

Environmental peace (*Gaia peace*), premises to develop a model

Roberto Beltrán Zambrano

Resumen

En América Latina, los conflictos ambientales tienen su propia naturaleza, características y dinámicas, las cuales nos deben llevar a plantear procesos de manejo y resolución enmarcados en un concepto definido de paz: una paz social (*Gaia*) que, a su vez, brinde los suficientes elementos de juicio para que esa construcción sea sólida y perdurable. Debemos reconocer que muchos procesos de resolución de conflictos ambientales han fracasado en su objetivo final: la paz.

Un modelo de construcción de paz ambiental (*Gaia*) debe brindar elementos de fundamentación y actuación en procesos de resolución de conflictos ambientales, de forma que esos procesos sean sostenibles en el tiempo, beneficien a los actores involucrados y garanticen el acceso a los recursos naturales de forma sostenible.

Abstract

In Latin America, environmental conflicts have their very own nature, characteristics and dynamics, hence the reason why we need to develop management processes and resolutions that are set within a framework of peace, i.e., a 'social peace' (*Gaia*). This, in turn, enables the right elements of justice to be put into place. The peace process is, as a result of this action, both solid and long-lasting. Conversely, we have seen how many environmental conflict resolutions have failed in their final objective in the past, i.e., in not achieving peace.

A peacebuilding model for the environment (*Gaia*) should therefore contain elements of foundational support and action in environmental conflict resolution processes, so that they become sustainable over time, benefit all the parties involved, and provide access to natural resources in a sustainable manner.



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INTRODUCTION

The current efforts of conflictology and of those working on peace research demand both the application of concepts and the development of new theoretical proposals that provide peace and their study with construction, development, and research. These are the major management elements in order to get new social agents implied for peace.

Latin America is a region with several kinds and degrees of conflicts. Its inestimable natural richness turns it into the region of hope for the world's future but, at the same time, into an attractive place to exploit its natural resources. This combination of needs, together with the slow progress of agreed environmental management, has generated a series of conflicts related with the environment.

Several initiatives on the resolution of environmental conflicts have been developed in several countries of the area¹ with positive results. In spite of that, the degree of conflictivity and violence is worrying² and, therefore, it is necessary to go further. That is to say, to develop models of environmental conflicts management based on a Gaia peace concept to grant the initiatives' orientation and the strengthening of a peace culture.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS: VIOLENCE, PEACE, AND NON-VIOLENCE

We must add the concept of environmental peace or *Gaia* to those of internal peace and social peace,

since it is the natural or ecological dimension of peace.³ It is a concept that we must also develop under the perspective of social peace [Galtung, 1998] or neutral peace [Jiménez, 2004], because the Gaia peace must include the different knowledges of "peaces" and incorporate them into everyday coexistence. This is its main challenge.

It is necessary to point out that the resolution of environmental conflicts, from the Peace Research (PR), is in line with the studies carried out on negative peace, positive peace, and neutral peace as well as with the contributions made by Johan Galtung about peace [1985, 2003], of which come out three starting axioms:

- a. The "peace" term will be used to refer to social objectives commonly accepted by many people.
- b. These social objectives might be complex and difficult, but not impossible to achieve.
- c. We take the following statement as valid: "peace" is the absence of "violence".

As for this work, we will point out the definitions of the three kinds of peace and their relationship with violence in order to show, thus, which is the link with the resolution of border conflicts related with water management. We will use the studies by Jiménez Bautista (2004), who compiles the work on this issue made by other authors.

What we understand by *negative* peace is the absence of war, armed conflicts or explicit violence, from the point of view of war between states or groups of people. What we understand by *positive* peace is the absence of structural or indirect violence, typical of social structures with inequalities of some kind

1 For further detail you can look at the papers by Red Mesoamericana de Manejo de Conflictos Ambientales and by Plataforma de Acuerdos Socioambientales (Ecuador).

2 Salama Pierre, (2008) "Informe sobre la Violencia en América Latina", Revista de Economía Institucional, Universidad Externado de Colombia, Vol. 10 N° 10, Primer Semestre/pp. 81-102

3 LOPEZ MARTÍNEZ, Mario (ed), (2004). "Enciclopedia de Paz y Conflictos", Tomo II, Instituto de la Paz y los Conflictos, Universidad de Granada

(social, economic, politic or military). And by *neutral* peace we understand the absence of cultural violence. In these three definitions, the word violence appears in different spheres: direct, structural, and cultural. This is a really useful difference when analyzing conflicts with a view to resolution.

