

Chapter 4

Environmental Conflicts

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ABSTRACT

Environmental conflicts have become a topical issue in the international research because of their complexity where social, economic, political and cultural factors operate. Their assessment is essential for understanding these factors and thus contributing to the formulation of effective resolution strategies. In this chapter the authors discuss the defining characteristics of the environmental conflicts as well as methods and approaches for their assessment and resolution. European environmental policies are used as examples of environmental conflicts drivers in order to highlight the large number of involved factors that undermine their successful implementation. This chapter ends the discussion with the presentation of the resolution efforts in multi-issue conflicts where a neutral party adds values to the process, advancing it towards an efficient ending.

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are not wanted by societies, although they may stimulate progress (Ioja et al., 2015), though they occur spontaneously or controlled, and establish new balances in the society. Conflicts undermine the socio-economic systems, provide easy access to resources or ecosystem services and withdraw the attention from the real problems that may happen concomitantly. Although conflicts are often caused by the infringement of legislation or by the care for society or environment, the political and economic interests are definitely the *real fuel* of contemporary conflicts.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0245-6.ch004

Environmental Conflicts

Environmental conflicts are situations where at least one actor opposes (as the result of the infringement of some principles listed in the environmental policies, strategies and legislation), to another actor who promotes a plan, project, or activity that supports or changes the status quo (Ioja et al., 2015; Schmidt & Willott, 2002; Torre et al., 2014). Most environmental conflicts have a complex history, where feelings of suspicion, mistrust, misunderstanding, lack of sympathy, or desire for power mix together with previous experiences and the diverse interests of actors and become the seeds of conflicts.

Environmental conflicts are often fueled by administrative documents, such as: petitions, complaints and appeals; communication media, such as newspapers, televisions, internet, social networks or other means of communication; verbal confrontations or public debates, protests by blocking access to certain areas or institutions as well as violence. Environmental conflicts are mostly solved by court actions (e.g. litigation) or by consensual approaches (e.g. negotiation) (Susskind & Cruikshank, 1987).

This chapter presents a wide range of approaches used in environmental conflicts assessment and resolution. The environmental conflicts which are targeted are those which result from the unsuccessful implementation of different environmental policies.

In the *Background* section, the defining characteristics of environmental conflicts are presented. These need a deeper understanding in the processes of conflict management and resolution. The following characteristics of environmental conflicts need to be considered: triggering events (such as a change, competitive interests or law enforcement), spatial characteristics (the location and scale of manifestation), temporal characteristics (duration, actuality, and progress over time), socio-economic dimension (involved actors, mass media means, claimed damage, and cultural characteristics) as well as the ecological dimension (environmental, economic, and social impact and law inconsistency).

In the section entitled *European Union's policies – drivers of environmental conflicts*, the authors present the main changes proposed at European level which cause tensions and the different ways in which different European directives and policies cause environmental conflicts. The relevant policies for this purpose are: the nature conservation policies (with a focus on the establishment of the Natura 2000 ecological network), renewable energy policies (required to meet the carbon emissions targets), waste management policies (promoting a circular economy model), water resources management policies (which refer to the qualitative and quantitative improvement of water resources) and the agriculture policies aiming is to improve the efficiency of agricultural activities by complying with the environmental requirements).

In the sections focused on *Main approaches in environmental conflict assessment and resolution*, data sources which can be used to understand them and various methods and tools are presented. For environmental conflict assessment a range of methods, such as interviews, spatial analysis, multi-criteria analysis and tools for environmental conflicts research (GIS, remote sensing, and diverse software) are presented. Regarding environmental conflicts resolution, the traditional legal processes and the consensual and participative processes are discussed.

In the *Conclusion* section the future research directions in environmental conflicts research are addressed.

The objectives of the paper are: (a) highlighting the defining characteristics and assessment methods of environmental conflicts; (b) presenting the role of environmental European policies in triggering environmental conflicts in the EU, and (c) discussing the main approaches in environmental conflict resolution.

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