

Abstract in response to

CfP POLLEN18 - The Limits and Exclusions of Sustainable Development: a renewed pathway for socio-environmental transformation?

A critical analysis of sustainable development in the context of peace and conflict – Exploring the role of the ‘natural’ environment in EU peacebuilding in Kosovo

Prepared by Teresa Lappe-Osthege (Department of Politics, University of Sheffield)

This paper critically interrogates the conceptualisation of the ‘natural’ environment under the banner of sustainable development in the EU’s post-conflict peacebuilding policies. By tracing the emergence of sustainable development as a guiding principle of EU peacebuilding, the paper sheds light on (1) how the EU utilises sustainable development to frame the link between peace, conflict and the environment in alignment with its overall neoliberal agenda, and (2) what specific types of environmental knowledge(s) are (re)produced – or excluded - to guide and legitimise post-conflict peacebuilding and development policies. Using the EU’s peacebuilding policies in Kosovo as a case study, the paper contrasts the EU’s approach with the notion of the environment that is promoted in Kosovar sustainable development policies. The analysis finds that the environment is predominantly framed by policy-makers as a growth-focused, instrumental sub-category of climate change, economic growth, natural resources, and poverty eradication, and, more specifically, as a threat or security risk to peacebuilding processes. By reproducing such dominant neoliberal discourses, non-orthodox conceptualisations of the environment are excluded from Kosovar politics. The paper demonstrates that while such a restrictively instrumental notion of the environment fits neatly with a quantified, evidence-based approach to sustainable development, it reinforces hegemonic forms of knowledge production in the policy-making process. Moreover, it does not leave sufficient room for the incorporation of sustainabilities centred around considerations for the intrinsic value of the environment. Therefore, the paper argues that at the core of EU peacebuilding policies lies a hegemonic process of environmental knowledge production that excludes alternative notions of the environment and thereby hampers substantial socio-environmental change conducive to the creation of sustainable peace after conflict.

Keywords: sustainable development; peacebuilding; environment; knowledge production; Kosovo.

Author bio

A Doctoral Researcher in the Department of Politics at the University of Sheffield, Teresa researches the relationship between sustainable development and environmental peacebuilding, using the EU’s peacebuilding policies in Kosovo as a case study. Most recently, Teresa has started to work on the illegal bird-trade in the Western Balkans as a Visiting Fellow on the Biodiversity and Security (BIOSEC) project at the University of Sheffield. Teresa is also currently a Visiting Fellow at the Marjan Centre for the Study of War and the Non-Human Sphere (King’s College London). Before commencing her PhD, Teresa completed an MA in Conflict, Security and Development at King’s College London and holds a BA in European Studies from Maastricht University (NL).