The different peace concepts are related to the different violence concepts. Therefore, direct violence is the one related to visible signs affecting people or things. Structural violence is related to those elements developed by social structures causing inequality. Finally, cultural violence is related to a series of paradigms, behaviours, and social tendencies leading to lack of equity, inequality, and disintegration of coexistence models.

The different kinds of violence, viewed from the research and culture for peace, must be coped with from a non-violent perspective preventing the vicious circle of violence to reproduce and grow.

In some societies, the rise in law regulations on environmental management and govern is being discussed. The question is: are new regulations necessary? Would it be necessary to improve the existing ones? Would it be indispensable to build peace concepts and models including the relationship of humans with the environment and with the management of use and access to the different resources? On the other hand, the conflicts arising from the exploitation of natural resources and from the relationship man-nature, generally have an only way of regulation: the litigious one. Would it be possible to count on alternative tools to deal with border conflicts from the perspective of environmental peace? Is it possible to develop essential elements to build a model of *Gaia* peace?⁴

One of the dangers that environmental government and management has to face is not shortage management, but the intention of a country or a group of countries to dominate or regulate its usage for a particular and restricted purpose. Thus, environmental conflicts⁵ with special characteristics arise:

- The first characteristic of this kind of conflict is that it is a process. It has a time line, causes, a place, actors, and consequences. In general, this

kind of conflicts is typically seen with a focus on the consequences, on the analysis of the development of banning regulations, rather than on incentives.

- The second characteristic of this conflict is that the above mentioned process has a public nature, since it includes aspects of public and collective interest (e.g., water as a public good). This is an enormously relevant characteristic when working with a Gaia peace model since several Latin-American countries have developed privatisation policies for the management of natural resources, thus limiting the participation of the State and of the implied communities in the decision making and the management of conflicts. Therefore, the only way left to solve these controversies is the recourse to law (public) or arbitration (private).
- The third characteristic of this kind of conflicts is that they involve collective actions, where groups of people or institutions introduce actions with a public nature. This characteristic, in relation with the previous one, has a problem when setting out a model of conflict management since the parties; generally, react according to their interests without taking into consideration the systematic vision of the problem.
- The fourth characteristic of this kind of conflict is related to the presence of a diversity of values, perceptions or meanings that the implied actors give to the actions or circumstances affecting or able to affect, the management of natural resources (use, access, legislation, administration, limitations, etc.).
- Finally, the fifth characteristic of this kind of conflicts is that they are related to the dynamics of opposition, controversy, argument or protest among those actors and, consequently, there is a recognition of the opposing actors in the conflict, no matter the claims being considered legitimate or worthy of consideration.

Some authors⁶ consider that three phases can be established in the search of solutions to environmental problems:

4 JIMENEZ BAUTISTA, Francisco, (2004). "Propuesta de una Epistemología Antropológica para la Paz", CONVERGENCIA, Revista de Ciencias Sociales, January-April, year/volume 11, number 034, Toluca, México.

5 Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental, (2000). "*Manual de Identificación y Caracterización de Conflictos en Áreas Prioritarias para la Conservación*". México.

6 GUTIERREZ PEREZ, José, (2004), in LÓPEZ MARTINEZ, Mario (Dir.), *Enciclopedia de Paz y Conflictos*, Tomo I, A-K. Granada, Ed. Universidad de Granada.

a. Defining the conflict. To state the current situation, people's perception of the conflict, the fears, the wishes, the worries. To understand the conflict's time line: what was the cause? What situation made it grow?

b. Delimiting the conflict. Both in time and magnitude. Affected sectors, natural resources, people, organizations, and groups being involved. In general, the past, the present, and the future of the conflict.

c. Drawing up solutions. As usual, this is the most complex and delicate phase since the solutions must be balanced and conceived as long-term solutions. For the building up of environmental agreements, it is important that everybody has the right information, updated at the moment of making decisions or of choosing the best solution. This is also a complex phase because at this point, the group pressures appear more clearly. This is why it is important to describe the main and the supporting actors. Taking into consideration the legislation of the country and the region as well as the government's official stance contributes to the conflicts having a legal and political support.

