political hegemon position in the basin. Unchallenged, Israel as the de-facto hydro-hegemon can act as a basin leader, or as a bully and pursue its interests unilaterally with military force (Jagerskog, 2003). Both Israeli positions are not recognised by the other riparians as the ecological hegemon is Lebanon, followed by Syria. This existential fear to lose its political hegemon position, is the psychological motivation why water in Israel is ultimately a security, classified and political issue that should be defended against any “enemy” who wants to jeopardize the state of Israel by restraining access to water resources in the overall basin. The concept of water scarcity is used in Israel to drive their water masterplan. In their media campaign towards the Israeli audience, the message is clear: the country is drying up symbolized by images of a women’s face that is gradually forming cracks in her face. The slogan on the billboard is “conserve your water, still three more years to go and it will be solved”. The three years stands for the time needed to finish the desalination master plan; in 2013 Israel will be able to desalinize 600 million m3 in large plants located along the seashore and by reuse of sewage affluents from municipalities, domestic use and industry18.

2.4 Playing a “Syrious” game

“Hydromonopoly” is a resource management board game. The objective of the game is sustainable river basin management whilst ensuring national demand for supply. The game is played by five players who start with an initial optimal allocation of water resources symbolized by blue marbles. At the start each player is entitled to a certain amount of blue marbles in the following optimal allocation for the Jordan River Basin19: Palestine: 14 Lebanon: 11 Syria: 32 Jordan: 22 Israel: 21 Several political events throughout the game force players to lose their blue marbles or gain blue marbles.

When is the game won?

Each player has a fiche with a black and blue side. When players reach their original amount of marbles (optimal allocation), they can put the blue side up on the board and continue playing. If the player has only 2 marbles left, it should turn the fiche to black but continue playing. If neither of these circumstances occur, the player removes the fiche from the board. If all players have black fiches on the board, the game is over. Game-over symbolizes environmental suicide. If all players have turned the fiche to blue on the

18 Interview Shimon Tal, 2009
board, the game is won.

Table 1 Overview of try-out groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Experience at local level in the basin</th>
<th>Ecological awareness</th>
<th>Willingness to cooperate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 International studies students</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Gradual (no win)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 African/Asian/European water experts</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High (game win)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 Syrian Arab villagers</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium to High (game win)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4 Middle East studies students</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low/Medium</td>
<td>Gradual (no win)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**International studies students:** “We need more dialogue to be able to trade marbles. This should be more included in the negotiating cards. There should be more choice to start an open dialogue. For example we also need a dialogue to trade surplus and increase the need of cooperation between players. Lebanon for example had a surplus and ability to share this surplus with others. There was not opportunity to share this, not in a dialogue. Everybody was saving the solution cards until a drought would strike of something. This behavior was logical to save and protect yourself but also meant the game stalled and we were not winning. Solution would be not to be able to keep cards.”

**African/Asian water professionals:** This group had no affinity or experience at local level in the basin. It had the highest willingness to cooperate. They understood the goal of the game well. Half an hour into the game and after another major regional drought, player Palestine had no marbles left. She assumed this would be the end of the game but the game did not end here as others had still marbles left. The facilitator suggested according to the rules of the game that the floor is open for free negotiations. The response of the group was positive. Player Lebanon suggested to calculate the marbles and share the marbles among each other to help out Palestine. By this single move, they won the game.

**Syrian Arab villagers:** “We cannot be completely objective, we are in the middle of the conflict zone. So my fellow player who plays Lebanon is not talking to Israel, not because he plays Lebanon but because he himself doesn’t like Israel. The personal feeling of everyone will have its effects, if you really want to
play it in a logical and rational way you should do it with people who don’t have any background or experience with the region or any political affiliation. This is one thing that is important. Because our past experience determines how we make decisions and why people cooperate with each other”.

**Middle East studies students:** After 45 minutes, player Lebanon started to get jittery because of the few marbles left in the game, the player suggested to share information about the amount of marbles of each player, in order to be able to win the game together. He reminded the other players of the objective of the game. The sharing of data is crucial in the winning of the game, as the goal is for everybody to reach back to the original optimal allocation. In a reaction to Lebanon’s suggestion to share the data, players Palestine and Jordan replied initially with hiding their marbles under the table. But after persuasion, Lebanon convinced that is was good that from now on, a status would be made of the amount of marbles after each round to keep track of the marbles in the game and how much everyone has. He was able to explain that it was important to make decisions as a group, in order to win the game. However, they failed to win the game within the 2 hours given.

