

# Development and Change in the Israeli Environmental Movement: From State Orientation to Civil Society and Partnerships

*Itay Greenspan<sup>1</sup>*

**Goal:** The Israeli environmental movement – the epicenter of this study – has been active since the 1950s, but experienced its notable growth only during the 1990s. This paper offers a framework for analysing development and change processes in the Israeli environmental movement through a civil society lens. The question guiding the paper is how can these developments be described and conceptualised? I examine changes in the Israeli environmental movement in relation to two processes: macro-level on the movement aspect and micro-level on the organizational aspect. A macro-level perspective links global and state-wide processes in civil society to observed transitions in the environmental movement. A micro-level perspective denotes changes in organizational characteristics of environmental NGOs (specifically, human capital, financial capital and environmental discourse) that influence the environmental movement as a whole.

**Data and methods:** The study is based on analysis of primary and secondary sources, as well as empirical data collected in 2010-2011 using a survey tool among Israeli environmental organizations (Tal et al., 2013).

**Findings:** The analysis divides the Israeli environmental movement into three periods using the above distinction between micro- and macro-level perspectives. The three periods of the environmental movement point to shifts in the relationships of government and the environmental movement: **in the first stage** – the "state-oriented" stage – only a dozen environmental NGOs existed, and the movement was characterised by close connections to political elites, identification with government agenda, public funding of activities, and discourse that did not challenge government positions on environmental issues.

In the second stage, the environmental movement shifts its orientation toward civil society. The movement is characterised by significant growth in size and visibility

---

1 The Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

and by adoption of conflicting, civic, non-governmental agendas. At this stage, the array of strategies to achieve goals were expanded and included both radical and moderate tactics, while the range of environmental discourses widened too. Interestingly, Anglo-Saxon immigrants to Israel – from the US, Britain, Australia and even South Africa - are taking leadership roles in the movement. They are involved in founding new organizations, introducing new values and attitudes to advance environmental policy and legislation, and are raising larger amounts of funds mostly from Jewish philanthropic foundations overseas.

The third stage in the movement's lifecycle starting around 2007, is characterised by adoption of partnership orientation. This entails, in line with trends in Israeli civil society, a greater inclination of environmental NGOs to form coalitions within the movement, and to develop cross-sector partnerships with government agencies and businesses. At this stage the movement is also experiencing diversity in organizational forms, founder identity, funding sources, and the environmental discourses being used. This partnership orientation of the environmental movement reflects trends of reduced conflict relations between government and environmental organizations, similar to trends across Israeli civil society in the last decade or so.

Discussion and implications of this framework in light of the critical literature about the level of Israeli civil society's independence is suggested in the paper.