ENVIRONMENTAL PEACE: 'GAIA PEACE'

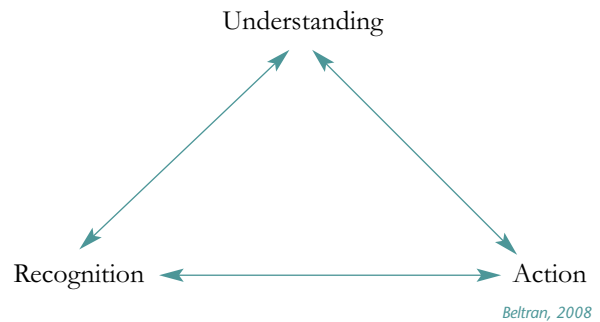
What we try to develop at the Instituto Iberoamericano de Educación para la Paz y la No Violencia (IIEPAZ, Iberoamerican Institute for Peace and Non-violence Education) is a definition more in line with the treatment of environmental conflicts. Our intention is to gather the different researches related to this issue and enlarge, in the first place, the concept of environmental peace applicable to our environment and, secondly, the model of environmental conflicts management in order to make it useful for the implied actors. Environmental law and law regulations are key elements of this task.

We must think of the ecological or natural dimension of peace in order to develop a concept of environmental peace from the environmental ethics (Leff, 1990). Taking as a basis the works done by Lovelock (1979) and Margulis (1989) as well as the peace works by Galtung (1985), the environmental peace or Gaia peace leads us to think about conflicts management not just from a single perspective, but from many. Per-

haps from all the perspectives taking part in conflicts, bearing always in mind that what binds or divides the parties in this kind of conflicts will always be natural resources.

How to solve the conflicts coming out from water management? Our proposal is summarized in the graphic below, which we will try to explain:

A GAIA⁷ peace management model



The premises to build up an environmental peace, through which we will develop conflicts resolution processes, are:

a. Recognition. As a result of a whole process allowing the parties to accept the conflict's presence. In the case of border waters management, for instance:

- Sustainability crisis: led by land defence movements against big hydraulic projects and pollution problems.
- Government crisis: a strong movement defending human and citizens' rights against the privatization of water and drains basic services.
- Food crisis: direct or indirect impacts on the world's food production sources which are induced by the breakdown of the hydrologic cycle and by the sustainability crisis of rivers, lakes and water lands.
- Socio-economic crisis: side impacts related to desertification, migration, land invasion and militarization of agricultural production areas.

b. Understanding. As an element of transition from a negative peace to a neutral peace. It is very important to consider understanding as a premise of Gaia peace since in this phase a series of processes occur that allow having a vision of the conflict free of

7 Beltrán, 2008, based on the work by Lovelock [1983].

paradigms preventing its systemic understanding. From another point of view, the understanding phase allows us to have data about the reality of similar conflicts in other regions, about indicators letting us know about the resources' situation, water in this case, about beneficiaries or affected people, about the results of an appropriate or inappropriate conflict management. It is impossible for the resolution measures to have a positive long-term effect without the complete development of this phase.

c. Action. It is the result of the two previous premises. Although it may not always appear in the last place and we may need the States to act in direct violence cases, action as a premise of environmental peace is the result of the parties' willingness for the good of all (*neutral* peace). In this phase we can find written agreements, law regulations, verbal engagements, behaviours, and changes in societies' legal, social, and environmental culture.

When talking about Gaia peace, we are talking about symbiosis, long-lasting reciprocally beneficial relationship to be visible in the inner and external life of people and societies.

AS A CONCLUSION

Resolution of environmental conflicts is not only about the application of tools settled by laws or agreements (mediation or arbitration). It is essential to understand the environmental conflicts, its nature, characteristics, and dynamics in order to set out management and resolution processes, which must be based on a social peace concept (Gaia) providing with sufficient information for the construction to be solid and long-lasting. Conflicts resolution, in itself, does not have any sense, if it is not in line with the processes and concepts of social peace (Gaia). Every conflict management must be originated and based on concepts supporting the process in the long run.

The function of environmental peace (Gaia) is to bring foundation and action elements to the processes of environmental conflicts resolution, so that, those conflicts will be sustainable in time, will benefit the involved actors, and will grant a sustainable access to the natural resources. Only in this way the actors of environmental conflicts will see Gaia peace as a credible and long-lasting proposal.

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