4 Pre-liminary assessment of the feasibility of hydropeace-building

Looking at the first results and outcome of the boardgame try-outs as a methodology in various settings, the use of serious gaming is possibly a fitting methodology to investigate the feasibility of hydropeace building between various groups sharing a watershed. Two out of the four groups have managed to win the game, notably the Syrian villagers at local level in the occupied Golan Heights and African/Asian/European water experts. Intuitively, the environmental awareness of water experts is relatively high compared than the Syrian villagers, but the local Syrian villagers have direct personal experience of the conflict and knowledge of the basin. Identity, trauma and experience of the players mattered in making decisions on sustainable water management in their specific dealings with Israel. As well, the Syrian villagers' livelihoods are affected negatively by the hydropolitical situation and have a vested interest in sustainable river basin management of the basin as a whole.

The other two groups had some knowledge of the region but did not win the game. Their general approach in the beginning was quite rational and selfish. Until the moment comes when players start to realize that everybody is losing marbles. This is usual a turning point in the game. Interestingly, none of the groups managed to lose the game completely or in other words “commit environmental suicide”. This is a fact that would need to be explored more quantitatively by more sessions at a statistically bigger scale. It would need further investigation to explore whether “environmental suicide” is really going to happen as many pessimists are predicting with doom scenarios in terms of “water wars” “water scarcity”, “violent
conflict”, “overpopulation” and the effects of climate change. The fear that is raised with these concepts, works conveniently for political agenda’s and water strategies as well. From a more cognitive human ecosystem approach (HEA) the game is a useful tool to investigate how the actions players take and decision players make are based on perception of the “other” and how many marbles are still in their possession. Empathic feelings when the other player has all but none marbles left, have played a role in making positive decisions for the basin as a whole rather than self-interest. As there was not a genuine hostility or violent communication between the various players, this aspect in water negotiations was not able to be investigated with the board-game.

5. Conclusion

Rational choice theory has not been sufficient to shed proper light on the influence of perception, identity, trauma, reconciliation, power and psychological processes in decision-making for sustainable transboundary river basin management and environmental peacebuilding. A more cognitive process-oriented approach whereby context, power, socio-political history and human experience at local level is considered could be more appropriate for research on the processes of hydropolitics in a basin at discourse level and its impact at local level. The empirical results of this paper have are convincing enough to conclude that the Israeli drive behind the occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights is more towards keeping control over the natural water resources and access to water supply than just securing a safe border. The two dimensions go hand in hand. At the occupied Syrian Golan Heights water supply is used as an economic and social pressure means to force Syrian farmers to become part of Israeli society as a full citizen. The continuous resistance of the Syrian Arab villagers is not welcomed by the Israeli Authorities as they want to fully consolidate the Israeli annexation of the area that took place in 1981.

Whilst the fear for the enemy and existential fear for losing access to water resources at local level is prevalent, specifically for Israeli soldiers and the IDF at border areas, in general visitors of the Golan Heights do not have a sense of fear or anxiety as the area has been quiet for such a long time. At discourse level I don’t think this fear for the enemy exists. The main ideological drive for Israel to keep the Golan Heights is water security instead of national security. It will ensure them the position of hegemon in the basin. This explains as well the Israeli focus on water supply and new water in the Israeli media water campaigns rather than water demand and cooperation with its enemy neighbours. From a sustainable transboundary water management point of view however, adding new water using fossil fuels remains to be debated. At basin level, the rethoric used is focused on cooperation, the current political situation between riparian states however is detrimental to the basin as a whole and the Jordan River, which has been reduced to a polluted trickle over the last decades of human conflict (Jagerskog, 2003;
Zeitoun et al, 2012). Environmental awareness of the Syrian Golan population and social relationships could point to a positive assessment of the feasibility of environmental peace building at local level. The fact that the game is not lost yet by any group, point towards an interesting theoretical perspective that needs further investigation on a statistically wider scale. Feasibility of environmental peace building at basin level also remains to be investigated.

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